

Chapter XX: FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Various members of the campus community have been asking for changes in the assessment program. This sentiment was very clearly articulated at last year's January Conference. Significant effort has thus been expended by many members of the Truman community to respond to desired changes. As a result, Truman's assessment program is continuing its evolution by pursuing five major initiatives.

First, the program is being refined to address university core learning outcomes, including a cyclical review of the various elements/instruments that make up the assessment program. A second initiative is to have universal discipline-based assessment plans in place and evidence of their use for enhancing student learning. Refining our current institutional effectiveness assessment plan so that it will have an increased focus on learning outcomes identified in the mission statement and efficiently integrated effectiveness measures with discipline-level assessment plans are both parts of the third initiative. Addressing institutional effectiveness outcomes for the campus environment and campus services falls under the same initiative. The fourth involves enhancing student motivation and participation in the assessment program. Finally, we plan to provide meaningful analysis of assessment data that is timely, focused, and that communicates effectively to the University community. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Initiative 1: Assessing University Core Learning Outcomes

Current assessment instruments are being mapped to university core learning outcomes with the aim of identifying areas needing modification. One intent is to potentially streamline the program, removing elements not directly tied to our current core outcomes. Learning outcomes for writing are being revisited with the intent of then developing a new writing assessment experience.

Work is ongoing in an attempt to identify and implement an assessment for critical thinking. This should prove valuable when we begin the process of core curriculum review. Computing literacy, one of our liberal studies program's essential skills, currently has no university-wide assessment in place. Finding a suitable assessment of computing literacy is also information necessary to inform future curricular decisions.

Initiative 2: Universal discipline-based assessment plans

Workshops for assessment in the disciplines took place, the most recent of which occurred at the 2003 January Conference. Specific faculty with expertise in assessment to support the development of discipline-based assessment plans are being identified to serve as resources for discipline-based assessment plans. Although current program review processes require disciplines to have assessment plans, their actual utility across disciplines appears uneven. The Graduate Student Exit Questionnaire is being reviewed as a component of assessing the graduate program. The overall intent of this initiative is for all disciplines to have specific, well-

articulated discipline learning outcomes, measures to assess these outcomes, results of those measures, and documentation of use of those measures in decision-making.

Initiative 3: Refinement of our institutional effectiveness assessment plan

The purpose of this initiative is two-fold. One purpose is to focus more tightly on the learning outcomes identified in the mission statement and ensure they are integrated efficiently with discipline-level assessment plans. A second purpose is to consider institutional effectiveness outcomes for the campus environment and campus services. Toward this end, the committee is (in addition to developing institutional effectiveness outcomes for the campus environment and services) reviewing the Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ). The GSQ closely parallels the Institutional Student Survey (ISS) formerly given to students mid-way through their tenure at Truman. Several years ago, when the ISS was replaced by the CSEQ, the obvious parallels between the GSQ and ISS became non-existent; the question of how to best glean insights from students as they complete their time at Truman is now being investigated. The committee is thus working to identify an instrument that perhaps more accurately assesses student satisfaction. The roles of both the CSEQ and NSSE are also being reviewed. An intended result of this initiative will be an assessment plan that explicitly articulates the goals of each assessment instrument and the outcomes the instrument addresses.

Initiative 4: Enhanced student motivation and participation in assessment

One aim here is to assess current levels of student motivation by implementing the use of the Student Opinion Survey (SOS), by content analysis of portfolio cover letters, by analysis of past Interview Project data, and by analysis of motivation questions on Junior and Senior Tests. There is significant sentiment that lack of student motivation regarding assessment greatly diminishes the usefulness of collected data. This initiative attempts to get an accurate picture of student motivation. A second goal is to review and implement feasible recommendations regarding communication to students, previously made by the Motivation Subcommittee. Many believe if students were more clearly informed regarding how collected assessment data are being used to improve their educational experience, motivation would increase significantly. A third goal is to review the strengths and weaknesses of each (non-communication oriented) strategy proposed by the Motivation Subcommittee and to recommend selected measures for implementation.

Initiative 5: Improved Data Analysis

Perhaps more than any other suggestion made for improving the assessment program, a call for improved data analysis was heard. This initiative attempts to provide meaningful analysis of data collected through assessment using a plan that is timely, focused, and communicates effectively to the University community. Toward this end, a second arm of the Assessment Committee was created, the Analysis and Reporting Group. They began meeting during the Fall 2002 semester. Among other tasks, the Analysis and Reporting Group is identifying questions of importance to faculty and students and is beginning to conduct its own analysis of the data. The

group has already established a process for offering grants to individuals on campus who are interested in conducting assessment studies. The intent here is to spread assessment expertise and experience throughout campus as well as to further illuminate results from collected data. The analysis group will be working to identify and invite faculty and staff who can act as assessment resources for those on campus conducting assessment analysis. Finally, the Analysis and Reporting Group will be identifying and providing opportunities for professional development in assessment. Significant success in working toward accomplishing this initiative will result, among other things, in documentation that curricular changes, modifications to existing programs, and policy changes are based on analysis of assessment results.

Obviously, many concurrent activities are occurring in an attempt to respond to the various campus constituencies asking for change in the assessment program. Both arms of the Assessment Committee, (the Design and Implementation Group functions very similarly to the Assessment Committee of previous years and the Analysis and Reporting Group is working on the above-mentioned goals) have taken on extremely aggressive agendas. Successful achievement of the embedded goals of their initiatives will inevitably prove responsive to many of the concerns voiced in recent years regarding desired evolution of Truman's assessment program.