

Progressive Measures

Mission Statement:

“The University Assessment Office is responsible for conducting a variety of assessment activities related to student learning outcomes using qualitative and quantitative research techniques, providing support services to other units engaged in such assessment, and sharing best practices for and results of assessment activities.”

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From the Director

The race to the finish line has begun. University Assessment has some exciting things planned for the last few weeks of the semester, and as many hit a “summer stride” the UAO experiences some of its greatest workload during the summer.

Many have graciously volunteered an artifact in this year’s inaugural implementation of the General Education - Institutional Artifacts Portfolio [IAP] process. During the fall semester 47 faculty from 11 departments/schools participated and this spring 63 faculty from 18 departments/schools offered artifacts for review. The two shared learning outcomes reviewed during 2008-09 included Public Opportunity [fall semester] and Critical Inquiry & Problem Solving [spring semester]. In May reviewers will participate in a 4-day workshop to assess the artifacts based upon the rubrics previously established. Once the review is completed a report of the results will be submitted to the Council for General Education who will evaluate the data and provide a public response in this issue of *Progressive Measures* next year! A big thanks to everyone for your support and/or participation in this exciting process for our campus.

April is *Alumni Survey* month for University Assessment. This year graduates from 2007 and 2003 will be targeted to complete the annual survey. We thank ISU Foundations for providing a Nintendo Wii as this year’s incentive. A marketing campaign - *Reggie wants to know...* was developed by University Marketing & Communications and will hopefully entice our new graduates to complete the survey which provides exceptionally valuable data for departments/schools as well as the institution.

This summer the UAO will also be conducting the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement [BCSSE] at Preview Sessions. BCSSE is a sister-survey to the National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE]. Together the data provide valuable information regarding how our students were engaged before arriving at ISU, and how their engagement practices change throughout their first year.

So for the UAO...April is really one of many starting lines versus finishing lines, but it truly is the entire race we enjoy! Happy Assessing!



Assistant Provost
Director - University Assessment Office



FOCUS

FACULTY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATING CIVIC
& COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AMONG STUDENTS

FOCUS Modules: Online this Spring!

Ramya Chandrashekar, Graduate Assistant, University Assessment Office

The FOCUS module series is a component of the FOCUS Initiative, specifically developed to support Illinois State University faculty with their efforts to incorporate civic and community engagement into the curriculum. In previous years, the modules have focused on various topics related to civic and community engagement, political engagement, and innovative partnerships for student learning. These modules have been researched and put to good use by faculty at ISU.

Last year, the FOCUS Fellows — Dr. Elizabeth Carlson, Assistant Professor at the Mennonite College of Nursing, Dr. Karen Pfost, Assistant professor at the Department of Psychology, and Dr. Joseph Zompetti, Associate Professor at the School of Communication, successfully created the content for two new modules — [Encouraging Civic Dialogue](#) and [Policy-making in the Discipline](#). These modules are currently accessible online!

A Preview of the New Modules

Encouraging Civic Dialogue:

This module is intended to provide practical methods of engaging students in the process of understanding and discussing significant social problems and issues. As such, the philosophy of “open inquiry” and the process of “civic dialogue” are important. Open inquiry espouses the free exchange of ideas and thought during the investigation of a social issue. Students are encouraged to learn about the open-mindedness of exploring and discovering all of the relevant facts surrounding a particular social issue. Upon beginning the process of understanding a social issue, students should also engage in a discussion – a civic dialogue – with others concerning the same issue.

Policy-making in the Discipline:

Many content areas addressed in higher education settings have important implications for social, public, and private policy. Relating content to existing public policy helps students grasp the significance of topics and helps them understand political processes. It prepares them for the kind of active citizenship which the FOCUS program encourages and facilitates. Exploring possibilities for future policy innovation can result in even more active, creative roles for students as citizens, pointing them in the direction of civic engagement possibilities they might not otherwise consider.

This module is designed to encourage educators to introduce students to policy and policy making to prepare students to focus on policy implications of content covered in non-policy courses. It also suggests possible roles for students which involve them in policy processes. It is designed to bridge academic content mastery with civic engagement.



Oh, the Places ISU Alumni Go: A Premier on ISU Graduates' Mobility Throughout Illinois

Matthew Fuller, Assistant Director, University Assessment Office

Each year the Planning and Institutional Research Office prepares an overview of the Illinois counties from which ISU students come. Thanks to this analysis the ISU community knows that 23% of our total student body (or 27% of our "in-state" student body) called Cook County home prior to coming to ISU and that Cook County is by far the most prevalent provider of incoming students. We know that Cook County and Collar Counties (DuPage, Kane, Lake, and Will) account for 48% of our entire enrollment (57% of our in-state student body). We also know that students heralding from McLean County make up 6% of our entire student body (7% of our in-state population) while students from McLean and surrounding counties (Champaign, DeWitt, Ford, Livingston, Logan, Macon, Mason, Menard, Peoria, Piatt, Sangamon, Tazewell, Woodford) make up 18% of our total student body and 21% of our in-state students. Finally, we also know that 85% of our total student body called Illinois home prior to coming to ISU.

However, what do we know about where students go after graduating from ISU? The University Assessment Office has engaged in a study to learn more about student mobility following graduation using data from the 2008 Alumni Survey. Students are asked to provide the zip code of the location where they are employed. The UAO received a total of 1,372 employer zip codes from alumni completing the 2008 Alumni Survey. Undergraduate and graduate alumni from the classes of 2007 and 2003 were surveyed and an overall response rate of 19% was obtained. These results are representative of the larger population of all 2007 and 2003 ISU alumni and provide initial clues about their post-ISU mobility.

While 15% of ISU's incoming students are from out of state, 29% of alumni responding offered zip codes which were outside of Illinois. Of those students who left Illinois after graduating from ISU, 31% are employed in Missouri, 26% in Iowa, and 22% in Indiana. No other state had more than 7% of ISU's graduates. It is noted that 31% of undergraduate alumni and 24% of graduate alumni continue their education within five years of graduating from ISU. Of those alumni that continue their education following ISU, 87% do so within Illinois.

When focusing on Illinois counties, two major population areas are noted for alumni: McLean County and Cook County. The largest concentration of ISU alumni (n=274, 24%) employed in one county occurs in McLean County. When reviewing McLean and the surrounding counties, exactly 500 graduates (44%) reported being employed in McLean and surrounding counties.

In comparison, 20% of alumni are employed in Cook County. Cook and the Collar Counties contain 39% of ISU's employed alumni. While 8% of alumni who are employed within the city-limits of Chicago, Schaumburg, Naperville, Carol Stream, and Joliet all account for an equally notable percentage of alumni employment. Four percent of ISU alumni are employed within the Chicago Loop.

Figure 1 (on page 4) illustrates the largest employment centers for ISU alumni. Using the Illinois Department of Transportation regions as guidelines, alumni employment locations were categorized into six areas: Central Illinois, Cook and Collar Counties, McLean and Surrounding Counties, Northern Illinois, Southern Illinois, and Western Illinois.

