

Chapter 14: YEAR END UPDATE

2012 was a productive year for assessment at Truman State University. In addition to our ongoing projects, we participated in the Higher Learning Commission's Assessment Academy. Because of our participation in the Assessment Academy, our overall goals for the 2011-2012 year were to better understand student critical thinking, leadership, and wellness.

Ongoing projects

The assessment committee oversees administration of our large, ongoing assessment projects, including the Truman Portfolio, senior tests, Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), the Faculty Survey on Student Engagement (FSSE), the first-year survey, the Graduating Senior questionnaire (GSQ), the alumni survey, and the employer survey. The Truman portfolio continues to evolve: a new problem-solving prompt was added, and a new rubric for critical thinking was tested. The Student Interview project was continued through Spring 2012, but was put on hold for the 2012 – 2013 year. The assessment committee will revisit whether project should be resumed in 2013-2014 or to continue interviews as needed to provide data for pressing university decisions. In the meanwhile, student-led focus groups are being continued. These groups have the potential to provide rich descriptions of student experiences somewhat similar to those provided in the interview project. The topic of focus for the student-led focus groups for 2012-2013 is experiences of transfer students.

Two components of assessment data have been proposed as part of the performance funding indicators under development in the state of Missouri. The first is senior test scores. State funding may be linked to the number of students who either score above the 50th percentile on nationally normed tests in their major or who pass a professional licensure or certification task in their major. The second component is institution – specific and is based on scores of critical thinking demonstrated through the Truman portfolio. Because the mission of a liberal arts school is closely tied to helping students learn to think critically, the percent of students achieving competence on this major was selected by the institution upon which to place our focus.

The assessment committee also provides data and consulting for other university assessment. For example, portfolio scores, senior test scores, graduating student questionnaire data, and alumni survey data are all regularly provided by program for academic programs completing their five-year reviews. In 2012, Undergraduate Council continued of review of general education components. Reports are available to campus constituencies at <http://ugc.truman.edu/matierals.>, Undergraduate Council is also in the process of reviewing the Critical Thinking rubric proposed by the Pathways Critical Thinking Task force.

Truman continued participation in several national and international efforts for assessment and accountability. We again participated in the College Portrait as part of the Voluntary System of Accountability and in the President's Alliance for Excellence in Student Learning and Accountability. We recruited students to participate in AHELO's (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes) feasibility study; AHELO is an international effort to understand what students know and can do on completion of an undergraduate degree. Truman continued participation in the Wabash 2010 study, until the study ended in August 2012. Representatives from Truman presented on assessment-related issues at the Indianapolis Assessment Institute and at the annual meeting of the Higher Learning Commission.

Participation in the Higher Learning Commission's Assessment Academy

In 2010, Truman agreed to participate in the piloting of the Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) new Open Pathways program for accreditation. Open Pathways requires each institution to complete a quality initiative: all of the institutions in the second cohort participated in HLC's Assessment Academy as the quality initiative.

The first part of Truman's participation involved collecting data on the student transformation in critical thinking, leadership, and wellness. The ongoing assessments provided good baseline data, and we collected new data specifically to understand transformative experiences. To facilitate campus discussions, task forces produced short

summaries of data, nicknamed “Purple Papers.” These were presented to campus in several venues, especially in summer 2011.

For the current stage of the project, the Provost sent two planned rounds of requests for proposals for pilot projects, one in Fall 2011 and one in Spring 2012. These projects were intended to be relatively small-scale with the potential for expansion. Each project was to build on the information provided in the Purple Papers and to have a substantial assessment component to track transformation in at least one of the desired characteristics. Faculty and staff forwarded twelve proposals. The seven funded projects are described below.

