

# EVIDENCE

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT  
LATE SPRING 2003



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**Who is Assessing What? Why, And for Whom?**

**Sonia V. Gonsalves**

Some of what you have heard is true; at least I hope so. Several programs are in the process of developing ways to assess their students' learning of concepts, attitudes, skills, techniques, facts, and other cognitive and metacognitive abilities that the program faculty deem important. Each active program is moving at a pace that is comfortable for that group of faculty, and is going about it in a unique way. There are common procedural features; programs start by identifying the important learning outcomes. They then build assessment plans, starting with a few and planning to add more later. Programs from all divisions are involved and in so doing are working to improve the connection between instruction and learning for their majors.

The goal of the assessment initiative is for programs to become proactive about monitoring how and what their majors are learning and to have some confidence about the quality of their graduates' knowledge and abilities. It is important to collect these data before students have graduated so that we can intervene to change anything that is not satisfactory.

Quite a few programs are now at the point where they are connecting the outcomes to specific courses. This step ensures that students have ample opportunities to meet the learning goals. The outcomes are circulated among program members and faculty members identify the courses in which they cover the particular topics or skills.

The most effective plans offer students several opportunities to master important learning outcomes; there should be at least two courses for each objective and at least one should be a required course. I have set out an example from psychology below.

**Outcome:** Interpret graphic, numerical, and textual data

**Performance Criteria**

- Interpret data from frequency distributions, frequency polygons, scatter plots, pie and bar charts
- Evaluate published articles to determine if conclusions are adequately supported by data
- Identify erroneous conclusions based on data published in popular media

Course

	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Final Year
Required		Psyc 2241	Psyc 3242	Seminar
Electives		Psyc 3304	Psyc 3391	

There are various levels of support within divisions. Some faculty and administrators have attended in-depth assessment training and orientation at AAHE assessment workshops. Brian Rogerson and Kristin Hallock-Waters, (NAMS), Evonne Kruger, and Michelle Sabatini, (PROS), Christine Tartaro, (SOBL), Linda Nelson, (GENS) Anne Pomeroy, William Lubenow, and Arnaldo Cordero-Roman, (ARHU) and Mary Ann Trail from the library, can answer your questions about divisional and information literacy efforts; so can Dean Marc Lowenstein and Associate Vice President Bonnie Buzza. Members of the assessment committee are also able to give you more information or to connect you with the resources that you want. In addition, all divisional deans are on-board in support of the assessment efforts of their programs.

**Progress Report on Learning Assessment in Bask Writing**

**Linda Williamson Nelson, Ph.D.**

The Writing Program in The Division of General Studies has been working on learning assessment for the Bask 1101-College Writing Course. We began by fine-tuning a list of outcomes; the results of which are noted below:

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**Outcomes:** Students should be able to perform the following writing tasks:

1. Compose a short essay, at least 500 words, word-processed, in unified support of a stated or implied thesis.
2. Compose essays in response to assigned, college level readings, as well as in response to personal experiences.
3. Use appropriate rhetorical strategies, such as argumentation-persuasion, comparison-contrast, description, narration, cause-effect, depending on the writer's intentions, the audience and the topic.
4. Begin an essay with an introduction that appeals to the audience's interests and/or concerns as it logically anticipates the topic of the essay.
5. End an essay with a conclusion that clearly refers to the major issues while it suggests the larger implications of the subject.
6. Compose the body paragraphs of the essay so that they are joined cohesively. In addition, the paragraphs work toward the clarification of the larger idea (the essay thesis) without diversions or repetition.
7. Write an essay that shows sufficient mastery of the conventions of Standard English grammar and punctuation so that the reader is not distracted repeatedly by errors in spelling, verb usage, end and internal punctuation, etc.
8. To find, evaluate and use source material with appropriate documentation including direct quotation, paraphrase and summary.
9. Choose words for the audience and the purpose, including appropriate diction.
10. Complete the course with a greater sense of his or her ability to write to a range of audiences, using appropriate rhetorical strategies.

We decided upon the *portfolio* as the most appropriate format to measure the outcomes. At present, we have decided that we will develop rubrics to judge the portfolios as representing one of the following three categories:

- An Outstanding Portfolio
- A Satisfactory Portfolio
- An Unsatisfactory or Weak Portfolio

We will collect an early semester, a middle semester and a late semester essay to constitute each portfolio. Those essays will collectively lead to one of the assessments above—outstanding, satisfactory or unsatisfactory (weak.). In making one of the three assessments of the portfolios, we will be looking for the demonstration of a range of skills and abilities including the quality of the thesis, the paragraph organization, the word choice, etc, in short, nearly all aspects of writing that we consider when teaching and assessing students' achievements.

We are hoping to pilot this assessment measure by the Fall 2004 semester.

### **Criminal Justice Assessment Report - March 2003** **Christine Tartaro**

Criminal Justice program members have been working to identify goals for each mandatory course for majors. Faculty who teach each of these core courses have been asked to identify goals, and most faculty have responded with a list of ideas. So far, the program has a list of goals for Research Methods, Police Behavior and Organization, Theories of Criminality, Introduction to Corrections, and Statistics. Besides our Introduction to Criminal Justice course, we have written goals for all but one core course.

There has been little discussion about goals for the Introduction to Criminal Justice course, primarily because this course presents us with an interesting challenge. Of the seven to eight introduction courses offered each semester, the majority are taught by adjuncts. Since adjuncts are not involved in program meetings and other matters that concern the program, we are wondering how to set goals for a course that is mostly taught by those who are not involved in goal-setting.