Certainly several limitations exist. Varying reclassifications of the "Northern Illinois" and "Cook and Collar County" categories may be more geographically or socially appropriate and shift the focus of discussion. The fact that the UAO does not have access to reliable zip codes for living arrangements is also a limitation. An alum may live in Illinois, but be employed in St. Louis, MO or Davenport, IA. Such cases may mask the true effects of alumni-reported employment zip codes. Finally, the sense of physical location relative to ISU may have persuaded Central Illinois alumni to respond more frequently than alumni in other regions of the state. The present analysis does offer introductory data regarding where ISU alumni are employed following graduation and calls for additional exploration into their post-graduation mobility.

Nearly twice as many students leave Illinois following their ISU graduation as compared to students who enter the state to pursue an ISU degree. Thus, data about post-ISU education is all the more important. It would appear that enrollment in an Illinois institution of higher education after graduating from ISU occurs (87%) at relatively the same rate (85%) as those students coming into ISU. As such the rate at which students graduating from ISU leave the state to continue education in another state does not explain the increased "brain drain," noted in ISU Alumni data. Additional factors (perhaps economic, political, social, or geographic) may account for the increase of alumni leaving Illinois following graduation from ISU.

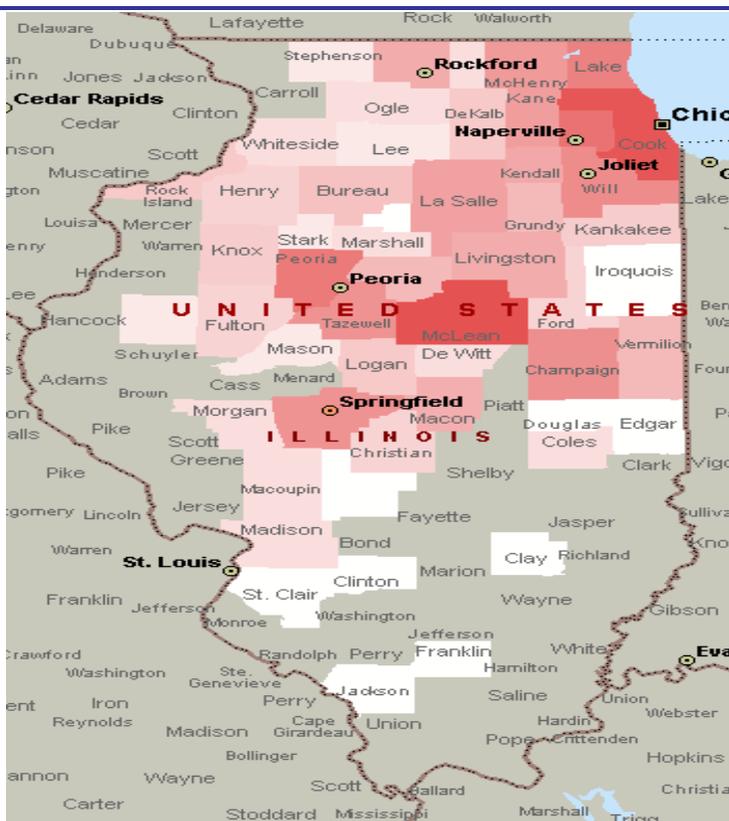
Additionally, the fact that McLean County residents account for only 6% of the incoming student body, but 20% of the alumni employment locations is intriguing. Cook and the Collar Counties provide nearly half of the student body, but receive only 39% of ISU alumni while

McLean and the surrounding counties retain 44% of ISU alumni. Additional analyses as to why students stay in Central Illinois are needed. Economic or social incentives to remain in Central Illinois or barriers to settling in other regions of the state upon graduation may be present.

To share your reactions or thoughts on these findings, please contact Mr. Matt Fuller (mbfulle@ilstu.edu, 309.438.2135).

Figure 1: ISU Alumni Employment Centers

Region	Total	Percent
Central Illinois	19	1.7
Cook and Collar Counties	454	40.1
McLean and Surrounding Counties	500	44.2
Northern Illinois (Not Collar Counties)	119	10.5
Southern Illinois	19	1.7
Western Illinois	20	1.8
Grand Total	1,131	100



Learning Communities and Their Role in University Assessment

Peter Smudde, Assistant Professor, School of Communication

Learning communities are not new and trendy, and there is every indication they will be increasingly employed at all levels, from singular courses to entire institutions (Cross, 1998; Smith, Eby, Jeffers, Kjellman, Koestler, Olson, Smilkstein, & Spear, 2006; Wohlstetter & Griffin, 1998). Technically speaking, learning communities have been around for many decades (Tinto, 2005). They date back to experimental programs in the 1920s and culminate in contemporary incarnations in the late 1980s to the present (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). With all the recent study of learning communities’ effectiveness on many dimensions, revelations about precisely how students benefit from learning communities have become clearer.

Scholar-educators initially anticipated certain benefits from learning communities along generally and primarily academic/intellectual lines, with an understanding that social dimensions would be affected too. What research tells us, however, is that students participating in learning communities

are significantly more likely to perceive a smooth academic and social transition to college, report higher critical thinking and intellectual abilities, have a stronger sense of civic engagement and empowerment, drink alcohol to less extremes, report fewer consequences of alcohol use by

themselves or their peers, and report higher college grade point averages than Comparison sample students. (Inkelas, Brower, Crawford, Hummel, Pope & Zeller, 2004, p. III-2)

These dimensions are largely (though not exclusively) socially based and show that learning communities work well on peer-interaction levels. In terms of “psychosocial and cognitive indicators” (Inkelas et al, 2004, p. V-1), students participating in learning communities show

no significant differences between [living/learning] and Comparison groups in their growth in cognitive complexity, liberal learning, personal philosophy, appreciation for racial/ethnic diversity, and academic and interpersonal self-confidence. These results tend to be consistent across all benchmarking groups, except that [living/learning] students at Research Extensive...institutions are more likely to report growth in cognitive complexity, personal philosophy, and academic and interpersonal self-confidence. (Inkelas et al, 2004, p. III-3)

A separate, methodologically different study by Zhao and Kuh (2004) showed similar results, but noted higher grades

among seniors who had a learning community experience at some time during college than those who did not (p. 124). Pastors (2006) reported that the findings of the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement found positive correlations between students' participation in learning communities and their perceived gains in personal and social development, competence and overall satisfaction with the collegiate experience, but any correlation between students' participation and their academic achievement and individual campuses is unclear, especially for those with emerging or new programs (p. 1). In any case, there is a kind of split in socio-cultural and intellectual benefits of learning communities to students. The question, then, is how much can learning communities contribute to the kind of learning outcomes that are meaningful at the institutional level?

Most current learning communities focus on freshman students who are new to the higher-education experience in all its respects, with certain pros and cons that go along with it (Cross, 1998; Jaffee, 2004; Jones, Laufgraben & Morris 2006). Scholar-educators often focus on the many features and benefits of learning communities, and they often explain specific insights and outcomes about many microlevel dynamics of learning communities. Without a doubt, learning communities offer advantages to those on either side of the lectern (Cross, 1998; Schmoker, 2004). Most important, learning communities sow and cultivate among students seeds of good thinking, learning, and acting in our world today and tomorrow.

In this paper I focus on the macrolevel of learning communities' impact. That is, I believe that learning communities offer exceptional opportunities for institutions to enact their strategic plans, and the assessment of learning communities is vital to fulfilling institutions' vision, mission and goals. Indeed, meta-research by Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, and Lindblad (2001) showed "no research studies have focused exclusively on institutional matters or leadership issues related to the developing, institutionalizing, and sustaining of learning community initiatives" (p. iv). My perspective comes on the heels of my institution having gone through and securing full accreditation for the next 10 years from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. That is not to say that UWW created and nurtured learning communities precisely to secure accreditation. That would be wrong, shallow and short-sighted. Learning communities for UWW is an important part of the institution's plan for success, which encompasses students, faculty, staff, and the community.

