

## Chapter III: CURRENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW & PHILOSOPHY

Truman State University is Missouri's statewide public liberal arts and sciences university. Truman is a highly selective, primarily undergraduate institution serving mostly traditional students in a residential setting, with an enrollment of 5,800 and a faculty of approximately 400. The University has been accredited since 1914 by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (<http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/>); its academic programs are also accredited by a number of professional organizations and agencies:

- AACSB International – The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
- American Chemical Society
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
- National Association of Schools of Music
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

The assessment program at Truman includes a variety of direct and indirect measures in the form of exams, surveys, and performance assessments.

### **EXAMS:**

Senior tests are required for every discipline. Most of these are externally developed, nationally normed instruments that are discipline-specific. Where a discipline-specific nationally normed exam does not currently exist, these students took the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). In most cases, a student's graduation does not depend on the results of the senior test, making it a low stakes evaluation. The primary value is in evaluating the curriculum within the discipline and delineating areas for revision. Discipline-specific senior tests include the Major Field Test (MFT), the Praxis II Exam: Content Knowledge, the Health Education Systems Inc (HESI) Exam for Nursing, and The Area Concentration Achievement Tests (ACAT). (For a complete list, see Chapter IX of this *Assessment Almanac*).

Junior testing for the 2007-2008 academic year, consisting of a cooperative experiment in conjunction with James Madison University, evaluated a JMU constructed scientific and quantitative reasoning (SR/QR) test which resulted in half of the juniors taking the JMU test and half taking only the scientific reasoning and the quantitative reasoning sections of the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP). This format was continued for the 2008-2009 academic year with the addition of a sample of first-time student data collected on the JMU instrument to evaluate the efficacy of a value-added approach to SR/QR assessment. Data

collection continues in 2009-2010, and this will be the final year of the project. Junior test results can be found in Chapter VII of this *Assessment Almanac*.

### **SURVEYS & INTERVIEWS:**

All fall-entry first-time freshmen complete either the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey or the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) during Truman Week. Two other nationally-administered surveys are a part of Truman's regular assessment program: the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The CSEQ is administered to students during their Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar. The NSSE is administered to a sampling of first-year students every other year. Re-administration for the NSSE occurs during the senior year. Results are compared between first-year student responses and senior responses.

Since the 1992-93 academic year, Truman students and faculty have participated in interview sessions. One hundred students are selected at random. Each student is interviewed by a student-faculty team and asked several open-ended questions about their learning experiences. The questions are developed every year by the Provost's Advisory Committee on Assessment. In spring 2009, students were asked questions regarding quality of life.

The locally developed Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) is administered to every graduating senior. Completion of the GSQ is a graduation requirement. Results are available by discipline and many disciplines include GSQ results in their five-year reviews to the State. Since December 2003, graduates have taken the GSQ online.

Truman alumni are also surveyed. Additionally, employers of alumni receive surveys from those alumni granting permission. Truman learns what activities alumni are involved in and how employers view the capabilities and preparedness of our alumni.

### **PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS:**

Assessment tools include the Portfolio Project, capstone experiences, and the writing assessment.

The Portfolio Project is a sampling of a student's work representing the student's intellectual growth at Truman, inside and outside the classroom. Students save their work immediately upon arrival at Truman and keep files through graduation. During the capstone course in the major, the students complete their portfolios. The Portfolio is especially effective in assessing Truman's Liberal Studies Program (general education) outcomes. The process of reviewing one's work in assembling the Portfolio is itself a learning tool, since it encourages self-reflection. Portfolios are reviewed and evaluated by faculty who use the evaluation process as a professional development opportunity. Though the immediate benefit is to the student, the University also learns much from the student portfolios.

The capstone is a culminating experience in each academic discipline. While the nature of the experience varies among majors, each requires students to reflect on their growth in

knowledge, skills, and attitudes over the preceding several years and to demonstrate how they have integrated their learning experiences into a successful and satisfying whole. In addition to helping the learner achieve a kind of closure, the capstone experience also enhances continuous quality improvement in the curriculum of each degree program.

The University continued to use a portion of the senior Portfolio Project to evaluate aspects of student writing abilities which are supervised by the Writing Across the University Committee. Submissions to a prompt for works demonstrating critical thinking were scored for writing skills with attention drawn to the four areas of quality of thinking, organization, style and mechanics. A more collegial approach to obtaining writing skills data, as proposed in 2006, is still under development.

### **PHILOSOPHY & USE OF ASSESSMENT:**

Truman's assessment program is ambitious in its intent and scope. It gathers data from each of the approximately 5500 students on campus every year. The data are used at the institutional and departmental level, but they are also used by the individual student. The comprehensiveness of the assessment system, as well as its implementation, makes assessment meaningful at Truman.

Each year at the summer Strategic Planning and Assessment Workshop, representatives from all disciplines on campus receive institutional and discipline-specific assessment and demographic data. They take these data back to their colleagues and are able to openly discuss findings and future directions. In addition to the summer Workshop, the University Conference was instituted in 2001 to disseminate findings, data, and to generate discussion. The Conference takes place over a one-day period and classes are cancelled in order to allow widespread faculty and student participation. One of the most important benefits of assessment is the data's ability to raise critical questions, thereby setting the institutional agenda for discussion and decision-making. The data can assist an institution in identifying problem areas and in monitoring programmatic change. By combining discussions about expectations for student learning, multiple pieces of assessment information, and informed faculty and staff analysis, institutional decision-making gains legitimacy and focus.

Truman believes in substantial faculty ownership of University assessments. Both the Portfolio Project and Interview Project are each directed by a faculty member. Faculty participate in reading the portfolios, interviewing students, and teaching capstone experiences. The Assessment Committee is made up largely of faculty and chaired by a faculty member.

Assessment for quality improvement and assessment for accountability are both embedded in the University's assessment philosophy. Truman is careful not to use assessment data punitively. Rather, data are used to incite discussion, support theories and statements, and assess outcomes. Wherever possible, multiple instruments are used to make a single determination.

Overall, assessment at Truman State University is a basis for change, improvement, and accountability. Data are shared campus-wide and with external constituencies. We focus on

quality improvement. Ultimately, students are the benefactors of assessment. Aside from having multiple opportunities to reflect on their learning and development at Truman, students also benefit from the feedback we have received from those students who came before them.