



***The Sinclair Community College newsletter  
designed to heighten the understanding of the integrated relationship among  
curriculum, general education, and assessment  
Fall 2006***

## Notes from the Office of the Provost

Helping students learn is really why we all come to work every day. In this edition of Building the Collective Responsibility for Student Learning, you will read about the critical distinction between compliance and commitment when you think about assessment; the value of assessing program outcomes in relationship to student learning; and the results of general education outcomes as seen through the eyes of our students. Sue, Teresa, and Lori share three stories which emphasize the integrated relationship among curriculum, assessment, and general education. They remind us that every day at Sinclair we help students turn dreams into achievable goals through accessible, high quality, affordable learning opportunities.

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## Student Learning, Assessment and Accreditation

### The Commitment versus Compliance Conundrum

*By Sue Merrell, Director of Curriculum, Assessment and Continuous Improvement*

At Sinclair, we have crafted our own definition of assessment of student learning. The definition can be found at the college's website: <http://www.sinclair.edu/about/assessment/>

Assessment at Sinclair is the shared process of purposeful, systematic measurement used to document, reflect upon, and improve student learning.

After processing this definition through the rock tumbler of collegial critique several years ago, we refined it and then defined each word to ensure cross-campus understanding.

The Shared—collective responsibility of administration, faculty, staff and students to gather and use information

Process—an ongoing plan, do, study, and act cycle of continuous improvement of

Purposeful—intentional or desired

Systematic—an organized effort impacting all parts of the whole

Measurement—the meaningful collection of information for comparative purposes

Used—employ for a purpose or benefit

To document—to capture, record, or provide evidence for

Reflect upon—to ponder, consider, study, or analyze and

Improve—to make better

Student Learning—acquired knowledge, understanding, attitudes, perspective, mastery, or skills

Our college's regional accreditation organization, Higher Learning Commission North Central Association (NCA), has its own definition of the assessment of student learning. Seventeen years ago the Commission wrote "...that the assessment of student learning is an essential component of every organization's effort to evaluate overall organizational effectiveness." Today the NCA offers a refreshed view of what this may look like in institutions such as Sinclair. NCA suggests that assessment is a strategy of inquiry that is both participative and iterative in nature.

"...the Commission makes clear the centrality of student learning to effective higher education organizations and extends and deepens its commitment to and expectations for assessment. Indeed the Commission asserts that assessment is more than a response to demands for accountability, more than a means for curricular improvement. Effective assessment is best understood as a strategy for understanding, confirming and improving student learning." (The Higher Learning Commission, NCA 2006)

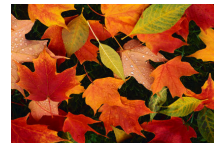
More than 20 years after the first authors boldly wrote about the scholarship of assessment, it seems that experts have thankfully moved away from viewing assessment through a one-size-fits-all lens. More recent descriptions of effective assessment characterize it as a strategy of inquiry into student learning. This movement away from prescriptive elements and toward inquiry-based findings represents a departure from the past.

Assessment is really about our collective, ongoing work to help students learn as opposed to some anecdotal trophy case of accomplishments showcased for an accreditation visit. Real deal stuff, so to speak. Beyond plans and beyond processes to using results to make improvements in how we help students learn.

If assessment is to be viewed as a strategy of inquiry, what questions should we ask?

- How does assessment affirm and improve learning in your program and/or courses?
- What have you recently learned as a result of your assessment endeavors?
- How have you used data to make improvements?

"In other words, organizations assess student learning in meaningful, useful, workable ways to evaluate how they are achieving their commitments and to act on the results in ways that advance student learning and improve educational quality. Effective assessment of student learning is a matter of commitment, not a matter of compliance." (The Higher Learning Commission, NCA 2006)



## Assessment

*By Teresa Prosser, Chairperson of the Assessment Committee*

Education in this country has always been about developing an educated citizenry. Indeed, the very foundation of democracy is based on the concept of an educated population. However, over twenty years ago, there was a growing national dissatisfaction with the results of higher education...and a need to find a way of making educational institutions more accountable for student learning. The result was the use of assessment, born as an educational reform movement.

Today, assessment is still with us. More often seen as a matter of compliance, not commitment, effective assessment of student learning is just the opposite. It is this issue of commitment that drives Sinclair to rise above and to find ways to embed assessment into the natural culture of the college.

Several pieces have been put into place as a way of making this enculturation easier and more integrated into the air we breathe. One way is the review of program outcomes.

Last year, the AQIP project of “Taking Assessment to the Next Level” addressed the review of program outcomes in a structured, predictable way. The Learning Liaisons from each division met with chairs to chart program outcomes into a five year plan, a plan that outlines the collecting of data, the analyzing of those data, and the improvements or actions taken based on the data for each program outcome. What this means for faculty, chairs, and deans is a focused review of program outcomes to determine relevancy; what this means for students is improved learning; and what this means for the college is assurance that we are teaching students what they need to learn to be effective and educated citizens.

So, how do we embed this process into our every day lives? As part of the new program review process, each program submits an annual update. On that annual update, the program outcome(s) under review for that year will be addressed in either the collecting stage, the analyzing stage, or the result stage. Having the annual update structured in this way will help faculty, chairs, and deans “close the loop” on assessing and documenting student learning of program outcomes....and will start to enculturate assessment within the college and will, hopefully, help us to move to a use of effective assessment that is about commitment, not compliance.