In this position paper I focus on three macrolevel, strategic aspects of learning communities and their role in university assessment. First, I briefly survey assessment literature about learning communities. Second, I address the strategic planning process for higher-education institutions, grounded in one university's experience. And third, I

discuss institutional assessment matters that fit strategic planning and the accreditation process. Taken together, these three aspects, although not exhaustive to the grand scheme of assessments and institutional planning, form a basic framework from which to integrate learning communities beyond the department or program levels to higher-education institutions themselves.

Assessment Approaches

Many conference papers and journal articles address aspects of assessment. That's important because we educators must know how to determine how well students are learning what we plan for them to learn. This knowledge about student learning is gained through various methods, such as direct/indirect, authentic, and embedded assessment techniques in courses and programs (Allen, 2004; Huba & Freed, 2000; Maki, 2004; McKeachie, 2002; Walvoord, 2004). Based on that knowledge, if things could be better, we educators can make adjustments; and if things work well, we know where we can capitalize on success.

There is ample research about assessment in learning communities that tackle course-, curriculum- and program-level issues (e.g., Davies, Ramsay, Lindfield & Couperthwaite, 2005; LaVine & Mitchell, 2006; Malnarich & Lardner, 2003; McPhail, McKusic & Starr, 2006). Other specific research covers assessment for online/distance learning (e.g., Chapman, Ramondt & Smiley, 2004; Derry & DuRussel, 1999; DiRamio & Wolverton, 2006; Lee, Carter-Wells, Blaeser, Ivers & Street, 2006) and faculty participation (e.g., Brown, Bucklow & Clark, 2002; Hubball, Clarke, & Beach, 2004; Stevenson, Duran, Barrett, & Colarulli, 2005). Articles by Browne and Minnick (2005) and Jaffee (2004) pointed to some of the potentially divisive issues to learning communities that can undermine their effectiveness for students and educators.

I offer this brief survey of some assessment literature so you can obtain the kinds of knowledge and approaches that you believe will suit your needs. My interest in the balance of this paper, however, is much less about the "nuts and bolts" of assessment and more about linking learning communities to the bigger picture of institutional assessment. So my next step is how learning communities and their assessment play a role in strategic planning.

Institutional Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a necessary and detailed process for any organization. It's interesting that the starting point to strategic planning is really the end point—think about the vision of what an organization wants to be, then figure out how to get there. The strategic planning process works "top-down," not "bottom-up." That is, there must be a big picture vision, and the route the organization must take to get there is a strategic plan. This plan helps the organization's parts (i.e., all its operational units) to figure out what their roles are and what actions they'll take to get to achieve certain objectives that move the institution closer to that vision.

Figure 1: Example university planning process model (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, 2006).

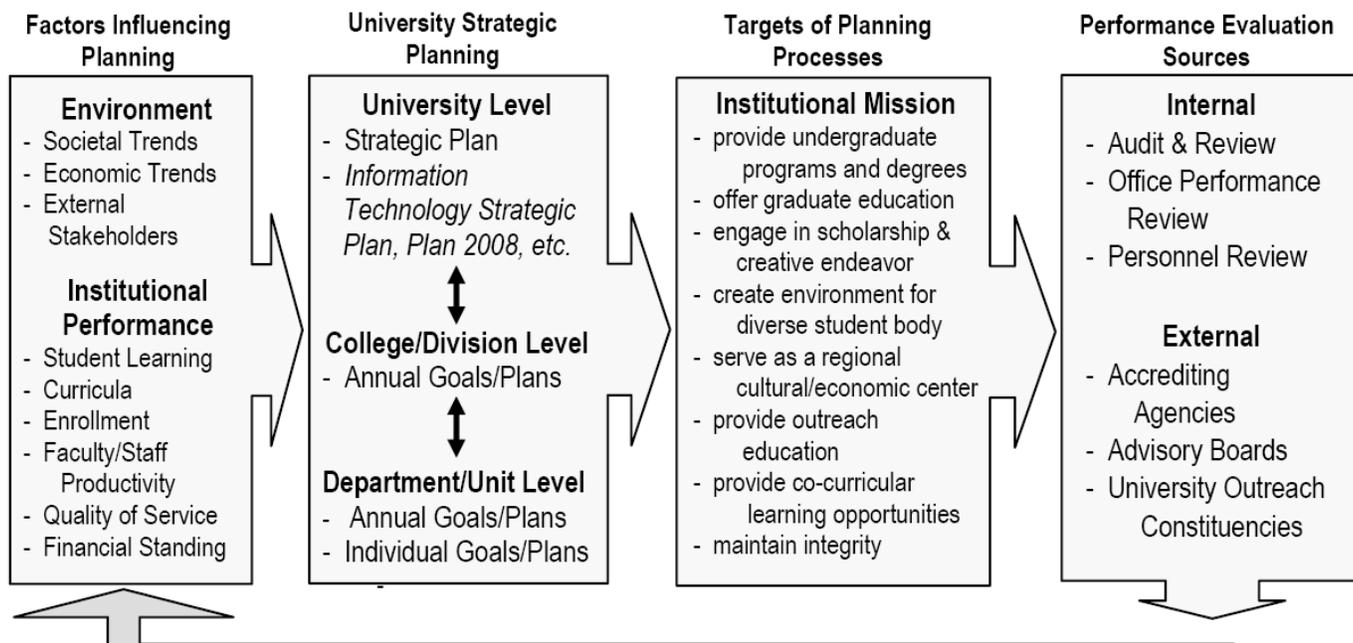
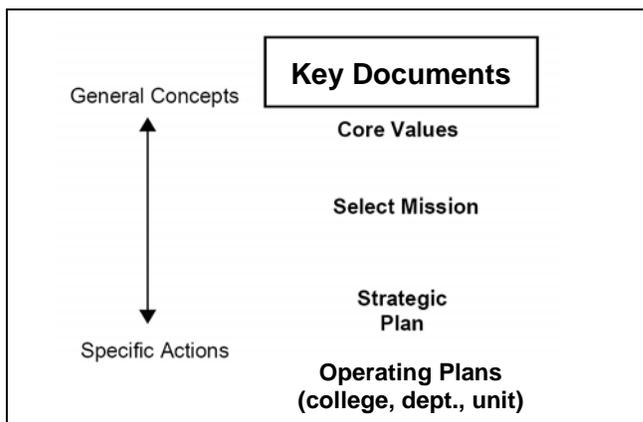


Figure 2: Key documents for effective strategic planning (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, 2006).



In academe, departments, colleges and operations do not create the strategic plan to which the institution must conform. It's the other way around. Note that detailed background information from the operational units would be consulted when creating an effective forward-looking plan for the whole organization. Representatives from those units could be included, as they were at my institution. Figure 1 shows the interaction among the various areas of higher education that are important to one midwestern university and, very possibly, similar institutions' planning processes.

