Chapter II: ASSESSMENT AT TRUMAN STATE UNIVERSITY: DEVELOPMENT, IMPACT, AND OUTLOOK

By

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(This report replaces the usual “History of Assessment” chapter)

Introduction

Virtually every student will encounter assessment in some way or another during his or her collegiate experience. While institutions place enormous value on the data and knowledge produced by assessment instruments, the majority of students see most instruments as a purposeless bother. The disparity between the value placed on assessment by institutions and by students, in addition to a keen interest in the development of assessment culture, prompted this study of the development of assessment at Truman State University. Upon investigation, this study found that even within the ranks of faculty, staff, and administration, assessment is valued to varying degrees. While some undervalue or discredit assessment, others overvalue it. Most fall into a middle ground, appreciating assessment's usefulness to the university in the past and its potential for the future.

In spite of (and perhaps because of) varied opinions on assessment, increasing knowledge of its purpose and context is critical to encourage an effective assessment program. There are two key reasons why it is important to understand Truman's assessment history. First, assessment was one of the tools that originally distinguished Truman both on a state and a national level. Placing assessment in this context helps in understanding Truman's unique history of assessment, one that is longer and richer than that of many other institutions. Second, in knowing Truman's deep history of assessment, one can better understand current practice and the implications of assessment for the future.

Seeing this broader history of assessment comes more easily to some than to others. Students often have the most difficult time seeing assessment as an important component of higher education and understanding its purpose over time. This task of understanding the history and purpose of assessment is somewhat easier for faculty. Most are here for more than four years

and many experienced firsthand the institutional changes associated with assessment. Faculty members are also more likely than students to receive reports of assessment progress and data, to hear administrators speak of assessment, or to consult assessment data as part of a decision-making process. The acculturation of new faculty into Truman's assessment philosophy is critical in keeping faculty in step with administrators and institutional values. Administrators, usually the individuals with the most comprehensive and inclusive view of the university, are most aware of assessment. At Truman, those select individuals who have been with the institution both as students and as faculty, staff, or administrators or some combination thereof during past two to three decades, particularly the 1970s and 80s, have the clearest sense of the purpose of assessment. Their perspective enables them to learn from the past and see the present within the context of the past.

Methodology

Research for this project focused on three main questions. First, "When, and why did the assessment culture at Truman develop?" Second, "How, why, and with what impact has assessment evolved over time in response to Truman's goals and needs?" Finally, "What are the costs and benefits of assessment at Truman?"

Research for this project occurred formally and informally for approximately one year, beginning with an assessment internship on Truman's history of assessment during the spring 2005 semester. Secondary documents, including those from books, periodicals, and Truman's own annual *Assessment Almanac*, shed light on the most basic history of assessment. These documents were effective tools for outlining the "nuts and bolts" of Truman's assessment history. They also, unfortunately, left gaping holes. Dates were sometimes omitted and certain

assessment tools were detailed while others, such as descriptions of discipline-level assessment, were often overlooked.

Two other types of sources helped fill in gaps left by traditional secondary sources on assessment at Truman. Collective and individual memory proved invaluable in clarifying the history of assessment at Truman. Interviews with present and former students, faculty, staff, and administrators formally recorded memories for this project and provided a broad spectrum of opinion. In total, twenty-five individuals responded to the series of interview questions. Respondents were:

- A. Kay Anderson, former undergraduate student, graduate student, and Registrar
- Nancy Asher, former undergraduate student, current Assessment and Testing Office Coordinator, current Interim Registrar
- Matthew Barnes, former undergraduate student, former member of the Board of Governors
- Sarah Burkemper, former undergraduate student, former President of the Board of Governors
- Debi Cartwright, Professor (School of Business), former Business and Accountancy Interim Dean
- Ralph Cupelli, Assistant to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Ruthie Dare-Halma, Professor (Math and Computer Science), former Chair of the first Design and Implementation Group (DIG) and Analysis and Reporting Group (ARG) assessment committees
- Douglas Davenport, former Director of the Portfolio Project, former Interim Dean of Social Science, current Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
- Maria Di Stefano, Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies
- Barbara Dixon, President of Truman State University, 2003-present
- Peter Ewell, assessment consultant for Truman State University, current member of the Board of Governors
- David Gillette, Professor (Economics), former Interview Project Chair, former Chair of the DIG and ARG assessment committees
- Garry Gordon, Professor (Art), current Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Margarita Heisserer, former Assistant Dean of Instruction
- Nikki Isemann, former undergraduate student and Board of Governors student representative
- Don Kangas, Professor (Biology), former assessment committee member
- Darrell Krueger, former Dean of Instruction
- Ian Lindevald, Department Chair (Physics), former Portfolio Project Director
- Charles McClain, former President of Truman State University, 1970-1989

- Shirley Morahan, former Professor (English), former Portfolio Project Director and Sophomore Writing Experience Director
- Lanny Morley, former Dean of Math and Computer Science
- Suzanne Pieper, former Sophomore Writing Experience Director and Assessment Specialist
- Erika Woehlk, former undergraduate student, former Staff Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Heinz Woehlk, former Dean of Language and Literature
- Candy Young, Professor (Political Science), former Interview Project Director, current Undergraduate Council Chair and member of DIG assessment committee

These interviews were structured around a series of eleven questions:

1. How long were/have you been involved with Truman State University in any capacity?
2. In what capacity were/are you exposed primarily to assessment at the university? Were/are you involved with a particular assessment instrument?
3. How did you become involved in assessment at Truman?
4. What were/are you most interested in concerning assessment?
5. Who was/were the assessment "ring leader(s)," creating new or different assessment techniques?
6. How did/has the university respond(ed) to the introduction of assessment techniques? The students? The faculty? The administration?
7. How did/has the Assessment Program change(d) or develop(ed) during your time at the university?
8. To your knowledge, how was/is assessment used by the university? What is the perceived purpose of assessment at Truman?
9. In your opinion, how did assessment impact the university's eventual change to a liberal arts and sciences institution and to Truman State University? Did assessment drive these changes or did these changes promote the mission and name change?
10. What positive dialogues or changes came/have come about as a result of assessment practices? In other words, what do you see as the benefits of assessment at the university?
11. What stresses or negative impacts came/have come about as a result of assessment practices? In other words, what do you see as the costs of assessment at the university?

Interview subjects were allowed to respond at length to the open-ended questions. Some prompting was used to clarify the meaning of certain questions, depending on each individual's relationship to the university. Interviews usually lasted between twenty-five and thirty-five minutes and were tape recorded whenever possible. The tape recordings were later transcribed for easy reference. If an interview was not taped, detailed notes were taken.

Primary sources provided final clarification on where assessment stood at various points throughout the university's past. University documents such as mission statements and planning documents reveal the emphasis the university placed on assessment at various points in time.

In addition to research, relationships with various faculty, staff, and administrators have served as invaluable informal assessment resources. Countless casual conversations about assessment helped to clarify both the development and the purpose of assessment at Truman. The unending support and patience of particular individuals, especially Dr. David Gillette, allowed me to more fully grasp the answers contained within the vast amounts of information available on assessment at Truman. To Dave and to a number of other individuals in the Provost's office, I am eternally grateful.

Development of the Assessment Culture

One of the best ways to clarify the meaning and structure of current practice is to examine its roots in its original context. Institutional history and assessment's role therein help to illuminate Truman's present commitment to and practice of assessment.

