

Measure What Matters . . . A Closer Look at Program Assessment

Why is the Center for Teaching and Learning talking about the dreaded “A” word—assessment? Assessment whether at the course level, program level, or college level forms a basis for understanding what our students know and can do as a result of our collective academic practices. At the CTL, we have experts who can work with individual faculty to look at course assessment as well as experts who can assist programs and departments in developing program assessments. On page 2 of this bulletin you will find elements included in one of the largest program assessments ever undertaken at NEIU, that of the General Education Program.

Curriculum planning and innovation at the department and program levels can be facilitated by gathering useful assessment data about student learning. An effective assessment plan developed and implemented by faculty articulates student learning goals and outcomes that are important to the program. In addition to knowing what to assess, an effective plan specifies the methodology that will be used to assess how well students in the program achieve expected learning outcomes. An effective assessment plan answers questions of implementation such as:

- Who is going to be assessed, which students in what courses?
- Who is going to do the assessment, which faculty or administrative support personnel?
- What form of assessment will be used?
- How often will program assessment take place?

Perhaps, the most important question to address in the plan is how the results of the assessment will be disseminated and used by the program to address student learning. If the results of the program assessment show that a substantial number of students are making significant gains in their learning related to program learning goals and outcomes, then the results provide evidence to make the claim that the academic program is exemplary. These results should be trumpeted!

More typical however, is the finding that the program is more effective in helping students to meet expected student learning outcomes related to some goals rather than others. In such an instance, there are a variety of approaches that could be taken by faculty. For example, they could:

- review program offerings to discern whether sufficient emphasis is given in particular courses for students to achieve the expected program learning goals and outcomes;
- look at how the courses are linked to see if this is the most advantageous approach to ensuring that students learn what program faculty deem important—the program learning goals and expected student learning outcomes;

- look at pre-requisites that may affect student learning in major courses;
- revisit the goals and outcomes to see if these need revision;
- see if gaps in student learning would best be covered by development of a new course;
- examine how well the assessment tool provided the information that was needed; or
- examine pedagogy

A critical aspect of assessment is what follows—the discussions among program and departmental faculty that lead to long lasting improvements. In this vein, assessment plans should be dynamic, changing when needed to reflect ongoing faculty discussions about what is important for students to learn and what is important to measure. For more information about consultations and workshops that can be offered in your department, please see the Northeastern Assessment Web page, <http://www.neiu.edu/~neassess/> and see the section “Workshops, Presentations and Events,” or send an e-mail to Angeles Eames, Associate Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, a-eames@neiu.edu

New General Education Assessment Plan

A new General Education Assessment Plan was recently approved by faculty governance bodies and endorsed by the administration. The plan, developed by the General Education Committee under the leadership of Co-chairs Roger Reinsch (COB) and Tom Weaver (CAS) takes effect immediately. Key elements of the plan include multiple ways of assessing how well NEIU students are achieving general education goals and expected student learning outcomes. Among these are:

- Embedded assessment—assessment of authentic student learning by collecting writing samples of entering students and students enrolled in upper level classes across the campus. These student papers will be assessed using writing and critical thinking rubrics developed by the General Education Committee in consultation with experts in the field. A Panel of Faculty Readers chosen from across the campus will be used.
- Standardized Testing—using the Academic Profile Test developed through a collaboration of ETS and the College Board, the test measures student knowledge and skills typically acquired through a general education program. Testing begins the week of March 7, 2005.
- Student Satisfaction Surveys—among these are use of particular items found in the National Survey of Student Engagement and alumni surveys.

For more information about the new general education assessment plan, please visit the Northeastern Illinois University Assessment website and look under “People-General Education Committee,” located at: <http://www.neiu.edu/~neassess/>

All CTL Bulletins are available on our website at: <http://www.neiu.edu/~ctl/>