The strategic plan begins at the top, with the top leader articulating a vision for the organization and working with organizational leaders to flesh-out the way to realize that vision in accordance with the organization's mission and values. A strategic plan is the marching orders, the hymnal, the guidebook, the "whatever you want to call it" for the organization — it is the thing to which an organization's

parts (from the president/chancellor to instructors and staff) conform their work. Figure 2 shows how the various strategic elements fit together at one institution. The process begins with documents about the values that are at the heart of the institution, includes the university's mission in society and for its constituents, culminates in the strategic plan that is meant to give purpose and direction to living up to the mission and enacting values, and finally sees the development of operating plans that support the institution's overall strategic plan.

Note how the specificity of strategic matters increases from concepts to action as we move from values to the plan and beyond. That's by design because all internal stakeholders will need to see where they and their operational units fit in the grand scheme of things, resulting in buy-in about the strategic direction for the institution. It is not that the strategic plan spells out specifically what each operating unit and person working therein must do. The focus for the strategic plan, again, is to give some specific direction to what the institution

Figure 3: Hierarchy of basic components of strategic plans.

must achieve and be, and it is up to the operational units and every person in the organization to participate in the process by defining what they can do to make the plan and vision a reality.

Within the context of an institution of higher education, where do learning communities fit strategically? Ideally they fit anywhere in academia where learning is focused. It has been argued that higher education has changed its “business model” from that of providing instruction to that of being producers of learning—from “teaching factories” to “learning communities” (Angelo, 1999, p. 4). The trick is to formally show in an institution’s plans and operations exactly where learning communities fit in the organizational structure and how they are enacted to facilitate specific outcomes.

Any higher-education institution will have something in its values and mission that specifically addresses learning in some way. It is important to understand at this point what learning communities are within a strategic framework. A strategic plan consists basically of six parts, and Figure 3 shows a hierarchy of how these features of strategic planning build one upon the other (and back again, as shown by the dotted arrows).

Vision is a simple statement about an organization’s ultimate state of being and resources required as effectively as possible over time to get there. A vision statement is articulated by top management, usually the recognized leader. *Mission* is a statement about what business the organization is in, and it accurately reflects what an organization does to get its product/service to market. *Objectives* are the high-level statements about what management/administration wants the organization to achieve over a defined period of time (e.g., year or more), and *goals* are specific measurable aspects that affirm that the objectives have been achieved. *Strategies* define the steps toward achieving objectives, and *tactics* are the specific efforts that must be done to enact a particular strategy. Objectives, goals, strategies and tactics must fall within the scope of the organization’s mission and get the company closer to realizing its vision. Other elements can be included in a strategic plan, like a situation analysis, evaluation scheme, budget, and so on, but they are not necessary for this paper.

The point here is that learning communities are not high-level objectives or measurable goals. Learning communities are specific *tactical* ways to help an institution to complete a specific strategy that meets certain objectives and goals, which fulfill the institution’s mission, thereby moving the institution closer to realizing its vision. With a clear definition of what learning communities are and what they can contribute strategically toward the institution’s success, precise statements about learning communities’ stake (i.e., objectives and goals for them) can be articulated at a tactical level for a strategic plan. Note that the tactical role learning communities play for the institution are strategic objectives for operating units’ plans.

For example, at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (UWW), learning communities function tactically, and therefore strategically, as a true collaboration among instructional and noninstructional units. Several learning communities were created that combined the resources that ranged from departmental majors and general education to residential life, new student programs, and university’s center for faculty professional development. Other institutions’ programs have been structured similarly (Dodge & Kendall, 2004; Tinto, 2005). With this sensibility about learning community’s role in the strategic plan of an institution, it is time to turn to the matter of how this tactic can be measured as an integral part of success.

Institutional Assessment Matters

An old saying in business is, “You can’t manage what you don’t measure.” The same is true in academia, and assessment measures at all levels are essential. There is much research and commentary about why assessment is so important (e.g., Bollag, 2006; Byrne, 2001; Love, Russo & Tinto, 2001; Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, 1995; Wilkie, 2001). A general approach to assessment by Allen (2004, p. 10), for example, describes a six-step process:

1. Develop learning objectives.
2. Check for alignment between the curriculum and the objectives.
3. Develop an assessment plan.
4. Collect assessment data.
5. Use results to improve the program.

6. Routinely examine the assessment process and correct, as needed.

Specific methodological issues of each step and all steps together notwithstanding (which are covered amply in the literature) refer to the point I want to make about institutional assessment in that learning communities, as a strategic component, are important to ensuring an institution's success and follow these same steps. By their very name, *learning communities* are emblematic of the reason why colleges and universities exist—to facilitate learning. They are at least a useful way to help cohorts of students to adjust to their higher-education experience and develop better habits of living and learning.

More specifically, the institutional assessment of learning communities must align with the strategic plan. This idea is an institutional view of step two in Allen's six-step assessment process. That is, as we look upon what a learning community's own objectives and goals are, how well do they "roll up" to the overall objectives and goals for the institution? Key institutional objectives and goals target matters of retention, expansion, and academic performance when compared to the general student population. Other objectives and goals may target student development/maturation and faculty-student ratios. In the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's (2006) self-study document provided to the Higher Learning Commission, the university reported the following about learning communities:

Feedback and performance data from students involved in the community indicated the program was a success. While no courses in common were planned for the spring term 2005, encouragement from students involved and continued cooperation from the colleges and the Registrar allowed Live & Learn to continue as a cohort for three additional courses. Enrollment data in fall 2005 for students involved in this pilot *Live and Learn* group suggested that more than 90% of the students returned to enroll in their sophomore year. This rate is approximately 20% higher than the freshman-to-sophomore rate as a whole. Learning community choices expanded to three with approximately 90 students in fall 2005, and plans are to establish nine communities with more than 200 participants in fall 2006. (p. 97-98)

What is gratifying in the literature about scholars who have described their institutions' learning community programs is that Whitewater's and other institutions' results are similar. Individual cases like those from Cicerone (2005),

Hegler (2004), Knight, Hakel, and Gromko (2006), MacGregor (2003), MacKinnon (2006), Pastors (2006), Pastors and Leaman (2006), Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, and Lindblad (2001, pp. 17-26), Wilkie (2001), and Zhao and Kuh (2004) are valuable because of their in-depth and candid analyses about how learning communities worked within both the program level and, especially, the institutional level.

What is unsettling to most faculty is the idea of having to engage in such an assessment effort at the operational level that rolls up to the institutional level (McDaniel, 2006). The connections between what one does in her/his course and one's department are more clear than the connections between one's course and the entire institution. The links, however, are there and assessment done at operational levels up to institutional levels must be aligned and synchronized. Again, we can't manage what we don't measure, and if we do not measure student learning effectively, we can not manage what we do as educators and administrators. The institution's strategic plan is the key, and all operating units have their own ways to fit into that plan that they get to articulate and enact. That is, the six steps of assessment as they apply to learning communities, especially steps one and two, must be designed to complement the institution's strategic plan and performance measures. Making assessment more a part of the daily business of colleges and universities makes it easier to do. The role of learning communities, as assessed at the operational level and rolled up to the institutional level, is an important one leading to institutional success.

Conclusion

Learning communities bring together diverse students into the liberating world of learning in institutions of higher education. Combinations of courses, programs, and facilities help students to grow as individuals and groups. With the help of educator-scholars who lead their courses and learning community programs, students make strides in their own personal and social development. In the process they also develop some skills for learning and living, thinking and doing that should add value to themselves and society. How we in academe measure the successfulness of learning communities at the micro- and macrolevels is key to determining how effective these programs are. Making sure that learning communities are effectively assessed at all levels—and especially rolling up to the institutional level—is vital to making clear the strategic contributions these opportunities have on students, faculty, and the community.