For nearly one hundred years, the institution's emphasis on teacher education reflected Joseph Baldwin's original intention to found an institution for the training of additional teachers for the Northeast Missouri region. Baldwin, recognized nationally by contemporaries for his involvement with and commitment to education, saw the need for a vocational training school for teachers in order to better educate the nation's citizens. Truman State University's history began when Baldwin founded the North Missouri Normal School and Commercial College in Kirksville, Missouri in 1876. In its early years, the school underwent several name changes, first in 1868 when it became North Missouri Normal School, and then again in 1870 when it became

more specifically the Missouri State Normal School of the First District. In 1919 all of Missouri's teacher education institutions became state teachers colleges and the school was renamed Northeast Missouri State Teachers College.

Before the transition to Missouri's statewide liberal arts and sciences institution in 1986, Truman built its reputation on Baldwin's original concept of teacher education. With an ever-expanding demand for higher education in the second half of the 20th Century, however, the institution could no longer focus primarily on teacher education. In 1968, the institution made its first notable move to increase and strengthen other program offerings. Northeast Missouri State Teachers College became Northeast Missouri State College, reflecting the institution's broader focus. Dropping the word "teachers" from its name underscored the institution's attempts to expand its mission and ensure that its students (including education students) had a strong background in a variety of academic areas.

It was during the programmatic expansion of the late 1960s and early 1970s that Northeast Missouri State College appointed the young Charles McClain as president, following President Eli F. Mittler (1969-1970). McClain was the fourth president at Truman in as many years. For three decades, from 1937 to 1967, President Walter H. Ryle oversaw the university. Following a period of extended stability in leadership under Ryle, a short period of discontinuity ensued. Ryle's successors, F. Clark Elkins (1967-1969) and Mittler led the university for a combined period of just thirty-six months (Elkins, twenty-nine, and Mittler, six) (Nichols, 2007). Elkins's institutional vision, while not implemented during his short presidential tenure, emphasized programmatic expansion and an increase in responsibility delegated to faculty members and presidential staff. Also under Elkins in 1968, NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) granted accreditation to Northeast's teacher education

programs (Nichols, 2007). NCATE accreditation increased the prestige and utility of a teacher's degree from Northeast Missouri State College. McClain would bring both continued vision and continuity by remaining at Truman for nearly two decades, from 1970 to 1989.

As the newly appointed President, it became McClain's duty to navigate the institution through the rapid expansion and unrest associated with the late 1960s and early 1970s. McClain made a conscious decision to study and learn about Northeast's structure and situation during his first years at the university. He soon recognized several of the key issues the institution faced, including program quality. Northeast struggled to strengthen many of its offerings while maintaining the vigor of its most popular program, teacher education. McClain explained that during the 1960s many academic requirements had been weakened and "soft" courses that did not challenge students had been introduced into the curriculum. McClain brought with him a renewed commitment to strengthen and expand academic offerings. Increased quality across the curriculum would allow Northeast to become a multipurpose university with a broader appeal to the general public. While dealing with these quality-control issues, McClain's administration also addressed a number of national social issues that contributed to instability and volatility across campus. Issues such as the Vietnam War, racial tension, and equal rights and opportunities among races and sexes occupied the collective mind of the student body. McClain explained that this unrest made it more difficult to gain student or faculty support for increased academic restrictions or rigor.

As president, McClain harbored a deep commitment to quality. Keeping in mind the apparent decline in the quality of higher education since the end of World War II, McClain sought to uncover how much impact a Northeast education was having on its students. During his first years in office, McClain led university administrators in their consideration of the value

of a Truman education, especially in regard to preparation for graduate studies and the workforce. In 1972, Northeast Missouri State College became Northeast Missouri State University. Such rise in status again stressed the importance of increasing educational quality. McClain's Dean of Instruction (now titled Vice President for Academic Affairs) Darrell Krueger (1971-1989) bought into and supported this quality-control vision, as did Margarita Heisserer, Assistant Dean of Instruction. Together, these three individuals, McClain, Krueger, and Heisserer, worked as a task force, developing and advocating for increased quality-measuring devices. These devices would serve as the framework for the slowly, albeit consistently, growing assessment program. By presenting the faculty with data regarding student achievement, walking the halls asking what it meant, always seeking improvement and never using assessment in a punitive way, a quality-centered ethos moved from the top of the university down into the ranks of faculty and staff. Administrators initiated a move toward assessment, but it was the faculty and staff whose enthusiasm for it would make assessment viable and successful.

McClain wisely sensed that the institution was at a critical point. McClain had the foresight to anticipate the social changes that would lead students, particularly female students, to enter professions other than teaching. If fewer incoming students were interested in teacher education, the institution must ensure the quality of *all* of its programs in order to remain a competitive institution. *To do this, the university needed to collect baseline data to determine how well it was educating its students.* Was Northeast preparing students who were competitive in the job market? How did its graduates compare with graduates of other institutions? The university needed to develop a progress report for itself in order to determine areas of strength and weakness. While many members of the faculty, administration, and staff resisted the notion that data collection and/or improvements were needed, McClain persisted.

At this time, the university developed an outcomes assessment model with value-added components to help the university learn as much as possible about itself, its students, and the quality of the education it provided them. As McClain and Krueger describe in their article "Using Outcomes Assessment: A Case Study in Institutional Change," Northeast created plans to develop an extensive university student database including outcomes not only from students' attitudinal changes, but also, and most importantly regarding ability and achievement measures. Since the outcomes assessment model focused on student learning, the university identified the critical points in the student experience in a flow chart, mapping the experience from prospective student to university graduate (McClain and Krueger, 1985). Using an advanced, holistic approach, both academic and co-curricular experiences were considered when developing this flow chart. With these critical points in mind, a model for assessment, or a "blueprint for data collection," was constructed to collect data regarding students' critical points (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 in Appendix 1) (McClain and Krueger, 1985, 34).

The student database would include demographic information, testing results, and survey results. The combination of such data had enormous potential; however, as McClain and Krueger astutely remark in their article, the university's desire to collect the data outlined in the student experiences flow chart and the data collection model predated the university's ability to collect such data, especially in a systematic way.

As noted by a number of individuals during interviews, the institution's early assessment techniques were designed only to discover the types, amount, and quality of student learning taking place. There were no specific, measurable outcomes in mind. This gave Northeast an early assessment edge. While other institutions began with learning outcomes goals and used assessment tools to measure their performance against those goals, Northeast was able to first

use assessment to increase its self-knowledge. With increased self-awareness, only then could the university set realistic goals for itself based on past performance both in areas of strength and weakness. This model lent itself well to value-added assessment, measuring students abilities as they entered and again later on to assess their growth. As an early adopter of the value-added model of assessment, the university hoped to find, by collecting data at various points in the student's educational experience, that the university was having a positive impact, both academically and personally, on each student. In other words, the university hoped to measure the specific value that Northeast added to an otherwise ordinary collegiate experience. In an increasingly competitive educational market, developing and demonstrating the distinctiveness of a Northeast Missouri State University education was critical to the institution's future.

The early goals and methods of the McClain administration's assessment program were quite different than the ones in place at Truman thirty years later. At the time of assessment's inception, McClain sought simply to demonstrate that student learning had occurred and to what extent. What sort of value did the institution add to a student's body of knowledge and skills? Assessment's purposes were largely internal, as opposed to external. The notion of value-added grew to become one of the most important characteristics that distinguished Truman's internal improvements and external prestige.

