



Talking about Assessment

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for the

Ohio Writing Center Consortium

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A working definition:

Assessment is “the systematic collection and interpretation of evidence leading to a judgment of value with a view to action” (C. E. Beeby, 1977; qtd in Bell 8).

Two Types of Assessment

- Summative Assessment
- Formative Assessment

Summative Assessment

- Provides a final judgment
- Is often used to determine future action
- Example: the grade awarded at the end of a calculus course may determine a student's admission to an engineering program.

Formative Assessment

- Provides feedback for improvement
- Example: the comments on a student's draft provide guidance for further revision.

When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative assessment; when the customer tastes the soup, that's summative assessment.

Reasons to Carry Out Writing Center Assessment

- To improve services for all stakeholders
- To justify our existence and secure /continue / increase funding

“Writing centers should emphasize summative evaluations. While formative evaluation remains necessary for program improvement, summative evaluation answers accountability questions from people who hold the purse strings.” (Bell 8)

Some Typical Means of Assessment

- Basic usage statistics
- Questionnaires or surveys of students and faculty
- Pre- and post-tests of writing
- Follow-up reports of students' grades
- External evaluations
- Reports of staff publications or professional activities

Follow-up reports of student grades

Neal Lerner

Massachusetts College of Pharmacy

First-Year Students, 1996-99

	Mean SAT Verbal	Mean H.S. GPA	Mean FYC GPA	Mean First-Year GPA
WC Users (307)	487	3.23	3.07	2.73
WC Non- Users (181)	499	3.11	2.78	2.42

Source: Lerner, "Writing Center Assessment"

Two other writing centers using similar approach

Temple University

University of Central Florida

WSU's Assessment Procedures

- Each unit at WSU creates a plan for assessing its effectiveness.
- Each unit files an annual assessment report based on that plan.
- All assessment plans and annual reports are posted to WSU's University Assessment site.

WSU Assessment Plan Template (10 parts)

- List the **OBJECTIVES** of the program.
- Explain how the department or program will know the extent to which **OBJECTIVES** are achieved (alumni or other surveys, employment data, etc.).
- List the **OUTCOMES** of the program.
- List and briefly describe the **MEASURES** that will be used to assess each learning outcome.

Assessment Plan Template (2)

- Describe how learning outcomes are made **MEASURABLE** and **BENCHMARKS** or other determinants of success are set.
- Describe the process by which **FINDINGS** will be derived from the measures.
- Describe the process by which findings are analyzed to determine what **IMPROVEMENTS** should be made to better meet objectives and learning outcomes.

Assessment Plan Template (3)

- Identify a **TIMETABLE** for assessment.
- Briefly explain how the program's assessment plan supports and interacts with **ACCREDITATION** and **LICENSURE** requirements (if applicable).
- Describe how the objectives and learning outcomes of the program are **COMMUNICATED** to students and others.

Assessment Plan
University Writing Center
Wright State University

http://www.wright.edu/assessment/bpra/outcomes/plans/uwc_plan04.doc

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Assessment Report Standard Format

Wright State University
Assessment Report Standard Format
July 1, 2004 - June 30, 2005

PROGRAM(S) ASSESSED _____

ASSESSMENT COORDINATOR _____

YEAR _____ **of a** _____ **YEAR CYCLE**

1. ASSESSMENT MEASURES EMPLOYED

Briefly describe the assessment measures employed during the year.

- What was done?
- Who participated in the process?
- What challenges (if any) were encountered?

2. ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

List the objectives and outcomes assessed during the year, and briefly describe the findings for each.

3. PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

List planned or actual changes (if any) to curriculum, teaching methods, facilities, or services that are in response to the assessment findings.

4. ASSESSMENT PLAN COMPLIANCE

Explain deviations from the plan (if any).

5. NEW ASSESSMENT DEVELOPMENTS

Describe developments (if any) regarding assessment measures, communication, faculty or staff involvement, benchmarking, or other assessment variables.

Assessment Report

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Some Sample Findings

FINDINGS (2003-04):

Improved Student Writing

In the evaluation form given to regular weekly clients in F03, 85% agreed that the Writing Center helped them improve their writing skills (60% “Strongly” agreed). Responses were similar in W04 (88% agreed; 64% “Strongly” agreed) and S04 (88% agreed; 71% “Strongly” agreed).

Responses to that question on the “mini-evaluation” given to walk-in clients were somewhat higher. For the winter and spring quarters, 98.5% percent of the respondents agreed their session helped them improve their writing (84% “Strongly” agreed). In the 135 total responses for both quarters, only one student “Strongly disagreed” that their session helped. In these two quarters, 64% of the respondents indicated that they “Strongly agreed” that they had “learned more about their strengths and weaknesses as a writer” during their visit. On the basis of these responses, then, it seems clear that students perceive the Writing Center as successful in reaching these goals.

Improved Student Confidence about Writing (2003-04)

On the evaluations filled out by regular clients, a statement about increased confidence yielded 77% to 81% agreement (49% to 53% “Strongly” so.) On the “mini” evaluations, 90% agreed that their confidence increased, 66% “Strongly” so. The instructor questionnaire and consultants’ winter project also indicated increased student confidence in their writing.