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Reaching Out: First-Year Student-Faculty Interactions at Illinois State

Jon Laird, Coordinator, University Assessment Office

One of the more influential factors in students' success during college is their level of engagement with their institution. When one thinks of engagement, several examples from the world of student affairs come immediately to mind: being a member of the Greek system, joining registered student organizations, actively participating in student government, attending college functions, and the like. While these are all certainly forms of engagement, practices such as interaction with faculty members during class, group work with classmates outside of class, and discussing education and career plans with faculty members can all be considered forms of engagement, as well.

Two of the more popular engagement surveys used by higher education institutions are the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), both of which were developed at Indiana University. The BCSSE surveys incoming freshmen during the Preview orientation

program, while the NSSE surveys freshmen and seniors who have spent at least two terms at Illinois State University. From 2001 through 2005, Illinois State University regularly participated in the NSSE. Beginning in 2006, Illinois State University moved to a three-year engagement survey cycle and began participating in both the BCSSE and an additional survey, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). For the purposes of this article, only the most recent BCSSE and NSSE results will be examined.

While the BCSSE and the NSSE are distinct surveys, there are several items in the BCSSE which align with items from the NSSE. Both surveys examine the following seven items as indicators of student engagement:

1. Using e-mail to communicate with an instructor.
2. Discussing grades or assignments with an instructor.
3. Talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor.

Table 1: Responses to 2006 BCSSE and 2007 NSSE Items on Student-Faculty Interaction

Area of student-faculty interaction	N	BCSSE mean (importance)	NSSE mean (frequency)	Average difference of means	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Using e-mail to communicate with an instructor.	302	3.15	3.25	.099	.884	.052
Discussing grades or assignments with an instructor.	302	3.21	2.46	-.742	.975	.000***
Talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor.	302	3.38	2.27	-1.116	1.003	.000***
Discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class.	302	2.72	1.68	-1.036	.986	.000***
Receiving prompt feedback (written or oral) from faculty on academic performance.	302	3.33	2.63	-.702	.917	.000***
Working harder than the student thinks he or she can to meet an instructor's standards or expectations.	302	3.31	2.65	-.659	.889	.000***
Working with faculty members on non-coursework activities (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	302	2.65	1.52	-1.136	.946	.000***

*** $p < .001$

4. Discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class.
5. Receiving prompt feedback (written or oral) from faculty on academic performance.
6. Working harder than the student thinks he or she can to meet an instructor's standards or expectations.
7. Working with faculty members on non-coursework activities (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)

To account for the difference in scales between the 2006 BCSSE and the 2007 NSSE, the BCSSE data were re-coded. The 2006 BCSSE asked participants to rank how important each of these behaviors is to incoming freshmen during the upcoming year, using a 1-6 scale in which "1" signifies "Not Important" and "6" signifies "Very Important." Alternatively, the 2007 NSSE asked participants to report how often they found themselves engaging in each of these behaviors, using a 1-4 scale in which "1" signifies "Never," "2" signifies "Sometimes," "3" signifies "Often," and "4" signifies "Very Often." Due to the Central Limit Theorem and the distribution of responses in each survey, only the middle responses on the BCSSE were re-coded: BCSSE responses "2" and "3" were re-coded to align with the "Sometimes" response from the NSSE, whereas BCSSE responses "4" and "5" were re-coded to align with the "Often" response from the NSSE.

Table 1 shows the results of a paired-samples t test which was calculated to compare the mean 2006 BCSSE responses for each of the seven behaviors to the mean 2007

NSSE responses. The only behavior which has shown an increase between BCSSE and NSSE responses was the use of e-mail to communicate with an instructor, though the increase was not statistically significant ($t(301) = 1.954, p > .05$). The remaining six behaviors all showed decreases in means from BCSSE and NSSE, and all differences in means were statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

The three behaviors which showed the largest difference between pre-first year expected frequency and post-first year actual frequency were: working with faculty members on non-coursework activities ($t(301) = -20.862, p < .001$), talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor ($t(301) = -19.330, p < .001$), and discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class ($t(301) = -18.268, p < .001$). This indicates that the frequency with which first-year students engage in these three student-instructor behaviors is notably lower than their pre-college expectations. A lack of engagement can result in phenomena which are detrimental to learning: increased class absences, decreased class participation, and, in some cases, withdrawal or expulsion from the University.

There are many activities which may fulfill these three expectations and benefit a faculty member's efforts to engage students. NSSE data suggests that students will look to faculty members as somewhat "career advisors," expecting to discuss their career plans with someone engaged in the field. This is a great opportunity for faculty to encourage students to visit their office hours in order to discuss career aspirations, as well as assist students with acquiring more information from the Career Center and their advisor.

Instructor-led service learning opportunities may be aligned with departmental and University outcomes, while at the same time serving as a way for first-year students to begin professional networking. These opportunities may also serve as real-world practice of class theories and concepts, and may inspire more discussion of relevant material outside of the classroom. University Housing Services also encourages faculty members to serve as a faculty mentor for a residence hall floor, easily allowing faculty members to build relationships with students outside of a classroom setting.

It should be noted that these results only analyze the significance of the correlations between items, and do not imply causation in any shape or form. Regardless of cause, a gap resulting in decreased interaction between students and faculty is occurring for many first-year students at Illinois State. These data provide deeper insight on additional ways for faculty members to engage their students and meet their students' needs, while at the same time providing an opportunity for students to assess their own academic behaviors and develop habits for success. The first year of college is a lengthy period of resocialization for first-year students; in many cases, they must (re)learn how to succeed

academically, how to manage their time, how to manage their finances, how to manage their changing social relationships, and how to make decisions which will greatly impact the rest of their lives. In this way, engagement is vital for student success in college, and a gap between pre-first year expectations and post-first year realities is an opportunity lost. Incoming Illinois State students expect to be engaged; let's exceed their expectations!



The Risky Writing Rubric in a Geography Course

Andrew Davis, NBCT, Faculty Associate, University High School, College of Education

Zach Parton, 11th grade, University High School

Experience shows that sometimes the sense of external oppression, as by censorship, acts as a challenge and arouses intellectual energy and excites courage.

John Dewey, "Search for the Great Community." From *The Philosophy of John Dewey*.

Introduction and Theoretical Foundation

This project began to take shape last summer as I was preparing to develop an introductory geography class for 11th and 12th graders at University High School. I was intrigued by Kathleen Medina's (1999) suggestion that "High school students are very good at playing the game of school..." (p. 185). I wanted to give my students an experience that they would find meaningful and would impact their ability to write effectively in the social sciences—and give them the skills to achieve success when they take social science courses at the university level. Further, I wanted to examine how I evaluated writing in a geography course. I knew this would be a challenge because most students (and a few of my fellow faculty members) did not view a course in geography as a writing class. Yet I agreed with Brenda Trofanenko (2006) when she claimed, "The current challenges facing social studies educators, among others, is that of being a relevant school subject in an educational system where literacy standards remain foremost (p. 248)." I believed this would be my

chance to create a project in a geography class that could address critical literacy and writing and prepare them for the kinds of writing they would be expected to do in college social science courses.