One feature of early assessment that has remained consistent through the present is the way in which assessment data was used. McClain ensured that all data collected were used in a non-punitive way. No individuals or programs could be targeted in a negative way as a result of assessment data. Deficiencies in a particular area were examined and resources were allocated appropriately to resolve any problems. As a result of this policy, university constituents could engage in open discussion without fear of reproach.

As noted above, NMSU's collection of early assessment data served three purposes: first, demographic knowledge of its students and their attitudes; second, the monitoring improvement both of students' academic ability and achievement; and finally, to prove that its graduates were nationally competitive across the curriculum. At the heart of all these goals was a focus on student learning. In order to attain these goals and collect usable data, Northeast utilized two distinct types of assessment instruments: standardized national exams and institutional surveys. Northeast utilized standardized national exams early on for freshman and sophomore pre-tests and post-tests and for senior exit exams. In some cases, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, local instruments were developed as senior tests when no sufficient nationally normed test could be identified. The national exam results provided the foundation for value-added outcomes assessment; the comparative nature of the value-added model was best served by quantitative data. Institutional surveys such as the Institutional Student Survey (ISS), designed to collect information on students' future plans, study habits, etc., and the Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ), a survey administered to graduating seniors, complemented Northeast's use of standardized national exams.

At the beginning, testing was optional and student learning was measured primarily through pre-tests and post-tests. McClain expected that the results of these standardized national external examinations would encourage improvement in addition to simply measuring student learning. The original test used for pre- and post-testing purposes starting in 1975 was the Sequential Test of Educational Progress (STEP). When first administered as a pre-test, the STEP collected baseline data for the institution's student population. Beginning in 1977, students were retested using the same instrument after the completion of forty-five credit hours, allowing Northeast to measure student learning gains achieved during a student's first three semesters.

Comparisons between the freshman baseline data and data from the sophomore year revealed learning (or lack thereof) that had taken place during the freshman and first half of the sophomore years.

Within a number of years, the university switched from the STEP test to the ACT (American College Testing program). The university elected to use the ACT because most freshmen entered college having already taken the ACT. Students with an ACT score already on file with the university were not required to retake the test during their freshman year. This move reduced costs for the university and reduced the number of required standardized tests for students. Sophomore post-test scores were compared to baseline ACT scores either from high school or from the student's freshman year.

Before the STEP debuted as the university-wide pre-test/post-test, the pre-test/post-test model was introduced at the departmental level. Implementation of voluntary pre- and post-testing progressed slowly as appropriate tests were identified. Business, for example, was one of the first divisions to adopt pre- and post-testing. Gradually, more divisions began selecting tests suited to their desired educational outcomes and offering them on a voluntary basis. Starting in the 1972-1973 academic year, some divisions adopted a senior exit exam if an appropriate pre-test/post-test could not be identified. Tests used include the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the LSAT (Law School Admissions Test), among others. By the late 1970s, most departments participated in pre- and post-testing. Based on the results of those tests, the university appropriated energy or funds to those areas in need of improvements.

The data being produced by the pre- and post-testing of freshman and sophomores did more than simply measure levels of educational attainment. In 1979 the university devised an innovative budget request using assessment data. The governor of Missouri, Governor Joseph

Patrick Teasdale (1977-1981), issued a challenge to the state's public universities for the annual budget request. Missouri challenged its public education institutions to develop a funding scheme to reward institutional quality, as opposed to traditional funding schemes based on enrollment or other quantitative measures (McClain and Krueger, 1985). Northeast submitted a proposal focused on achieving mission-centered goals and outlined how it would measure its success in meeting those goals. Specifically, Northeast set explicit outcomes for value-added test scores, senior tests, and certain items contained on student surveys (McClain and Krueger, 1985). The university received $407,868 for this initial budget request. In subsequent years, the university continued to receive increased funding as a result of its ability to set and attain measurable goals for itself.

Prior to and throughout Northeast's transition to a higher-caliber institution, President McClain realized the need to recruit an intellectually talented body of students. Rather than simply raising admissions standards, the university also engineered methods to attract better students. The introduction of the Pershing Scholarship, a full tuition, room, and board scholarship for academically deserving students was one means by which Truman drew strong candidates (McClain interview). Better programs attracted better students, making it easier for admissions standards to rise; fewer students with low ACT scores chose to attend or even apply. Self-selection, in conjunction with slowly rising admissions standards, helped to amass a talented body of students at Truman.

To educate its high-achieving students, Northeast also recognized the need to attract quality educators with a commitment to self-improvement. McClain's administration ensured that new faculty members were aware of and willing to participate in Truman's growing assessment culture. McClain himself interviewed all but one faculty member hired during his

tenure. During interviewing, McClain would discuss assessment and gauge a potential employee's willingness to support and participate in Truman's assessment culture.

McClain continually stressed the importance of incorporating both new and existing faculty members into the student-learning, quality-centered mission. One hallmark of Truman's early assessment programming was frequent communication with faculty and staff. According to many interview subjects, McClain and Krueger would often engage faculty members in conversations about assessment data. Many interview subjects reported reading short articles pertaining to student learning or assessment that had been distributed at the wishes of McClain or Krueger. In this way, faculty were informed about the impetus for changes and felt invested in the developments regarding assessment.

After a decade of increasing the breadth and depth of assessment, McClain's administration decided to go public with what McClain refers to as the "Truman story." A decade's worth of value-added assessment had produced both evidence that the quality of a Truman education was steadily rising as well as increased funds for the university. With this in mind, the university applied for and received the G. Theodore Mitau Award for Innovation and Excellence in 1983. McClain also sent packets about Northeast's assessment success to institutions across the country. A case study on Northeast's success, *In Pursuit of Degrees with Integrity: A Value Added Approach to Undergraduate Assessment*, published in 1984, recounted the institution's development of assessment while providing a model for other institutions. The book remains a definitive source on how the value-added model of assessment developed and proved successful at the university. Soon, representatives from Northeast were visiting other campuses to serve as assessment consultants. Representatives from various institutions visited the Northeast campus to learn more about its effective assessment program.

Assessment Responds to University Needs and Goals

According to one of Truman's recent Assessment Almanacs (Dare-Halma, 2003), assessment serves four primary functions. First, Truman implements assessment in order to improve student learning. The assessment devices themselves do not improve learning; rather, the data from assessment instruments point to areas where student learning is relatively weak or strong. Based on that information, the university can choose an action plan to bolster student learning. Second, assessment at Truman also aims to improve both the physical and the attitudinal campus environment. Third, the assessment program aims to ensure the integrity of Truman degrees. Finally, and quite importantly, assessment allows Truman to demonstrate accountability to all of its constituents. Data from each instrument serves one or more of these purposes.

While Truman currently uses assessment for these four primary reasons, the goals of assessment activities were not always so concise or clear. Intense institutional change virtually required assessment activities to be flexible. Northeast adjusted its assessment activities when data revealed particular needs. As assessment adapted to the needs of Northeast, so too did the university adapt to the needs of the state of Missouri. In 1985, Northeast was named Missouri's statewide liberal arts and sciences university, rather than just a general, regional university. In this time of constant change, maintaining focus was difficult; strong, consistent leadership helped Northeast navigate through these times while utilizing assessment activities as a tool for continual self-improvement.

