

# Assessing Student Learning

Huston-Tillotson University

January 2008

# Brain Games

Huston-Tillotson University Mission

Students

Learning

Ideal Student Graduate Characteristics



# The Promise of Assessment Institutional Improvement Public Accountability

This session will

- \* demonstrate meaningful assessment of student learning in a small college environment
- \* Be interactive- allowing you to think about your campus and your plan for improvement

# Margaret Miller

# Change

“ The major challenge continues to be that we cannot tell the public anything meaningful about the most important result of a college education- what students learn.”

19<sup>th</sup> Century Challenge: build system of higher education

20<sup>th</sup> Century Challenge: Provide access to higher education

21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge

Ensure the quality of  
Higher Education



# Assessment

A learning system rather than a learning unit

Faculty know students, evaluate individual student learning and assume that in-class assessment and final grade is enough to demonstrate quality.

IT IS NOT!!!!!!! No more than one puzzle piece put in the right place is enough to see the full picture.

# Infusing a Spirit of Inquiry

The key to a strong assessment system in a small college is \_\_\_\_\_.

*Why? Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Confidence: How Winning Streaks and Losing Streaks Begin and End.*

*People who believe they are likely to win are also likely to put in the extra effort at difficult moments to ensure that victory.*

# Faculty lead the dialogue of a true learning organization

1. How well are our students learning?
2. How well are our administrative services supporting student learning?

Must never be afraid of the answers.....

Miller: " In an era of questioning, both our professionalism and our self interest require us to answer the question of how we are doing as honestly and as concretely as we do our best scholarly work."  
Change 2007

# The Purpose of Assessment

1. To demonstrate quality and excellence *and ensure the same level of quality continues.*
2. To identify areas needing attention, support and development *and decide how to improve those areas*
3. To plan changes to improve policies, procedures, services, curriculum, resources, teaching, campus climate *and ultimately improve student learning.*

# Assessment is different than planning

Planning: Checklist completed or not

Assessment : SO  
WHAT?

Add one faculty member with a background in medieval history

How did the addition positively increase student learning?

Increase faculty development money to support incorporating a global perspective into coursework

Did faculty development money increase the global perspectives of students taking the coursework?

# The Six Accountability Questions

1. What will you assess? Learning goals.
2. What tools will you use to gather the information? **Assessment methods.**
3. From whom and how will you gather the information? **Assessment plan.**
4. How will you analyze the results?  
**Data review process.**
5. How will you use results to improve student learning? **Closing the loop.**
6. How will you communicate results to various publics? **Accountability and Branding.**

# Assessment

## Student Learning Outcomes

### Assessment: value

A. Course    B Program

C. Campus culture

### Student Learning:

1. Individual
2. Students one course/  
multiple sections
3. Students in Program/  
Major/ Minor
4. Impact of General  
Education
5. Overall impact

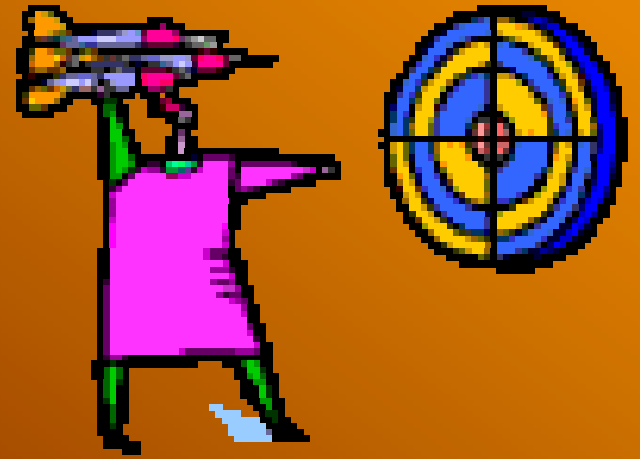
	1	2	3	4	5
	C	C C	P	G E	O
A	1A	2A	3A	4A	5A
B	1B	2B	3B	4B	5B
C	1C	2C	3C	4C	5C

# You cannot assess what you have not defined: Establish Clear Learning Goals

Are your learning goals clear?

