Assessment Notes
Volume 5, Number 1
October, 2014

An occasional newsletter from the Director of Academic Assessment

Assessment Update for Assessment Liaisons, Department Chairs, Program Directors, and Deans

1. **Changes to the assessment schedule (or Yes, you now have more time!)**
   - Under the able guidance of Bruce Larson the Institutional Effectiveness Committee has been discussing ways to improve the latter stages of the assessment process, the stages in which there is institutional review of assessment data with an eye toward reporting on our progress to GA, SACS, etc and addressing resource and other needs raised by our assessment data.
   - The IE section below details the changes being piloted this year but one permanent change has been made to the reporting semester schedule. In the reporting semester units have been required to complete discussions of data, development of action plans and all pertinent TracDat updating by March of the reporting semester. **Effective this year the end of the reporting period has been moved to August 31, early in the subsequent Fall semester.** Cohort 3, required to report in Spring semester 2015, now has until August 31, 2015 to complete all elements of the reporting process. The IEC will discuss Cohort 3 assessment reports during Fall semester, 2015. The revised schedule is posted at: [https://ierp.unca.edu/instructions-chairs-directors-liaisons](https://ierp.unca.edu/instructions-chairs-directors-liaisons)
   - Why? Read on to the Institutional Effectiveness Update section to learn more.

2. **Progress on new common outcomes for major programs**
   - At the October, 2014 meeting the Department Chairs and Program Directors received a draft proposal with suggested language for the new five common program outcomes. As noted in the April, 2014 edition of *Assessment Notes* those outcomes are:
     - knowledge of the major - major competency as one assessment
     - critical thinking (new GA requirement) - need a direct assessment
     - written communication (new GA and Senate requirement) - need a direct assessment
     - oral communication - oral competency as one assessment
     - information literacy (new Senate requirement) - need a direct assessment
   - The draft language comes from the American Association of Colleges and University’s LEAP program. Chairs and program directors will share these with their department colleagues and provide feedback regarding the language to help us move toward common definitions of these five program outcomes. A copy of this document is posted at: [https://ierp.unca.edu/newsletter](https://ierp.unca.edu/newsletter)
   - Programs in all three cohorts are encouraged to start reorganizing their TracDat assessment plans to relocate existing assessments in new lines identified for each of these common outcomes. Lisa will begin work with Cohorts 1 and 2 this Spring to facilitate the transition.

3. **Progress on identifying outcomes for the Liberal Arts Core (our new general education curriculum)**
   - In preparation for our upcoming 5 year SACS review, which includes a review of learning outcomes for our general education core, Department Chairs and Program Directors also received a copy of the draft common program outcomes for the Liberal Arts Core. The five outcomes, and some preliminary ideas for linking them to LAC components:
     - Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning (quantitative perspectives, social science, lab science, scientific perspectives)
Interdisciplinary Perspectives (humanities, senior colloquium, freshman colloquium)
- Intercultural Knowledge (foreign language, diversity intensive, arts)
- Written Communication (Lang 120)
- Critical Thinking (Lang 120)
- The draft language for these outcomes also is taken from the American Association of Colleges and University’s LEAP program. Chairs and program directors will share these with their department colleagues and provide feedback regarding the language to help us move toward common definitions of these five program outcomes and how each one maps onto elements of our LAC curriculum. A copy of this document also is posted at: https://ierp.unca.edu/newsletter

Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Update

1. Changes to the IE review process

Every now and then it’s good to reflect on existing processes to ask how they might be improved. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee (IEC) has struggled in recent years with evaluating assessment reports in a timely way. Discussions early in the semester led to our piloting several possible changes to the structure and process of the IEC which, if successful, will be codified in a document submitted to the Faculty Senate in Spring, 2015. A brief rundown of the changes.

- The IEC will meet as a set of subcommittees during Fall semester and as a complete committee during Spring semester.
- One subcommittee will focus on reports from units whose work is linked to student learning, the other on reports from units whose work is linked to the strategic plan.
- Because reports will be evaluated during Fall semesters, reporting units have until August 31 of Fall semester to submit their final reports. This converts what was an eight week/two month timetable for discussing data, developing action plans, conferring with deans and supervisors to a four month timetable.
- Spring semester will be devoted to sharing information from the two subcommittees, developing collective statements about our progress on our student learning outcomes and the strategic plan and submitting recommendations to the University Planning Council and/or Senior Staff.

We hope these changes will facilitate more analysis and reflection, leading to improvements both in reporting what we learn and suggesting changes which might improve our operations and effectiveness. The membership of the IEC is posted at: https://ierp.unca.edu/institutional-effectiveness-committee

2. Training for Chairs/Program Directors and Assessment Liaisons

New department chair, program director or assessment liaison? TracDat making you bonkers? No problem. Help is just a click away.