Assessment practices at Truman had reached a turning point by the early 1980s. Notable gains had been made since 1972 and 1973 when tests were administered to a small proportion of

seniors on a voluntary basis. By the time Truman received the G. Theodore Mitau Award in 1983, value-added pre- and post-tests were administered to all students as freshmen and sophomores, and each senior was required to pass an exit examination. Data were used to note areas of weakness and to allocate resources to bolster those areas. In addition to these tests, various surveys were also administered. Freshmen took an orientation survey, the Institutional Student Survey (ISS) was administered biennially, graduating students took the Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ), and students who elected to withdraw from Truman were also asked to take a survey. Overall, the university introduced assessment techniques to continue to gain self-knowledge and to make changes to reach its institutional goals.

The introduction of assessment techniques at Northeast had a domino effect. The attitude, the curriculum, and the cultural landscape of the institution continued to change rapidly. No one, not even President McClain, could have predicted with certainty how assessment would ultimately impact the university. Beyond quality, another result of Truman's assessment culture was the redefining and narrowing of the mission and the eventual state-mandated mission change that made Truman the statewide liberal arts and sciences institution for Missouri.

Truman is a historically liberal arts-based institution. According to the Truman State University Master Plan 1997-2007, Presidents Baldwin (1867-1881), Kirk (1899-1925), and Ryle (1937-1967) all utilized liberal arts rhetoric. Therefore, the liberal arts-oriented mission appearing in the 1973 *Report of the Commission on the Institutional Goals and Priorities of the Seventies* under President McClain is not surprising. While affirming its commitment to the liberal arts and sciences and increased quality, the institution made its first statement regarding objective measures of learning, or assessment, in the 1973 report.

With priorities in place, everything at Northeast was on the rise, including admissions standards and the institution's reputation among potential students, parents, and legislators in Jefferson City, Missouri. Improved standards and reputation, however, produced an unexpected challenge. When better-qualified students enrolled at Northeast, the value-added pre-test/post-test model became less meaningful; knowledge and skills gains were no longer as significant as they had been previously. Bright students who performed well on the pre-test did not perform notably better on the post-test just three semesters later. Due to motivation and other issues, some students even performed worse. The university needed a new way to demonstrate its quality.

Pre- and post-testing at Northeast continued, although the instrument and its administration changed frequently. Starting in 1987, ACT testing during the freshman year became required of all students, even those with prior ACT scores. The ACT would not remain the test of choice for long. In 1990, the university began using a battery of two tests, the College Outcomes Measurement Project (COMP) and the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP). The COMP addressed six areas: functioning within social institutions, using science and technology, using the arts, communication, solving problems, and clarifying values. The CAAP is a five-part test with sections in writing, reading, mathematics, critical thinking, and scientific reasoning. In order to boost value-added scores to better reflect the increased quality of its students, the university altered its testing schedule. During the 1993-1994 academic year, post-testing was delayed until after the completion of sixty credit hours, as opposed to forty-five.

In spite of the value-added challenge, Northeast was poised to become the state's leading public university and in 1985, the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education recognized

the institution's immense improvements by recommending that Northeast undergo a mission change to make it a statewide, public liberal arts and sciences institution. Missouri House Bill 196 took effect on January 1, 1986, making Northeast Missouri State University the state's distinguished public liberal arts and sciences institution. In order to ensure that the university adequately met its new liberal arts and sciences objectives, administrators developed a long-range plan with measurable goals and various assessments to monitor progress. With the aid of Peter Ewell, an assessment scholar who had done previous consulting with the university, and others, the *Five-Year Planning Document* was devised to help Northeast make the transition from comprehensive to liberal arts and sciences. In 1996, ten years after Northeast's mission change, the legislature confirmed the successful transition to a statewide liberal arts and sciences university by renaming the institution Truman State University.

If the years prior to the mission change were characterized by increasing quality, then the years after the mission change were characterized by systematic program cuts. In order to satisfy the narrowed liberal arts and sciences mission, numerous programs (over one hundred in all) had to be cut from the university's program offerings. Programs peripheral to the mission were sacrificed; they were slowly phased out in order to meet the needs of currently enrolled students. Faculty members from discontinued programs were given opportunities to make horizontal moves across the university. Some opted to leave the university, but many found homes in other offices or departments.

During the 1980s and especially following the mission change, the university developed several new ways to assess student learning in addition to pre- and post-tests. Most of these new assessments were locally developed and tailored to Truman's particular and ever-changing needs. Many of these local instruments were primarily qualitative instruments, rather than

quantitative measures. Qualitative instruments, especially when locally developed, provided increased insight into the skills and attitudes of students. In addition, local development of instruments provided faculty and administrators with greater confidence that the instrument would suit Truman's needs and provide beneficial data. The results produced by these instruments lent themselves to improvements in "classroom practice, higher-order thinking skills, and writing ability" (Dare-Halma, 2003, II-9).

One such local instrument, the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE), was developed in 1989 to assess students' growth as writers as well as the use of writing across the curriculum. Sporadic writing assessment had been performed at the university starting in 1979; however, a 1984 mandate from Undergraduate Council required that all students participate in writing assessment in order to graduate. This assessment involved faculty meeting with students to review their writing strengths and weaknesses. Students would write on specific prompts and then schedule a meeting with a faculty member to review their work. In this way, students could receive one-on-one feedback and both parties could gain from the interaction.

The Student Interview Project, developed in 1992-1993, is another locally developed instrument. The Interview Project explores a subject of university interest by interviewing a particular sub-population of its students (i.e. freshmen or juniors). A random sample of students from the selected group responds to both a short written questionnaire as well as longer, oral interview questions generally administered by a team of one faculty or staff member and one student. Occasionally select staff members would also assist in lieu of the faculty member. In recent years, the Interview Project has focused on student engagement in the liberal arts, service learning, and leadership.

McClain and Krueger both departed from Northeast in 1989, ending their long tenures at the university. The absence of these two individuals contributed to a developing sense of loss and a lack of continuity. While assessment started at Northeast from the top down, faculty had come to be the real owners and implementers of assessment. Faculty informed many of the decisions made by the administration, inspired the introduction of more attitudinal and qualitative instruments, and chaired many of the assessment projects.

McClain and Krueger, two ardent proponents of assessment, had been the leaders who constantly focused the university on its goals and how assessment could aid in their accomplishment. In the absence of these men, a seeming "assessment void" developed. According to a number of interview subjects, communication regarding assessment became less frequent and less clear. A number of interview subjects agree that less enthusiasm for assessment was generated during the early 1990s. Less critical evaluation of assessment data took place, resulting in less data-fueled action. A perceived lack of support for assessment from the new administration under President Russell Warren (1990-1994) prevailed.

A new administrative structure introduced during this time served to disconnect faculty from assessment. Previously, assessment had been controlled by a number of different offices, departments, and individuals. President Warren, in an attempt to centralize assessment, created a new position for a Director of Assessment. This structure was short-lived, but created a great deal of resentment among faculty. Many faculty members lost the sense of empowerment instilled in them by McClain and Krueger, who constantly sought out faculty opinion.

Interestingly, students felt the impact of the faculty's loss of ownership over assessment. In interviews with former students, reports of faculty mentioning assessment in the classroom

setting and speaking about it in a positive manner drop off after the early 1990s. Without positive faculty influences, students lost a primary source for information on and support of assessment.