Are they shared goals?

Can you talk about them easily? Are  
they distinctive? Are they  
branded?



# What are you assessing?

Knowledge of the subject matter?

Specialized skills and competencies?

Critical/ integrative thinking?

Writing skills?

Verbal communication skills?

Attitudes or values?

Habits/ behaviors?

Career/ Graduate school success?

# Columbia College

General Education Goal: An appreciation of the liberal arts. Students will have a base of knowledge in the liberal arts and an acquaintance with the distinct modes of inquiry of various disciplines.



# How would you evaluate this goal?

Identify at least three ways you could assess this goal at Huston Tillotson University.



# Assessment Methods



Multiple methods

Qualitative and quantitative methods

Standardized and non-standardized  
methods

National and cohort comparative methods

Internal and external assessments

Looking for patterns

Planning for  
dialogue

# General Education Learning Outcome

An appreciation of the liberal arts. Students will have a base of knowledge in the liberal arts and an acquaintance with the distinct modes of inquiry of various disciplines.



# Measured by

**Common LA 101 exam question:** On the basis of what you have learned in this class, argue for or against the value of studying the liberal arts in college. Regardless of your argument, use the modes of inquiry of at least two of the liberal arts to make your points.

**Academic Profile:** first year and senior year

**Sophomore/ Junior focus groups**

**Senior portfolio review**

**Senior survey**



# Goal: Higher order thinking and communication skills

The ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate information and problems

## **Critical Thinking**

- \* **pre-post first year critical thinking test**
- \* **Academic profile 1<sup>st</sup> year senior year**
- \* **NSSE**
- \* **Capstone portfolios**

The ability to communicate effectively in both written and spoken forms

## **Communication Skills**

- \* **Speech 104 video external review**
- \* **NSSE**
- \* **Writing and speaking across curriculum rubric evaluations**
- \* **internship evaluation**
- \* **Leadership semester evaluation**

# Understanding both the commonality and diversity of the human experience

An awareness of human commonalities and differences

The ability to live and work with people who are different from oneself

NSSE	CSEQ	Senior Survey	CIRP/ SCC
Leadership Semester		Residence Life Survey	
Curriculum Inventory		Alumnae First Destination	

# Other CC Learning Outcomes

Increased understanding of women in our culture and the world

Understanding of the nature and application of moral, ethical and religious values

Skills and habits for life-long learning

# What assessment methods work?

Assessment methods do not have to be costly; each one does not have to be done every year; they do have to be effective measures.

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Pre-post group inventories/ tests-  
standardized or non standardized  
skill/ attitude/ behavior/ knowledge

Curriculum maps

Course embedded assessments

Rubrics for goal assessment throughout courses

# Assessment measures

Comparative analysis: benchmark colleges/  
programs

Portfolios/ Capstone course evaluations( internal  
and external evaluators)

Focus groups: Junior Year

Student surveys

Employer surveys: Internships and after  
graduation

Graduate School placement/ scores

Match course and course assessment  
measures to each learning goal.  
Make it meaningful!

Course Assessment: student evaluations;  
faculty evaluations; sequence  
assessment; senior survey; standardized  
tests; common tests; independent faculty  
review of sample work.

Changes at CC: faculty development, texts,  
sequence of topics, use of on-line  
material; assignments, time on specific  
subjects/ skills.

# Course Sequencing

Common writing assignments; linked writing assignments; academic profile; NSSE; rubric assessment of writing and/or knowledge skills; faculty review of sample work.

Changes at CC: course sequencing; courses not appropriate for first year; infuse writing and oral communication throughout; emphasize service learning.

# Assessment at CC led to

Re-design of General Education Program with attention to four year integrated experience.