Projects involving Critical Thinking

- Critical Thinking in Student Worker Supervision: Truman State requires that students who receive scholarships above a specified amount must provide service to the university. Therefore, meaningful work experiences for students are plentiful. This project aims to incorporate transformative coaching into these existing work experiences within Student Affairs. Assessment will involve pre- and post-scores of student workers’ critical thinking skills on the university critical thinking rubric, comparing the progress of students who received coaching to the progress of those who did not.
- Critical Thinking in Accounting: Students in three separate accounting courses will be coached in critical thinking using a published case study designed for that purpose. As part of the training, students will learn to evaluate their own critical thinking using a university rubric. Assessment will include evaluations by faculty using the same rubric, as well as pre- and post-scores on the California Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory.
- A School-Wide Exploration of Critical Thinking Pedagogy: Faculty in the school of Social and Cultural Sciences have agreed to try new pedagogical techniques to increase critical thinking in a range of general education courses. Courses will participate in one of three levels: teaching the campus

rubric heavily, with revised assignments using the rubric; introducing the rubric with use for existing assignments; and no change. Assessment will include comparison of student work across levels, and a sample of students who take the California Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory.

Projects involving Living Physically and Emotionally Healthy Lives

- Mental Health First Aid: This project supports the formal training of Mental Health First Aid instructors. After undergoing training themselves, these instructors will train staff and faculty to be points of contact for students undergoing mental health crises. Assessment will include pre-and post-tests of knowledge and stigma of individuals suffering mental health problems, as well as existing campus-wide measures of stress, mental health, and perceptions of university support for mental wellness.
- The Wellness Pact: The Wellness Pact allows coordination of several existing campus programs, in a re-envisioning of student wellness resources. The intention is to influence the culture of the university by providing an integrated message about healthy behaviors. Six student interns will perform the bulk of the coordination. Assessment measures will compare resource use and referrals before and after the Pact, supplemented with self-report measures.
- The Wellness Zone: A resource room in the library will be designated for stress-reduction and other wellness activities. One portion of the Zone is available during all library hours, and includes space for progressive relaxation and meditation. Students staff the rear portion of the wellness zone, which includes nutrition counseling and biofeedback. Assessment will target both those who visit the Wellness Zone voluntarily and a random sample of other students who may or may not have visited the Zone.

Projects involving Leadership

- Bulldog LEADERS program: In this project, students reflect on their own values and leadership styles. Speakers and group discussions are part of the Bulldog “huddle.” Assessment primarily involves pre-post surveys.

The leaders of each project will collect data in the 2012-2013 academic year, with presentation to the campus before 2013 – 2014. Those projects which are successful in substantially increasing transformative experiences in critical thinking, leadership, or wellness will be implemented on a larger scale.

Assessment Committee goals and plans

The Assessment Almanac also continues to grow and develop. This year, a summary of assessment in graduate programs was added (Chapter 12). Though most of the large assessment endeavors are linked to the undergraduate curriculum, graduate assessment is also important, and we added a chapter to document it. Another change to the Almanac is the Volume structure. In the past, one volume of the almanac contained summary and interpretation, while another contained expanded measures and data. The volumes have been combined this year into one to facilitate searching the documents and ease of downloading data. The final change to the change to the timeframe covered. Initially, the almanac covered a fiscal year (July through June), but the Almanac was published in late December or early January. This meant that data for assessment collected in Fall semesters were not published for more than a year after they were collected. In this volume, all data that are available and previously unpublished in the Almanac are included. For example, data for the first-year survey for Fall 2011 are included as usual, but data for Fall 2012 were also available, and are therefore included as well. This allows for faster dissemination of data.

Students contributed directly to this assessment almanac and to the functioning of the Assessment Committee. Daniel Wolz, Melissa Kern, Lauren Liegey, and Autumn Smith prepared minutes for the committee. Daniel Wolz also co-authored the graduate affairs and the student affairs assessment summary, while Lauren Liegey co-authored the

discipline assessment spotlight and CLA summary. Elizabeth Hoffman co-authored the portfolio chapter. Kiera Hulsey and Emily Davis co-authored the Student Interview Project, while Emily Love, Zak Palmer, Angela Page, and Adam Speak served on the Interview project research team.

Looking forward, the assessment committee continues to work on a database to facilitate understanding of the student experience across different assessment instruments. For the 2012-2013 academic year, the assessment committee has undertaken revision of the alumni survey, a more thorough analysis of students' problem solving skills, and a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of transfer students. We hope to include "purple papers" on problem solving and transfer student experiences in the 2013 almanac. Some changes to the alumni survey were implemented in fall 2012, and the new version will likely be fully implemented by 2015.