We are now moving to the next stage of our assessment planning, which is the development of specific objectives for each core course. We already have specific objectives for one core course, and the faculty will work on the remaining courses during the summer break. The program will begin to work on ways to collect data during the fall semester.

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### ARTP Assessment Plan

#### Mark Mallet

The Faculty of the Studies in the Performing Arts Programs (ARTP) have been engaged with questions of assessment, in present form, for the past two semesters. This work is ongoing, and continues deliberatively. Several reasons can be identified for the pace at which we are completing this objective, the most pertinent of which include:

- A desire to create an assessment framework that will serve the evaluative needs
  - o of the Program Faculty immediately
  - o of the Program collectively in the near term
  - o of the Division and College as needed, long term
- A concern that the unique qualities of skills and knowledges comprising our disciplines are
  - o Accurately identified and defined;
  - o Assessable on both an intimate, or “micro,” scale and a comprehensive, or “macro,” scale
    - Micro in the sense of:
      - specific objectives or instructional units; and
      - individual instructional periods, i.e., semesters
    - Macro in the sense of:
      - Overall performance in all ARTP components in which a student is engaged on a semester-long or annual periodicity; and
      - Cumulatively constructing a context for extended student development during period of matriculation in a particular program
  - o Balanced in relation to one another, i.e., that “knowledge” is not privileged at the expense of “skill
  - o Recognized as complementary to one another
- An effort to avoid excessive additional faculty time or labor to accomplish, owing to simple pragmatic concerns:
  - o We are a small faculty serving a diverse set of constituencies in our Programs:
    - Dance — 1 Full-time, 1 Part-time faculty; Music — 2 Full-time, 1 Part-time faculty; Theater — 2 full time faculty;

- Dance — Major, Minor, 3 tracks; Music — Minor only, no tracks; Theater — Major, Minor, Split Program (w/ LITT), 3 tracks

- o All ARTP Programs produce major public performances in support of their curricula;
- o Antiquated and/or scarce resources and facilities consume an immense amount of time beyond the demands of specific production requirements.

With these concerns as guides for our discussions, we have sought to identify the general characteristics of the assessment program. First, we developed a set of criteria that we believed should be expected of our majors and minors upon graduation. Owing to some significant differences between programs within the Studies in the Performing Arts, these criteria had to be stated somewhat broadly; it was agreed that each discipline (Dance, Music and Theater) will develop appropriate sets of competencies. Rather than state our criteria as a set of goals or targets, however, we found it more consistent with the interrogatory aesthetic of assessment to phrase our criteria as questions. Among those upon which we have achieved general agreement are:

- Are our students able
  - o to gather and utilize information effectively?
  - o To identify, find and evaluate new information?
  - o To think critically, reason effectively, and solve problems?
- Do our students
  - o Communicate clearly, articulately and persuasively?
  - o Exhibit their critical skills in their theses?
  - o Draw upon knowledge acquired in their courses as a basis for their argument?
- Do our students
  - o Demonstrate a mastery of the skills central to their discipline?
  - o Work cooperatively, respectfully, and productively with one another?

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- o Behave professionally, manage their time well, meet deadlines, and honor commitments?

This list is work in progress, and will continue to be amended as decisions are made relative to other elements of our developing framework

Among the other elements comprising our present discussions, the most urgent has been identified as establishing an inventory of skills, knowledges, and competencies for which we feel our students, and we ourselves, should be held accountable. We are agreed that such an inventory will probably not be generally pertinent, because of variations in curricula, course content, and pedagogic styles. Each discipline, and possibly each faculty member within each discipline, will, therefore, be responsible for the specifics of her/his specialty. In keeping with our concern for a framework that operates on a number of levels, however, we are very concerned that such inventories are both synchronous and complementary. In addition, we are working to make sure that the inventories are able to “telescope” from a “micro” to a “macro” applicability.

In constructing the inventories of accountabilities, we are relying on some common, generally accepted models from contemporary research, including Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theories. Once the elements of the inventories are identified, we will consider different modalities of assessment. By unanimous consent, we emphasized qualitative measurements over quantitative. Though partly the result of a common preference, we also acknowledged that none of us is sufficiently conversant in quantitative modalities. We recognize the utility of such approaches, and are presently trying to develop models that we can use both formatively and summatively in our overall program’s development. Some key criteria for the methods of assessment under consideration are:

- That the assessment product be expressible Qualitatively, and contributes to an overarching narrative reflecting the students’ matriculation;
- That a variety of assessment methods are provided which allow direct feedback to both the student and the faculty;

- That our students are provided opportunities to participate in the assessment process, both of their own work and that of their peers;
- That methods of assessment which might be described as dialogic be included;
- That the product of the framework be considered primarily as a longitudinal evaluation, i.e., that the students’ career at RSC be assessed comprehensively, and not merely cumulatively.

Bounded by the foregoing criteria, we expect to adapt and/or apply many of the traditional forms of assessment appropriately. Among these are:

- Exams, tests, quizzes;
- Demonstrations of technical proficiency;
- Performance of tasks;
- External response to work performed;
- Critical analysis of, and response to the work of others, including peers.

Of special interest in cataloguing our assessment methods is an insistence that our co-curricular production programs be recognized as a significant aspect of our pedagogy, and that, as such, it be further recognized as presenting a wealth of assessment opportunities. That being said, however, we have generally acknowledged that these opportunities may be unusually difficult to adapt to a framework.

We have designed a spreadsheet that the Theater faculty are using to lay out our assessment framework. I would be happy to share it with other faculty.

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