Feedback from Writing Consultants

(selected questions)

	<u>strongly agree</u>		<u>agree</u>		<u>disagree</u>
I had enough training to work with development students.	11	9	0	0	0
I had enough training to work with ESL students.	3	8	8	1	0
My knowledge of the writing process increased.	17	3	0	0	0
My knowledge of grammar and editing increased.	16	4	0	0	0
My interpersonal skills improved.	16	4	0	0	0
I used skills learned in the Writing Center in my classes.	14	2	3	1	0

See the complete 2003-04 report as posted on
the Wright State University Assessment website:

http://www.wright.edu/assessment/bpra/outcomes/reports/2003-2004/writcent_rpt04.doc

Evaluation Forms

Some Samples

Mini-Evaluation Form

Given to Walk-In Clients

(five questions and a space for comments)

	Definitely	Probably	Not Sure	Probably Not	Definitely Not
1. This Writing Center visit helped me improve my writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. This visit helped me understand my assignment better.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Because of this visit, I feel more confident about my writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. During this visit, I learned more about my strengths and weaknesses as a writer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I plan to use the Writing Center's services again.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

End-of-Term Evaluation Form

Given to Clients Enrolled in DEV
Classes and Required to Attend
Weekly Sessions

The evaluation consists of seven open-ended questions ...

EVALUATION OF YOUR DEV WRITING CENTER CONSULTATION

*The information on this form is confidential and will be used for evaluating consultants. When you finish this form, please put it in the box marked “**Completed Student Evaluations.**”*

Consultant’s Name: _____ **Course Name/Section #** _____

Quarter: (Please circle one) Fall Winter Spring

1. How were you treated by the staff?
2. What difference has coming to the University Writing Center made in your college success?
3. What was your consultant’s strongest point? Give examples.
4. Name one specific thing you learned from this consultant.
5. In what way(s) could your consultant improve?
6. Describe your most productive session this quarter. What happened and why did it go so well?
7. What advice would you give to a student who comes to the Writing Center next quarter?

... and ten Likert-scale
questions.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

**Strongly
Disagree**

1. The consultant presented material in an organized and understandable way.

2. The consultant was professional and on time.

3. The consultant was polite and helpful.

4. The consultant spent time listening to me instead of doing most of the talking.

5. The Writing Center helped me improve my writing.

6. Because of my visits to the Writing Center, I feel more confident about my writing.

7. I learned more about my strengths and weaknesses as a writer from my sessions.

8. My consultant helped me adjust to formal academic writing style.

9. I feel more comfortable at Wright State because of my visits to the University Writing Center.

10. I am satisfied with the help the University Writing Center provided me.

Consultant Evaluation of Clients with Standing Appointments

Given to Writing Consultants at
End of Each Quarter

An opening section to gather information

Client's Course: _____

Client's Instructor: _____

Quarter and Year _____

1. What was this client's greatest need?
2. What progress did this client make?

Followed by four Likert-scale questions

1. The client's writing improved over the course of the quarter.
2. The writer's confidence increased over the course of the quarter.
3. The writer was more at ease in the center over the course of the quarter.
4. I had a good working knowledge of assignment for this class.

Consultant Feedback Form

Given to Tutors at End of Fall
Quarter

This self-evaluation consists of thirteen Likert-scale questions ...

1. The fall orientation session provided adequate training for me to begin tutoring.
2. I felt comfortable going to the administrative staff to ask for information.
3. Information presented in weekly staff meetings helped me work with clients.
4. Information presented in weekly staff meetings helped me understand Writing Center policies.
5. I felt comfortable bringing problems to the attention of the administrative staff.
6. I had enough training to work with developmental students.
7. I had enough training to work with ESL students.
8. I felt I was able to help most of my clients become stronger writers.
9. The Writing Center's WebCT site was a useful resource.
10. My own knowledge of the writing process increased.
11. My knowledge of grammar and editing increased.
12. I used skills learned in the Writing Center in my classes.
13. My interpersonal skills improved as a result of working in the Writing Center.

... and six open-ended
questions.

How many years have you worked in the Writing Center? _____

1. What would make the fall orientation session more helpful in preparing you to begin tutoring?
2. What would make weekly staff meetings more valuable to you?
3. What is your greatest strength as a tutor? Be specific and give an example. How might we have let you use that strength to help more people in the Writing Center?
4. What is your greatest weakness as a tutor? Be specific and give an example. What might we have done to help you address this weakness?
5. In what kinds of professional development activities would you be interested in participating (e.g., paper topics for conferences, staff meeting facilitation topics, campus outreach ideas, etc.)?
6. What would you like to tell us that we didn't ask you here?

Recommended Reading

- Bell, James H. "When Hard Questions Are Asked: Evaluating Writing Centers." Writing Center Journal 21.1 (2000): 7-28.
- Johanek, Cindy. Composing Research: A Contextualist Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition. Logan: Utah State UP, 2000.
- Lerner, Neal. "Counting Beans and Making Beans Count." Writing Lab Newsletter 22.1 (1997): 8-9.
- . "Counting Beans Wisely." Writing Lab Newsletter 26.1 (2001): 1-4.
- . "Writing Center Assessment: Searching for the 'Proof' of Our Effectiveness." The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship. Ed. Michael A. Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead. Logan: Utah State UP, 2003. 58-73.
- Newman, Stephen. "Demonstrating Effectiveness." Writing Lab Newsletter 23.8 (1999): 8-9.