Reduction in required coursework coupled with commitment to common experiences to enhance student learning.

Design of two signature courses, infusion of leadership into curriculum, implementation of leadership semester and leadership transcript

Creation of Center for Engaged Learning, student mentoring, sophomore learning communities emphasizing social justice

How does your assessment data get into the planning system?

Identify one “learning” you’ve gathered through assessment data.

How did that “learning” get to decision makers?



# How does change occur?

All assessment of student learning comes to the Assessment Committee and the Core Curriculum Committee.

Assessment of student learning that has institutional impact comes to the President's Council and the Department Chairs.

Assessment information is shared with faculty and staff at opening meeting, opening workshops and all faculty and staff meetings

# Provost and Assessment Committee are Information Hubs

Any group reviewing assessment data  
can recommend follow-up to improve  
learning outcomes-

To faculty committee: Instruction  
class and community time

To college committee: Diversity to  
improve learning to live and work  
with others

# Issues raised through assessment data

Student writing and reading scores on the Academic Profile were not showing the expected improvement from 1<sup>st</sup> to senior years.

Referred to Pearce Communication Center to infuse writing across the curriculum.

Referred to Department Chairs to increase the amount of reading in upper level courses.

# NSSE Trends

2000 Indicators: CC distinctive in 1st year but not senior year. By 2005, indicators were positive for both 1<sup>st</sup> and senior years.

Changed timing of 2 signature courses

Sophomore Learning Community

Junior: Leadership infusion in each major/

Leadership semester/ service learning/

Leader2leader

Senior: Capstone course in each major/ Leadership

Transcript/ Leadership semester presentation

# Assessment of Educational Experience

CIRP/ CSS

Academic Profile

Employer Survey

Focus groups

Job placement

NSSE

Senior Survey

External reviews

Portfolio review

Graduate Scores

Leadership portfolio review

Leadership semester review

Capstone project reviews

# The Habits of Highly Effective Assessment Systems

1. Shared, believable learning goals communicated to students
2. Multiple measures
3. Organized feedback system
4. Broad based involvement
5. Open sharing of data
6. Dialogue with spirit of inquiry not culture of fear
7. Changes resulting from assessment

# Accountability: communicating a unique brand of student learning

Clear goals- use mission/ values/ vision language to communicate your unique impact

Structure communication processes that work on your campus- BOT/ Alumnae/ Community leaders/ Parents/ Students

Gather data re market impact of your brand.

# Columbia College Promise Statement

The Columbia College community  
empowers motivated students to

Explore new ideas

Develop their voices

Cultivate within themselves the  
leadership abilities

To build a better world

# How do you measure a promise?

Leadership Semester

Leadership Transcript

Leadership Portfolio

Capstone Presentations

Learning Communities

Conference Presentations

NSSE

Employer Survey



# Continuous improvement

Check to see if action made a difference.

Keep track of trends. Don't expect immediate results.

Benchmark against national and international excellence.

Set priorities and allocate resources to achieve your student learning goals.

# You First

Courage    Commitment    Confidence  
Competence

Columbia College is where young women become strong leaders. Leadership is not the position you hold but the difference you make. It is a fundamental value and a pervasive force throughout campus.

At Columbia College we put **You First** as you develop your courage, commitment, confidence and competence to build a better world for others.

# Creating A Culture of Assessment

Integrated involvement of faculty, staff and students in assessment

Organized system of getting assessment information to faculty and staff

Benchmark and trend analysis to let you know how you are doing

# Ponder Failure

Each action that does not work is another opportunity for assessment and planning.

The more you assess, the more you understand the root causes of your learning dilemma.

The more you know the root causes, the more effectively you can plan for changes.

Assessment becomes real and meaningful in these kinds of dialogues.....

# Celebrate Success

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves.

Small colleges are havens  
for excellent student learning.  
Embrace assessment,  
learn to measure  
student learning,  
communicate it  
and celebrate it!