Many university constituents agree that President Jack Magruder (1994-2003) and his administration refocused on assessment after a period of decline. Yet even Magruder utilized assessment in ways different than McClain's administration. During Magruder's presidency, a number of physical improvements were made to campus, showing his emphasis on responding to student reports and attitudes regarding issues outside the classroom in addition to academic issues. Nevertheless, the loss of focus on assessment in the early 1990s was a stumbling block from which the university is still recovering.

Since then, the university has taken many steps to help both faculty and students regain their sense of investment in and ownership of assessment. This is especially difficult for students, who attend the university already expecting it to be an institution of prestige. Although Truman's reputation is supported by assessment data, students often miss the connection between reputation and assessment. As the university rebounds from the loss of focus in the early 1990s, enthusiasm for assessment and its quality-centered and self-reflective benefits will further redevelop.

A number of efforts have been made to rejuvenate Truman's assessment culture. The Design and Implementation Group (DIG) and the Analysis and Reporting Group (ARG) were established in 2002 as separate divisions of the original assessment committee as two formal methods of renewing faculty ownership of assessment. The split committee structure is an improvement on the original Vice President's Advisory Committee on Assessment, established in 1991 by then Vice President for Academic Affairs, Jack Magruder. The specialization of DIG and ARG allows faculty and staff greater effectiveness in their work and places them in a

position to see real results from their efforts. Scholarship of Assessment Research Grants, established in 2003, provide yet another way that faculty and staff can become more involved in assessment and increase their sense of ownership. Faculty and staff apply for research grants to investigate a topic of their own choosing that has relevance to the university community. In this way, grant awardees help the university while investigating a topic of professional interest. Assessment Colloquia, begun in 2004, bring people together to discuss assessment-related issues and understand recent projects, discoveries, grants, etc. Assessment internships began in 2005. These assessment internships, themselves a product of faculty initiative, allow students to work with assessment administrators to develop a project that suits their own interests as well as the needs of the assessment program. Students earn major or elective credit for their assessment internships. Past projects include improvements to the assessment website, student work with the Interview Project, the continuation of research begun with the 2003-2004 Interview Project on student and faculty perceptions of student engagement, and this history of assessment research project.

Current Assessment Techniques

By the end of 2005, Truman had phased out many of its original instruments in favor of more relevant tools. Current instruments include surveys, nationally normed standardized exams, and performance assessments that are both qualitative and quantitative. Throughout a student's four years he or she engages in all types of assessments.

During the freshman year, all students take the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) survey. The CIRP provides the university with a profile of the entering class, including demographic and self-reported information on students' plans for college and the future. A small

sample of freshmen also takes the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which examines five areas: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Truman has administered the NSSE since it was piloted in 1999. NSSE results have been especially revealing and somewhat controversial. Some of the data show that, in certain areas, Truman has not performed as well as it would like or as well as similar institutions. While action has not yet been taken to achieve the desired results, the data have fueled interesting discussions about teaching methods and the student experience.

During the sophomore year, students take no institutional-level assessments. Students may encounter assessment at the discipline level.

A student's final two years are filled with a variety of assessment experiences. Juniors complete the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ), which measures three aspects of a student's experience, including college activities, college environment, and self-reported estimate of gains. Juniors also begin taking nationally normed exams; specifically, half of the juniors take the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) while the other half take the Academic Profile (AP). The CAAP measures knowledge and skills in five areas: mathematics, science, reading, writing, and critical thinking. The AP examines seven areas: natural science, social science, mathematics, humanities, as well as reading, writing, and critical thinking. While both freshmen and juniors used to take the CAAP and AP for value-added purposes, freshman testing was discontinued in 2004.

Assessment is most intense during the senior year. A small sample of seniors takes the NSSE in order to provide comparisons with freshmen and to gain a broader understanding of a student's experience at Truman. Additionally, seniors engage in a locally-developed capstone

experience within their major. These capstones, introduced in 1989 on a voluntary basis, are currently a requirement in each student's major. Capstones are designed both to evaluate a student's knowledge in the major as well as assess the quality of the academic program. The capstone experience varies for each major by design in order to assess each major's particular outcomes. Seniors also submit a portfolio designed to measure particular outcomes, such as critical thinking, interdisciplinary thinking, historical analysis skills, and scientific reasoning. The Portfolio Project was implemented at the discipline-level starting in 1988-1989 in order to assess how well the university was meeting its liberal arts and sciences core curriculum outcomes (Northeast Missouri State University, 1993). The charge to assess the LAS curriculum appeared in 1987's *Five-Year Planning Document*, which outlined Northeast's transition from a general education to a liberal arts and sciences university. The portfolio became a university-wide requirement in 1999. Currently, approximately sixty faculty members volunteer to read portfolios for a week at the end of each spring semester; some of them even read for two weeks. Volunteers receive a small stipend as an incentive to participate. The Portfolio Project serves both as an assessment of student learning and a faculty development tool providing faculty insight into teaching methods from across the entire campus. Selected student portfolios are also used for Truman's new writing assessment, which is commonly referred to as "multi-faceted" writing assessment or "three-branched" assessment because it addresses three distinct areas. The assessment's three areas include a Writing Across the University (WAU) committee, collegial review of student writing, and a rubric-based review of senior Portfolio Project materials. This Writing Assessment replaced the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE) starting in 2002. The SWE was discontinued for a number of reasons, including monetary cost and the failure of the instrument to produce expected student gains. In addition to their portfolio submissions, seniors

take a nationally normed exam in the major as an exit exam to assess individuals' performance and to allow comparison of Truman's programs with those at other universities. Finally, seniors fill out the Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) survey to express attitudes about aspects of their Truman experience.

Some students may also be randomly selected to participate in focus groups or other university or program-level assessments created to investigate a specific issue. Even after students graduate, Truman attempts to continue measuring its graduates' success and their perceptions of their education. Following graduation, Truman graduates are asked to take an alumni survey. Truman also issues surveys to the employers of its graduates in order to assess the preparedness of graduates for the workplace.

Assessment takes place at the discipline level in addition to the institutional level. The capstone, for example, is a university-wide requirement that facilitates the assessment of discipline outcomes. Although other specific discipline-level assessment will not be examined here, extensive review of each program occurs continually. The institution provides ample support for programs and disciplines wishing to begin assessment or to strengthen their current assessment efforts. The Assessment Committee serves as the primary body for making recommendations on the administration of assessment instruments and the dissemination of data.

Costs and Benefits of Assessment at Truman

Assessment is useful to the university in many ways. During its thirty-five year history, assessment has benefited the university on the departmental, institutional, state, and even the national level. At the same time, the university and its constituents face a number of costs as a result of Truman's commitment to assessment.

Interview subjects identified a number of negative impacts of assessment at Truman. Some costs of assessment are inherent, while others have developed as a result of ineffective assessment practices. Several of the most negative, and therefore costly, characteristics of assessment at Truman include:

- Monetary costs
- Overzealous commitment to assessment
- Time and energy drain
- Loss of good will

On the most basic level, assessment requires money. Although small relative to many other costs, assessment entails a significant monetary commitment from the university. Most interview subjects, however, agree that the benefits of assessment justify the monetary costs even among those who mentioned monetary costs as a negative aspect of assessment.