I began putting together my thoughts on projects that would integrate instruction and assessment and would use writing "as a tool for exploring ideas or techniques, or for solving problems" (Camp, 1993). There would be no five-paragraph essays in this course (Hillocks, 2002). Further, I wanted to put together a writing project that was based on Baxter Magolda's (2001) suggestion that writing pedagogy should promote self-authorship in students. She offers an approach where students actively engage as learners to analyze multiple perspectives and then apply their existing knowledge to establish and defend their own beliefs (Magolda, 2001, p. 230-231). Clearly through writing students can "develop higher-order thinking skills: analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and interpreting" (National Writing Project, 2006, p. 22). This was the theoretical and pedagogical basis for the writing assignment. Bob Broad's (2003) text *What We Really Value* gave me my rubric.

Broad (2003) drew from Baxter Magolda when he suggested that teachers should help students move toward self-authorship. Therefore, we must set up conditions (i.e. assignments and assessments) that will promote this kind of thinking and writing (after all, "writing is thinking" *c.f.* Atwell, p. 3). He then discussed the shortcomings of traditional writing assessments. Broad indicated that "The age of the

rubric has passed” (p. 4). He offered the idea that students, in an effort to become self-authors, need prompts and assessments that encourage them to take risks (p. 42). Further, I wanted my students to develop pieces of writing that allowed them the freedom to express their own voices and personalities. Broad quoted Grant Wiggins who expressed frustration that teachers are hesitant to include “interesting” as part of their evaluative rubrics (p. 51). I wanted my students to have the opportunities to create knowledge through writing that was based on the underlying notion that their voice should be the driving force. Above all, students were encouraged to use voice and narrative to synthesize multiple texts with their own views on a complex issue in the geography course.

The Project

I decided to develop a writing assignment as part of a unit I was teaching on the Middle East in World Geography at University High School. This is an elective class and the students are all juniors or seniors. I began the unit by assigning various readings out of the textbook (Lydia Mihelic Pulsipher and Alex Pulsipher, *World Regional Geography: Global Patterns, Local Lives*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Co. 2008). The readings dealt with the creation of the nation state of Israel in 1948. I did little lecturing. We viewed a film produced by PBS on the Arab/Israeli wars and we read many documents published by the Israeli government on Arab terrorism. I also gave them a chapter from Jack G. Shaheen’s book (2008) *Guilty: Hollywood’s Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*. He argued that Arabs are so vilified in film that Hollywood has created almost total fear in America of Arabs because they are all potential jihadists. I then showed my students a film that features Shaheen called *Reel Bad Arabs*. His thesis was that the negative stereotyping of Arabs in film creates overwhelming fear in America. After viewing this film I had my students post a response on an online discussion board (Blackboard). Many of them were moved by the film but felt that Shaheen was “overreacting” (excerpted from a student post).

I then showed students a film that was produced in Palestine by Palestinian filmmaker Hany Abu-Assad called *Paradise Now* (it took the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2006). I showed them several movie reviews of the film beforehand. The film was in Arabic and I wanted them to have a basic understanding of the plot and characters before we viewed the film. I particularly wanted them thinking about Roger Ebert’s review (2005). He claimed that *Paradise Now* is “dangerous” (para. 7). I asked my students to think about why he would claim this.

After we viewed the film I opened a discussion board thread and asked students to respond to the movie. The responses were rather incredible (you may access their responses by going to my blog: <http://www.uhigh.ilstu.edu/blogs/wordpressgeo>). Students were shocked to find that the two men who become suicide

bombers are so much like themselves. Many of them rightly concluded that Ebert’s suggestion that the film was dangerous was accurate. It humanizes Palestinian suicide bombers. We see into their world...and we begin to understand it. One young woman seemed to be shouting (she used bold type font) in her post by stating “Why on Earth would we humanize humans?” Her answer was: “How can they be humanized? Because maybe we haven’t ever seen them in a different light.” Another young woman indicated that the film “did a nice job putting the audience in the shoes of two martyrs during their mission to bomb Tel Aviv.” Another student said “I wish that everyone in this country could see this film.” I think the most interesting comment to come after the film was a student who stated “We call suicide missions acts of terrorism when I think they should be called acts of desperation.” Another student indicated that the film was a “tear jerker” for her and that her views on terrorism and terrorists had changed. Brilliantly, she goes on: “I don’t agree with it, but I can understand the concept of why the people act like that. When watching the movie you knew that it was wrong what they were doing. But they were real humans with emotions; risking their lives...It is hard understanding someone else’s cultural views or even religious views. I have a different view than before.” Roger Ebert was right. This film is dangerous.

The Rubric and Assessment

As the culmination of this activity, I asked students to print out all of their peers’ comments on the discussion board and highlight the points they wanted to touch on in a whole class discussion. We circled up the desks and spent a day discussing the unit. Students were able to draw on not only their own ideas but the ideas of their classmates. This format gave everyone a chance to interact with multiple texts to synthesize their ideas. I also had pre-service teachers from ISU observing several days of this unit and I encouraged them to interact with the high school students. I even invited the principle of U High, Jeff Hill, to come in and watch the discussion. Everyone was impressed with the student’s ability to formulate intriguing ideas on incredibly complex issues. To conclude the project I asked students for one final piece of writing. I asked them to create a text that they felt represented their best thinking on the topics we read about, viewed, and discussed. I gave them the following rubric:

Their writing could take any narrative strategy.

It should be interesting.

It should say something that has never been said before.

It should be uniquely their own voice.

And finally, it should take a risk.

Students immediately began asking questions about form and content. I told them everything was up to them: Length, style, voice, narrative, language use, everything. I just wanted them to offer something new. I did encourage them that there should not be any five paragraph essays—unless that

was how they would choose to represent their voice no matter what. Fortunately, I did not collect any of this kind of writing.

Several students wrote an essay that was fairly standard. Yet I found that the tone and voice of the papers were unique and risky. One student wrote, “Do we not realize that bombing for peace is like fucking for virginity, it doesn’t work.” It is this kind of creative thought that shows evidence of in depth understanding and courage that I was looking for in this assignment. I know that this student will find success in college—In fact, she was just accepted at American University in Washington, D.C.

Some students took this opportunity to write short stories. This format allowed them to create texts that expressed thoughts that would have been difficult in a standard essay. They needed the creative space to generate a self-authority. These texts gave me insight into their thinking and synthesizing of the materials and discussions we engaged in during this unit. These texts were almost creative non-fiction.

One student reflected on her own life through mock journal entries. She engaged her own thinking about terrorist acts as she remembered them growing up (she was in junior high when the 9-11 attacks occurred) and related them to her newfound insight from this unit. She created a document that was uniquely her. Her voice. Her personality. And, it was extremely interesting to read.

In way of conclusion I restate my goals for this writing project. I wanted to give my students the opportunity to become self-authors. I wanted them to have an authentic experience that allowed them to synthesize multiple texts and perspectives in order to create a piece of writing that was unique. They would be able to express their voice. Make something that is interesting and say something that has never been said before. To take a risk. I believe my students met my challenge and embraced this project. Rubrics can stifle voice. Students are used to being graded for conformity. I would alter Dewey’s suggestion that oppression leads to creativity. Total freedom of expression leads to intellectual energy and excited courage. By way of conclusion, I asked Zach Parton to reflect on this project for this article. I include his reflection below.