- New to the system: Jessica schedules TracDat training several times each semester for those who are new to the system. If you missed our two training sessions in October, please contact her directly.
- Access to TracDat sections: Jessica also controls TracDat permissions which give users access to areas within TracDat. If you cannot access a section you need, please contact her directly.
- Help for continuing users: Lisa can give you a “refresher” session whenever you need one. If you need help entering results, editing plans, etc., please contact her directly.
3. **Institutional Surveys and Data Resources**

Please remember that reorganization of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) and Institutional Research (IR) last year resulted in the relocation of some IR services. The IE Office now oversees administration of all surveys and coordination of our data resources. If you are looking for data or information for your IE plan or other departmental planning, please check our website first. There is a wealth of information already located on the IE and IR webpages. If you think you might want to administer a survey during the 2014-15 academic year, you MUST contact the IE Office before the end of this semester (go to [https://ierp.unca.edu/](https://ierp.unca.edu/), select first menu item, IERP request form). **Our survey calender is quite full this year and we will be unable to accommodate survey requests that come in after December.**

**QEP Update**

1. **Baseline data on critical thinking dispositions among freshmen and seniors**

Our QEP assessment plan uses the California Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory (CCTDI) to assess understanding of and attitudes about critical thinking. Our baseline data compares over 500 new freshmen, assessed during summer orientation, to 346 seniors graduating last year without completing any Inquiry ARC coursework, on the seven dimensions of the CCTDI. With our thanks to Cathy Whitlock and Lyndi Hewitt, members of the QEP Assessment Team who coordinated our data analysis, the findings from our baseline assessments. (Definitions of the dimensions are reproduced verbatim from the Insight Assessment website, [http://www.insightassessment.com/Products/Products-Summary/Critical-Thinking-Attributes-Tests/California-Critical-Thinking-Disposition-Inventory-CCTDI#sthash.7fiX8aI4.dpbs](http://www.insightassessment.com/Products/Products-Summary/Critical-Thinking-Attributes-Tests/California-Critical-Thinking-Disposition-Inventory-CCTDI#sthash.7fiX8aI4.dpbs))

- **Dimensions which showed significant improvement from freshman to senior year**
  - **Truthseeking:** Truthseeking is the habit of always desiring the best possible understanding of any given situation; it is following reasons and evidence where ever they may lead, even if they lead one to question cherished beliefs.
  - **Analyticity:** Analyticity is the tendency to be alert to what happens next...is the habit of striving to anticipate both the good and the bad potential consequences or outcomes of situations, choices, proposals, and plans.
  - **Systematicity:** Systematicity is the tendency or habit of striving to approach problems in a disciplined, orderly, and systematic way. The habit of being disorganized is the opposite tendency.
  - **Confidence in Reasoning:** Confidence in reasoning is the habitual tendency to trust reflective thinking to solve problems and to make decisions.

- **Dimensions which did not show significant improvement from freshman to senior year**
  - **Open-mindedness:** Open-mindedness is the tendency to allow others to voice views with which one may not agree. Open-minded people act with tolerance toward the opinions of others, knowing that often we all hold beliefs which make sense only from our own perspectives
  - **Inquisitiveness:** Inquisitiveness is intellectual curiosity. It is the tendency to want to know things, even if they are not immediately or obviously useful.
  - **Maturity of Judgment:** Maturity of judgment is the habit of seeing the complexity of issues and yet striving to make timely decisions. A person with maturity of judgment
understands that multiple solutions may be acceptable while yet appreciating the need to reach closure at times even in the absence of complete knowledge.

Remember, these are students new to UNC Asheville and students graduating without Inquiry ARC coursework. Clearly, UNC Asheville has an impact of students’ critical thinking skills independent of our QEP. This year we hope to begin comparing graduating seniors with Inquiry ARC coursework to those in this baseline group. Stay tuned for more information in the coming semesters.

2. Preliminary data from our new course-based assessment plan

A more direct assessment of critical thinking is our pre-/post-course-based assessment, an element of each Inquiry ARC course. Instructors design assessments in which students respond to a course-appropriate critical thinking task at the start and end of each semester. The task might be an analysis of an article, a piece of visual art, a series of analytical problems...anything that requires students to demonstrate their skill on at least three of the five dimensions of critical thinking assessed by the AACU VALUE Rubric for Critical Thinking (read the rubric at https://ierp.unca.edu/value-rubrics). Instructors evaluate their work and the analysis subcommittee of our QEP Assessment Team (Cathy and Lyndi) goes to work. For Spring, 2014, the first semester in which we used this particular strategy, changes on all five dimensions were statistically significant. The table below shows the number of courses in which each dimension was evaluated, the number of students evaluated across those courses and the average change (on a 4 point scale) from the pre-course to post-course assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion from the AACU Critical Thinking Value Rubric</th>
<th>#Courses in which it was evaluated</th>
<th>#Students evaluated</th>
<th>Average change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of Issues</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>+0.4375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>+0.3077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Context and Assumptions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>+0.4086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Position (Perspective and Hypothesis)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>+0.648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and Related Outcomes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>+0.7263</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This edition of Assessment Notes, and all previous editions and supplements, are posted on the Institutional Effectiveness website at https://ierp.unca.edu/newsletter.

New to the next edition of Assessment Notes: Brief interviews with faculty and staff about the ways in which they have used their assessment data for program improvement!