Over the past three decades, use of assessment has shaped Truman's very identity. The university highly values the power of effective assessment and is committed to its continuance. Truman's commitment to assessment has indeed benefited the university, but it has been costly as well. Specifically, Truman's commitment to assessment means that the university has been unwilling to do away with instruments that no longer produce relevant information. With too much data to analyze, understanding what the data have to say becomes a much more difficult task. Sampling or testing every other year may produce sufficient results instead. Apathy is yet another result of Truman's extreme commitment to assessment. When assessment becomes a mechanical task on a to-do list, the institution runs the risk of losing the self-reflective aspects essential to meaningful assessment activity. Assessment serves very little purpose if self-reflection fails to occur and data or results are not considered. Constant reexamination of both purpose and methods aids the university in avoiding costly overassessment.

The required commitment of time and energy is another serious cost of assessment. Faculty, staff, administrators, and students all spend various amounts of time and energy on assessment. Especially in cases where the university fails to let go of outdated instruments, assessment may cost more than necessary. Such costs often turn people off and produce a negative attitude toward assessment activities. For those who choose to get involved with assessment administration, the time spent serving on committees, attending meetings, and otherwise working on assessment takes away from personal time for reflection on or work with assessment data and from course or professional development. When faculty and staff become overextended, assessment burnout can set in and even assessment's most enthusiastic advocates grow tired as a result. Students, especially if they do not sense the value of using time for assessment-related purposes, feel taxed even by small time commitments perceived as unnecessary and burdensome. Students take tests their junior and senior years, and all participate in capstones and the portfolio project. Some are also called upon to participate in other surveys or test samplings.

This time commitment may lead to frustration and disenfranchisement. As mentioned earlier, some members of faculty and staff who participate in the assessment program become frustrated by their inability to do everything. When assessment becomes a task, in contrast to a method of encouraging reflection and improvement, it fails to do either very well. Similarly, if students are frustrated by assessment requirements, especially in their last semester, the university runs the risk of failing to procure accurate assessment results and must therefore make decisions based on imperfect information. On top of capstones and graduation requirements, students are also asked to thoughtfully compile a portfolio. They often report feeling that the university "tests" them, overassesses them, and times assessment instruments poorly. To many

students, the personal costs of assessment outweigh their perception of the benefits they receive and thus sometimes leave the university with feelings of disenfranchisement. In this way, assessment might possibly threaten alumni support of the institution.

Despite the costs, assessment has provided Truman with countless benefits during the past three decades. Undoubtedly, the primary benefit is the increased quality of a Truman education. Northeast first used assessment techniques to measure and demonstrate student learning. The program has matured, however, and now uses assessment for both accountability and for conscious improvement. Constant focus on student learning and educational quality is key in continually producing a return on the investment in assessment. Certain key changes in Truman's past exhibit the enormous potential of the appropriate use of assessment data. For example, the 1986 mission change from the State of Missouri would have been impossible if not for the quality improvements Truman made based on assessment data during the 1970s and early 1980s. Truman's strong reputation in Missouri and beyond rests in part on Truman's ability to demonstrate how much its students learn both in and out of the classroom.

As stated by the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Assessment in its 1993 report, "wise use of test results by faculty, administration, staff, and students, is the difference between assessment for reporting and assessment for improvement" (Northeast Missouri State University, 18). Finding ways to use assessment for improvement is key to reaping the benefits of comprehensive assessment. While more benefits could be identified, some of the most positive aspects of the assessment program are:

- Accountability to audiences
- Curriculum changes
- Self-reflection
- Faculty and staff development
- Ingrained culture of assessment

Accountability to a variety of audiences is one of the most important benefits of assessment. Through the quantitative and qualitative assessment data that it gathers, Truman can prove itself to multiple audiences. Accreditation agencies and state legislators often require assessment data of institutions in order to meet particular standards.

The majority of the assessment benefits hinge on the ability of the university to use assessment for improvement. Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, assessment data helped to shape curriculum changes, resulting in an increase in educational quality. Assessment data were used extensively following the 1986 mission change to ensure that the university's new programs were meeting the desired outcomes. Assessment data were used in the development of Truman's Liberal Studies Program and continue to be used during periodic reviews of the LSP.

The development of the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar, or the JINS course, is the most often cited recent example of curricular change based on assessment results. Results of the Portfolio Project revealed students' ineffective interdisciplinary thinking skills. To remedy the deficiency, faculty initiated the creation of the JINS course. All students must now enroll in and complete a JINS course during the junior year in order to experience and develop their interdisciplinary thinking skills. Since the introduction of the JINS course, Portfolio results show that students' interdisciplinary thinking skills have improved (Dare-Halma, 2003).

Truman's extensive and comprehensive use of assessment encourages self-reflection and, occasionally, constructive self-criticism. The comprehensiveness of Truman's program reflects the institution's value of self-reflection in all aspects, especially in regard to student learning, curriculum, and student services. Students, in addition to faculty and staff, are encouraged through assessment to engage in self-reflective behaviors.

Another primary, though often overlooked, benefit of assessment at Truman is faculty development. Many of Truman's qualitative assessment instruments, such as the Portfolio Project and the Student Interview Project, allow faculty to interact both with students or student work as well as fellow faculty members. In these settings, faculty members learn important lessons about students and student learning. The Portfolio readings bring faculty together from across campus to discuss how students learn by analyzing what they produce over the course of a four-year experience at Truman State University. In a similar way, the Student Interview Project brings one faculty (or staff) member and one student together as a team to interview another student. The activity allows each person to interact with the others in a new and interesting way. Truman's annual Summer Master Plan and Assessment Workshop is another means by which assessment brings faculty and staff together to discuss assessment-related concerns and accomplishments.

Truman's long history of assessment has produced an implicit acceptance of assessment measures and a willingness to continually evaluate methods. This openness to and familiarity with assessment is another key benefit of Truman's history of assessment. A majority of faculty, staff, and administrators accept the importance of assessment to the university's past, present, and future. As a result, Truman has an ingrained assessment culture. When presented with problems and need for change, the decision-maker will generally first ask what the data have to say regarding the issue. While assessment techniques may often be questioned, assessment rarely is. Truman never hesitates to examine new assessment instruments that have the potential to reveal information about the university and its students. Many potential projects get rejected, but Truman's participation as a pilot institution with the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) from the Council for Aid to Education represents its latest foray into value-added assessment.

The comprehensiveness of Truman's program reflects well the practice of triangulation, whereby decisions are informed by data from multiple assessment measures.

Overall, assessment data increase the university's level of self-awareness. Quantitative and qualitative assessment instruments formalize the knowledge and attitudes of the university's students. With data in hand, administrators are more aware of the needs, thoughts, strengths, and weaknesses of students and the nature of their experience at the university. That data, when studied effectively, can effect positive change for an institution of higher education.

Roots of Success

Truman's success with assessment can be traced to a number of characteristics unique to the institution. Rooted in the institution's history of assessment, many of the characteristics that distinguish Truman's assessment program have been consistent for the past three decades since McClain's administration incrementally introduced assessment in the early 1970s. Traits that helped promote the success of Truman's assessment program include:

- Internal development
- Focused leadership
- Inclusive nature
- Positive and non-punitive

Charles McClain's decision to introduce voluntary standardized testing at Truman was made not to meet external standards or state mandates. Unlike many other institutions that began assessment later, Northeast developed assessment internally for its own use. McClain did not introduce assessment practices in order to prove that the university was meeting particular goals; rather, the administration wanted to gain knowledge about itself and its students. By building a body of data, Northeast gained an immediate advantage over institutions that began assessment later. Northeast did not treat assessment as a requirement. As a result, the university generated

enthusiasm for the program and avoided a compliance attitude early in the university's assessment experience.