Zach’s Reflection

The film “Paradise Now” was very impacting for both me and my classmates. The discussion that came out of the viewing of the film as well had a serious effect on the world views of the class.

Coming from a fairly political family, and early in my high school career becoming even more interested/involved with politics, I came into the viewing of the film with relevant knowledge of the subject. While sympathetic to both sides, I tend to have more of a bias towards the Israelis, as I am of Jewish heritage. While the movie had a Palestinian bias, it was portrayed very tastefully, giving fair

sympathies to both sides. This is very appealing to people on both sides, a middle of the road approach as opposed to one side being overly sympathized. The class seemed to react well to some issues that had never quite been brought to their attention, such as the plight of people chosen to be suicide bombers. In the sense of delivering this media, the technology worked well.

The discussion held on BlackBoard had very good results. It gave us, as students, a means of discussing our thoughts in a non-confrontational and organized manner. The ideas were outlined on BlackBoard, and then we took notes or printed out points of interest to bring to class for a discussion. This discussion allowed for a wider exploration and expansion of ideas that had been outlined or brought up on line. This feedback was much more effective, as it allowed for an open forum based on another open forum with a more ridged structure which allowed the organization to carry through and help the class in their discussion.

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Developing and Assessing Student Autonomy in the First-Year Experience of Psychology Majors

Derek Herrmann, Marketing & Research Graduate Assistant, University Assessment Office

Dawn McBride, & Corinne Zimmerman, Associate Professors, Department of Psychology

As students enter college, they are immediately thrust into a world of personal responsibility and independence. This transition from the more structured learning environments found in many high school classrooms to the more autonomous learning environments of higher education is quite abrupt. Although many students look forward to this change, they are usually not very prepared for it. However, it is this granting of autonomy and self-directed learning that prepares students for the “real world” beyond their college classrooms. The current project addressed this issue and was guided by self-determination theory, which states that self-regulation (which is needed for self-direction) is promoted by three needs—competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Certain types of environments, such as the classroom, can either promote or hinder the development of these needs, and research has shown that the amount of choice and feedback on assignments can promote competence and autonomy (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). In addition, Ponton and Carr (2000), following other theories of motivation (Bandura, 1997), suggested that students be exposed to autonomous learning situations to promote autonomy.

In the Fall 2005 semester, the Department of Psychology implemented a new course, PSY 111: Introduction to Psychology. This course is limited to psychology majors only and has a maximum enrollment of 30 students in each section, which contrasts with the other introductory psychology course offered (PSY 110; a General Education course with a maximum of 350 students in each section). In addition, all of the sections of PSY 111 meet together each week for a guest speaker series, where speakers describe their subarea of psychology and their research specialization. PSY 111 is designed to promote the three needs described in self-determination theory. Competence is promoted by teaching students about the discipline of psychology; autonomy is promoted by allowing students choice and feedback on assignments (such as argumentative papers on psychological issues) throughout the semester; and relatedness is promoted by developing a community of psychology majors.

This research project focused on the assessment of these first two needs, competence and autonomy. For this study, three hypotheses were made. It was predicted that PSY 111 students would show an increase in their knowledge of the discipline of psychology. It was also predicted that PSY 111 students would show a greater increase in locus of control (amount of control people feel they have over their environment), self-efficacy (beliefs people hold about their

ability to perform tasks and accomplish goals), and psychology content knowledge than the PSY 110 students taking the course from a PSY 111 instructor. In addition, it was predicted that the PSY 111 students who completed additional research-oriented activities would show a greater increase in locus of control and self-efficacy than the PSY 111 students who did not complete the additional activities.

Method

During the Fall 2006 semester, students in one section of PSY 110 and all four sections of PSY 111 (one of which was taught by the instructor of the PSY 110 section that participated) were asked to answer the question, “What is a psychologist?” to assess content knowledge at the beginning and end of the semester. During the Fall 2007 semester, students in all four sections of PSY 111 (same four instructors as Fall 2006) completed pretest and posttest measures that included questions from a previous edition of the Psychology Subject Test of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) to assess their knowledge of the discipline of psychology. During the Fall 2007 semester, students in one section of PSY 110 (same instructor as Fall 2006) and all four sections of PSY 111 completed pretest and posttest measures that included questions taken from previously used measures of locus of control (Lefcourt, Von Baeyer, Ware, & Cox, 1979) and self-efficacy (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001), as well as questions added by two of the researchers (McBride & Zimmerman). In addition to the amount of choice the students had that was built into the assignments in PSY 111, the students in two of the four sections also completed additional research activities that further allowed them to make choices and take greater control of their learning. These activities added to the competence and autonomy by making each activity more challenging than the previous one and by allowing more choices for each activity.

Results

To determine if PSY 111 students increased their knowledge of the discipline of psychology, the number of correct responses at pretest and at posttest on the measure that contained the GRE questions was compared. The students in the two sections with the highest and lowest average final course grades were combined, and the students in the two sections with the middle average final course grades were combined. The data indicated that there was an increase in the students’ knowledge of psychology, and there was no difference between the two section-groups.

To determine if PSY 111 students showed a greater increase in their locus of control and self-efficacy than the PSY 110

students, the scores at pretest and at posttest on these measures were compared. To determine if PSY 111 students showed a greater increase in their content knowledge of psychology than the PSY 110 students, the responses to the question “What is a psychologist?” at pretest and at posttest were coded and compared. The data indicated that although there was a difference between PSY 110 and PSY 111 students in internal and external locus of control, there was no difference between the pretest and the posttest scores (see Table 1).

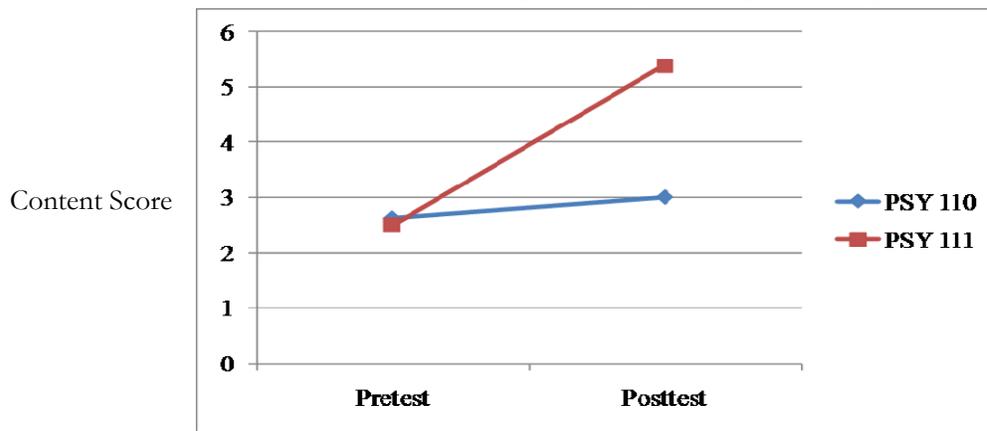
The data also indicated that there was no difference between PSY 110 and PSY 111 students in self-efficacy, and there was no difference between the pretest and the posttest scores. However, the data did show that the PSY 111 students showed a greater increase in psychology content knowledge than the PSY 110 students between pretest and posttest (see Figure 1).