## General Education

By Lori E. Zakek, Chairperson of the General Education Committee

The data are coming! A lot of activity and good work is ongoing in the area of General Education here at Sinclair, but perhaps the most exciting news is that we now have *campus-wide quantitative student general education assessment data results*. These results come from the first ever survey of students to assess their perceptions of General Education outcomes.

A subcommittee of the college’s General Education Committee, led by Ned Young and Linda Pastore, developed and implemented a repeatable process for the assessment of General Education Outcomes at students’ entry and exit points. The surveys were disseminated to students in spring, 2006. This successful initiative is the first of a five year continuing cycle that asks for students’ perceptions of their outcome achievements in General Education.

And why is this so noteworthy, you might ask? A debrief of each of the italicized words in the opening paragraph is illustrative of the importance of this endeavor:

*Campus-wide:* Colleges are expected to show results in the area of general education. Historically, our faculty and our departments have taken great care to ensure that students are learning general education concepts and skills, but we, as an institution, have not attempted to demonstrate that our students, as a whole, have improved general education outcomes from the point at which they entered SCC to the point at which they graduated.

*Quantitative:* We have wonderful pockets of anecdotal, qualitative, and quantitative information about our students as learners, but again, we have not had these data specific to each general education outcome, nor have we had them campus-wide in aggregate.

*Student:* While there does exist some student perception data about General Education (e.g., the Community College Survey of Student Engagement –CCSSE—and our IPR office gather important and useful data), heretofore no research

has been collected that is directly linked to our SCC faculty determined General Education Outcomes.

*Data Results:* In this case, the results of the student surveys will be shared in an effort to inform all of us as we attempt to continually improve what we do for our learners. These results can be scrutinized for classes in students' core or transfer module courses, as well as in program courses, so that we as an institution can identify not only what

we do well, but so that we can better hone in on improvement opportunities.

In the next issue of this newsletter we will share the findings from the Information and Computer Literacy survey. Then, in spring of 2007, the second general education outcomes survey (Oral and Written Communication) will be conducted with students in the student success courses (entry point) and in capstone type courses (exit point).

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### ***Additional Resources***

#### Sinclair's Web sites:

CMT: <http://cmt.sinclair.edu/security/login.cfm>

\*click on the Guest Login link at bottom on page

AQIP: <http://www.sinclair.edu/about/aqip/index.cfm>

Assessment: <http://www.sinclair.edu/about/assessment/index.cfm>

General Education: <http://www.sinclair.edu/about/gened/index.cfm>

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**Sinclair offers many institute sessions and workshops throughout the year as a way of providing meaningful opportunities for faculty and others to learn more about curriculum, assessment, and general education. For a listing of those sessions being offered in the Winter Institute, please refer to the following page.**

## Winter Institute 2006

Sessions related to assessment, general education, and curriculum development will be offered at the 2006 Winter Institute. Register online at <http://our.sinclair.edu/sites/dlis/profdev/>.

### Using Data to Assess Program

#### Outcomes

Tuesday, November 28  
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon  
Building 14, Room 14114  
*Sue Merrell*

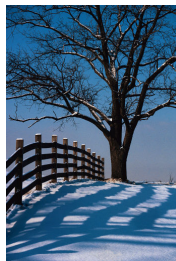
Using easily accessible data, participants will analyze program outcomes information to determine the extent to which students have achieved discipline-specific knowledge and skills. Chairpersons, chair designees, and others with an interest in curriculum, assessment, and continuous improvement will find that this session provides hands-on, operational knowledge of numerous data sources such as the DAWN Information Portal, IPR analyses, CMT reporting, and the Provost's web site for program review.

### Incorporating and Measuring General Education Outcomes in

#### Any Class

Tuesday, November 28  
1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
Building 14, Room 14312W  
*Lori Zakel*

At this workshop, participants will learn how and when to use general education rubrics in their classes. General education outcomes occur throughout all classes, and should be assessed periodically throughout a student's program of study, for purposes of evaluation and improvement. By the end of the workshop, participants will have a completed rubric for a class assignment that can be used immediately.



### Sinclair 101: First Year Experience (FYE) at Sinclair Community College—A Teacher's Toolbox for Facilitating this Course Across Campus

Wednesday, November 29  
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

-or-

Thursday, November, 30  
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon  
Building 14, Room 14108  
*Judy Kronenberger and Sarah Kienitz*

In this workshop, you will be given the master syllabus and samples of teaching syllabi used by experienced faculty members who have taught this course in previous quarters. As a group, we will brainstorm ideas related to student success outcomes and discuss factors that prohibit student success across all divisions. In addition, you will learn how to communicate with Early Alert counselors, give in-class assessments, and learn a variety of activities to use with students in the classroom.

### Using Student Support Services in First Year Experience Courses

Wednesday, November 29  
1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

-or-

Thursday, November, 30  
1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
Building 14, Room 14108  
*Judy Kronenberger and Sarah Kienitz*

This workshop will explain typical ILPs and first year students from a counseling perspective. It will also help teachers of FYE courses to use counseling tools in their classes, including Early Alert, LASSI (Learning and Study Skills Inventory), MBTI, Kuder Career Assessment, and ILP Software. Participants will also meet student services professional staff from multiple areas, which will help faculty make better student referrals.