Focused university leadership during the establishment and maturation of the assessment program also served to foster enthusiasm and motivation. According to many interview subjects, assessment was a mantra for McClain, Krueger, and other key individuals. McClain and Krueger constantly discussed, inquired about, and developed their knowledge of assessment data and practices. Interview subjects attested that McClain and Krueger constantly turned to assessment data to help answer their questions. They studied the data in order to see what it said about the university. Dramatic change under McClain and Krueger showed how their focus produced real results. Their focus pulled others into their assessment-oriented mission and their long tenures brought continuity.

Assessment at Truman began and remained highly inclusive throughout most of its history. Motivating a large organization to work toward institutional goals presents a difficult challenge, especially when setting priorities and implementing new programs come from the top down. The inclusive nature of Truman's program promoted cooperation and enthusiasm from faculty, staff, and students. Faculty and staff are all encouraged to participate in the assessment program, and do so in a variety of ways. The Provost's (Vice President's) Advisory Committee on Assessment, the Portfolio Project, and the Student Interview Project, among others, allow faculty and staff to come together for assessment purposes. All students are obligated to complete certain assessment requirements in order to graduate.

Finally, as explained earlier, the non-punitive nature of assessment at Truman remains a cornerstone upon which much of its success rests. McClain developed the assessment program as something constructive from which the university could learn. Assessment's purposes, then, are

positive and focused on goals of self-reflection and constant improvement in areas such as student learning, teaching, and student services. To reinforce these goals, McClain assured the university that assessment would never be used punitively; to this day, the university maintains that tradition. Assessment draws attention to areas of need and may at times be critical, but people or programs never face punishment based on results. Data help identify areas of need and invite action where deficiencies appear.

Current Challenges

Assessment has maintained its importance to the university, yet has also become something habitual. Like most habits, assessment may be performed almost unthinkingly. Without questioning the purpose and meaning of assessment, assessment's effectiveness is threatened. Partly as a result of Truman's assessment history, the program currently faces a number of dangers. Current and former students, faculty members, staff, and administrators interviewed in the research portion of this project pointed out several current challenges and dangers.

Perhaps most dangerous are reports from both students and faculty that they are unable to see the benefits and usefulness of assessment instruments. For many, assessment practices such as the junior tests or the Portfolio Project are "red tape" or hoops through which students must jump for an unclear benefit to the university. This perception produces an additional problem. Little understanding of an exercise's purpose and no punishment for poor performance produce low student motivation. Regardless of student ability, performance on tests and other assessment instruments reflects decreased motivation. Under these circumstances the data do not represent reality and render data somewhat useless.

Faculty members are another critical link in the assessment chain; the program could not function without them. If faculty members do not use or see the uses of assessment, then the program cannot be implemented properly. Assessment data will not be used either to their full potential or as originally intended. Additionally, the actions and statements of the faculty and staff with whom students interact often directly shape perceptions of university assessment. Faculty members who explicitly or implicitly undervalue assessment directly influence students, as does positive commentary on assessment.

A number of interview subjects expressed concern over excess commitment to assessment at Truman. Is the university holding on to unnecessary tools and, indeed, overassessing its students? Are faculty and staff members spread too thin with committee work? Are faculty members, staff, and administrators engaging in self-reflective behaviors, or is assessment simply a mindless habit? Are enough faculty members benefiting from the faculty development aspects of the program, or are they deterred from participating? Even if the university expends an appropriate amount of energy on assessment endeavors, its priorities must be in the right place for that energy to produce meaningful results. For example, administering too many standardized tests consumes time that can be spent analyzing the data from those tests. Similarly, collecting superfluous indirect and/or objective data takes away from the direct and/or qualitative and attitudinal data that can be collected and analyzed. Getting trapped in the traditions of assessment, such as a willingness to introduce new methods and an inquisitive nature, which helped to build Truman's reputation, may cause the university to lose its competitive edge. Is Truman still an institution whose assessment program exudes excellence and innovation, as it did over twenty years ago when the university was awarded the G. Theodore Mitau Award?

Action Plan for the Future

Some suggestions from former and current students, faculty, staff, and administrators collected during the interview and research portion of this project may help Truman confront the dangers it currently faces.

Overall, the university must continually reevaluate the effectiveness of the assessment program as a whole, in addition to each of its component parts. Each individual assessment instrument should aid the university in achieving one or more of the goals of the assessment program as a whole. A Spring 2006 assessment budget cut caused the Assessment Committee to critically evaluate the necessity of each assessment instrument. While budget cuts obviously detract from the university's ability to make assessment as thorough and far-reaching as it might like, the cuts force university officials to engage in the sort of critical analysis required to ensure that current methods are helping the university achieve its goals.

One cornerstone of effective assessment practices is making data easy to access and use. All of the university's constituents should be able to access and understand assessment results with ease. To facilitate better understanding of results, data must be available both in raw and in an analyzed form.

Based on the need to make assessment data more accessible, the university is currently taking steps to improve data availability and ease of use. During the Spring 2006 semester, the university began implementing a data-warehousing program that works in conjunction with the existing Banner Web system. This program is known as the Operational Data Store (ODS). ODS will digitally house all of the university's assessment data, making it easier both to view raw data

and to import data into analysis programs, such as Excel or SPSS. Further moves to make analyses available to faculty and students, particularly, are recommended.

With a number of positive changes in motion, it is important that all of the university's constituents, and especially those most unfamiliar with or hostile toward assessment, be made aware of the benefits of and improvements to the university through its assessment program. Students at the university in the 1980s were perhaps more conscious of assessment because of the "value-added" mantra as well as the university's steadily increasing reputation and selectivity. Today, however, students recognize Truman as a high-quality institution and are unaware of the means by which the university improved itself. To remedy this, greater publicity is needed. Assessment can and should become part of every student's and faculty member's vocabulary.

Publicizing change is key in bringing assessment to the attention of more university constituents. For example, the SWE was discontinued in 2002 partly as a result of faculty and student comments. The university adjusted the assessment program as a result of feedback in an attempt to improve satisfaction while finding a more effective writing assessment technique. Since the demise of the SWE, the new Multi-Faceted Writing Assessment has been introduced. Even while faculty evaluate their writing, many students lack the awareness that writing assessment even exists. For faculty, too, the new writing assessment consumes less time than the SWE. Fostering greater assessment program awareness, both of its benefits and its changes, may produce greater receptivity and appreciation from all campus groups.

Evidence suggests that a culture of self-awareness and self-improvement pervades many of the offices and departments on campus producing informal, individual self-assessment efforts. The recently-introduced Graduation Fair exemplifies such efforts. Based on student feedback,

both informal and from the GSQ, university officials became aware that the graduation process was taxing on students. Previously, the university required each student to have officials from various on-campus offices sign a form affirming that the student had satisfactorily completed his or her graduation requirements. The Graduation Fair, instead, brings representatives from all of those campus offices together in one central location and students get their forms signed in a fraction of the time. Based on word-of-mouth commentary by graduating students, the Graduation Fair seems to have increased student satisfaction.

Conclusion

As the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Assessment wisely stated in its 1993 *State of Assessment Report*, "the challenge today is to maintain and enhance the [assessment] culture" (3). This challenge is no less true today than it was in 1993.

The story of how the assessment culture developed and grew under the steady leadership of Charles McClain and Darrell Krueger explains how Truman State University became the institution it is today. In the 1970s, Northeast Missouri State University began experimenting with systematic testing to gain self-knowledge. Upon learning of its strengths and weaknesses, university leaders took action to increase the quality of the university. Their efforts were rewarded as Northeast became a quality multipurpose university and then a quality statewide liberal arts and sciences university with a new, more distinguished name. Change did not occur overnight or as a direct result of assessment techniques. Rather, the knowledge gained from assessment instruments showed administrators what actions were needed to be taken in order to make the university a better place for student learning.

Increased emphasis on external accountability has changed the way faculty, staff, and administrators think about assessment. Assessment data can serve as an excellent tool for self-criticism and analysis, or internal accountability. As assessment increasingly becomes required, especially by state legislatures, energy formerly used for internal evaluation has been shifted to use for external demonstration. With these changes taking place, institutions must be very careful to remain focused on student learning and quality. The positive benefits of assessment appear to decrease when assessment becomes a habit or a compulsory activity, as opposed to a method of self-reflection.

In spite of over thirty-five years of experience with assessment, Truman cannot rest or be complacent. Each student, each faculty member, and each staff member or administrator has a vested interest in the success of the institution. Assessment has been critical to Truman's past and it has shaped the present. By continually working to maintain and enhance the assessment culture at Truman, as the assessment committee recommended in 1993, the university can look forward to a brighter future.

Appendix 1

Figure 1. University/Student Contacts

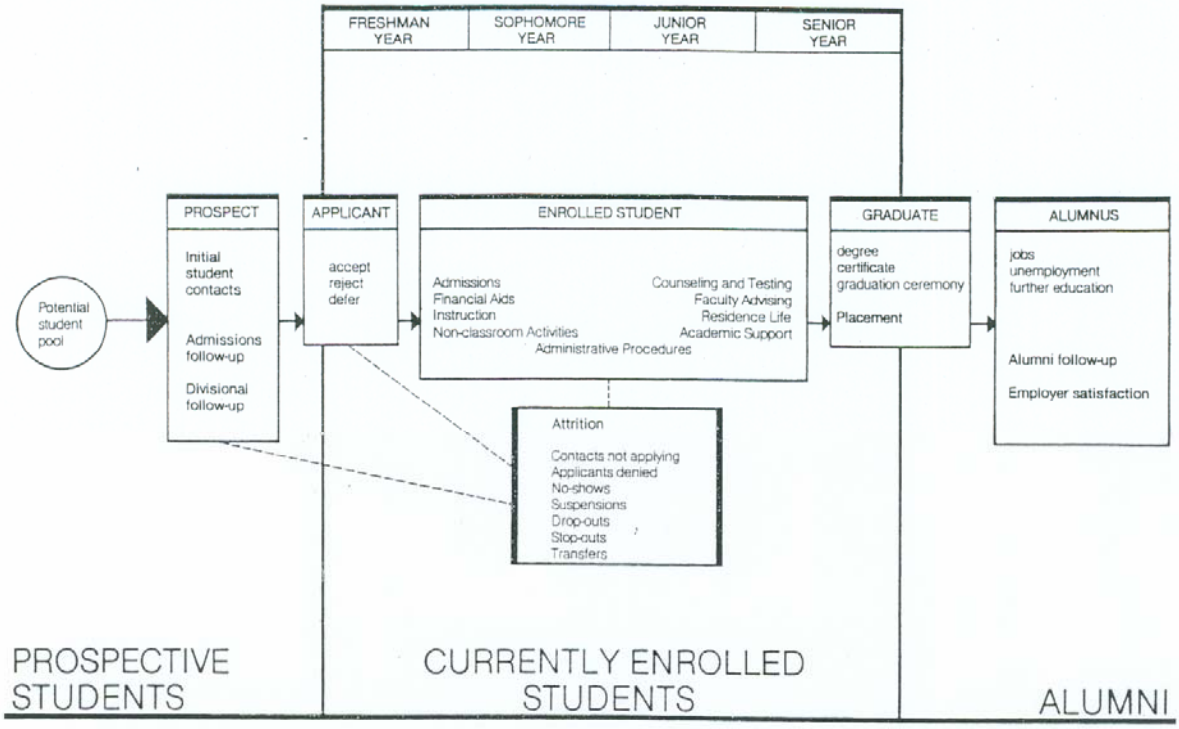
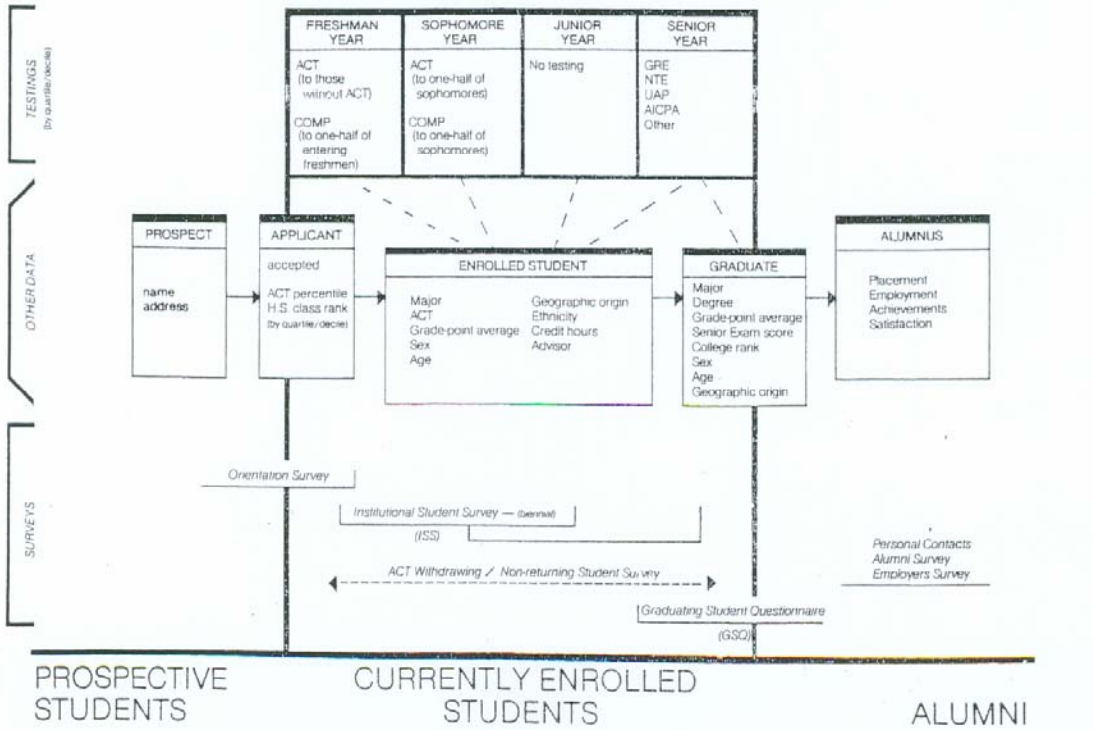


Figure 2. Student Data Record



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