To determine if the PSY 111 students in the two sections that included additional research activities showed a greater

Table 1: Mean scores on the measure of locus of control for PSY 110 and PSY 111 students

		Course			
		PSY 110		PSY 111	
		Internal	External	Internal	External
Time	Pretest	3	2.33	2.77	2.25
	Posttest	2.89	2.38	2.82	2.28

Figure 1. Mean number of codes from the “What is a psychologist?” responses at pretest and at posttest



increase in locus of control and self-efficacy than the students in the two sections that did not include additional research activities, the scores at pretest and at posttest on these measures were compared. The data indicated that there was a difference in internal and external locus of control between the sections with and without research activities, but there was no difference between the pretest and the posttest scores (see Table 2).

Discussion

Three hypotheses were proposed at the beginning of this study. The first hypothesis was that the PSY 111 students would show an increase in their knowledge of the discipline of psychology, and this was supported by the results. The second hypothesis was that the PSY 111 students would show a greater increase than the PSY 110 students in locus of control, self-efficacy, and psychology content knowledge. Although there was no increase in locus of control or self-efficacy scores, the PSY 111 students showed a greater increase in psychology content knowledge than the PSY 110 students. The third hypothesis was that the students in the two sections of PSY 111 with research activities would show a greater increase than the students in

the two sections of PSY 111 without research activities in locus of control and self-efficacy. Again, no increase in these measures was found.

There are several possible reasons for the lack of support for these predictions, especially regarding the third hypothesis (the differences between the PSY 111 sections with and without the additional research activities). The four sections of PSY 111 were not equivalent on numerous dimensions. The two sections that included research activities had the lowest two average final course grades, which could have affected the locus of control and self-efficacy of the students in these sections. The two sections that did not include research activities were morning classes, whereas the other two sections were mid-to-late afternoon classes. Different types of students may have chosen these different times to take the course. In addition, the instructors of the two sections that included research activities did not post their class notes online, whereas the other two instructors did. All of these factors may have affected the results in ways that were not expected during the design of this study.

Although the predicted outcomes were not found for locus of control or self-efficacy measures, attempting to control or

Table 2: Mean scores on the measure of locus of control for PSY 111 students

		Sections			
		With research activities		Without research activities	
		Internal	External	Internal	External
Time	Pretest	2.69	2.24	2.9	2.27
	Posttest	2.75	2.24	2.93	2.33

correct these extraneous variables in the future may yield results that are consistent with the proposed hypotheses. For example, because both of the morning class instructors posted their class notes online, one of them could include the additional research activities (instead of one of the instructors that included them in this study, who both taught afternoon classes and both did not post their class notes online). This would address these issues and thus make the groups more equivalent and more comparable. The questions used on the measures of locus of control and self-efficacy were not designed to measure longitudinal changes of these constructs. Using measures that are specifically developed to determine changes over time would be more appropriate in a future study. In addition, it may be beneficial to exaggerate the differences between each of the research activities to make the developmental shift more salient to the students. However, students in PSY 111 did show a greater increase in psychology content knowledge compared with a similar, large section course. Thus, PSY 111 appears to be meeting at least one of the goals of the course. In conclusion, this area of students' academic development is very important, both for their academic and professional careers, and making sure that autonomy development is embedded within any course curriculum should be a top priority throughout higher education.

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UAO Moves to Hovey Hall!

After years of serving the university from our office at the Instructional Technology and Development Center (ITDC) on South Main Street, we have moved to Hovey Hall 401 at the heart of campus! While we miss everyone at the ITDC, we are grateful for the warm welcome we have received at Hovey Hall. Thank you for making this transition one of ease!

New Staff Member Joins the UAO team

The University Assessment Office would like to introduce Jon Laird as its new Coordinator. Jon started in December, 2008 after working on the Teacher Data Warehouse at the University of Illinois – Urbana/Champaign for nearly two years. Prior to working for University Assessment, he also served the Illinois State community as a Preview Guide, a Resident Assistant, and an undergraduate intern for the Stevenson Center. Jon completed his B.A. in sociology at Illinois State in 2005 and is currently an Illinois State graduate student pursuing a M.S. in sociology, with one of his main interests being the effects of technology on social interaction.

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Goals Addressed by General Education Course Syllabi

Sharon Weldon, Chair, Council on General Education

The General Education Syllabus Audit is a first step in the evaluation of the General Education Program for Illinois State University. Most syllabi mention goals consistent with the 12 [General Education Goals](#) approved by the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate in August of 2006, but fail to identify their course as a General Education Course.

The purpose of the audit was to obtain a snapshot of how well the tenets of the General Education Program were delivered to students through the syllabus. Ideally, a General Education course syllabus would inform students of the abilities and foundational background to which they will be exposed in the course. But the syllabus also links the course goals designed and implemented by the faculty member with the approach designed by the University to attain the skills and knowledge for students to serve as informed and thoughtful citizens or its General Education Program. In fact, the syllabus is the vehicle by which the course is approved for inclusion in the program. Thus, to inform the student, reinforce the message to the faculty and communicate the building blocks of General Education, the syllabus should impart the relevant goals of General Education along with more specific objectives of the instructor-architect.

In order to evaluate the syllabi with respect to these goals, the University Assessment Office (UAO) collected representative syllabi of all courses offered in the General Education Program for Spring 2008. This convenience sampling insured that all courses were covered, though not all sections were examined. Syllabi were categorized based on the position of their respective courses in the program, and syllabi goals were aligned and scored based on which of the 12 General Education Goals were appropriate for the category. The UAO delivered this information to the Council on General Education (CGE) for its evaluation.

To simplify its analysis, CGE expressed goals addressed in the syllabi as a percentage of those expected for the category. For example, courses in the Outer Core – Science, Math and Technology shared goals 1a, 1b, 2b and 11b of the General Education Goals. If the syllabus in question discussed goals 1b, 2b and 11b, the syllabus was

scored as addressing 75% of the goals attributed to its category.

In Table 1, the majority of course syllabi (70.0%) mentioned at least 50% of the recommended goals for the appropriate category. A striking percentage of Inner (76.4%) and Middle (79.5%) Core syllabi noted half or more of their goals while Outer Core documents trailed at only 61.1%. Communication of 75% or more of the goals associated with the course's category fell to an overall 33.6%. These findings varied widely over Inner (41.2%), Middle (48.7%) and Outer Cores (20.3%), as well as within the sub-categories.

In contrast to the success indicated with General Education Goals, only 18.9% of the courses in the General Education Syllabus Audit indicated that the course was part of the General Education Program. Again, Middle Core syllabi described the courses within the General Education Program the most at 25.6%, while Outer Core course materials mentioned the program in only 14.8% of the documents. CGE could only speculate about the reasons for the absence of General Education information in the syllabi. Non-tenure track instructors or new faculty members may not know that their course is in the program or may not appreciate the value of communicating the goals of General Education. Other instructors may have chosen to address their goals in different media to the students, such as inclusion on a website or in other course documents.

Discussion of the aims and opportunities of General Education begins with the information and goals delivered in the syllabus. While administrators and advisors offer overviews and explanations of the program, the instructors of each component course in the program have a unique opportunity to describe its purpose and specific aims from the viewpoint of the individual course. Through a well-crafted syllabus, each faculty member in a General Education course possesses the means by which the program structure is strengthened and its delivery enlivened.

CGE is currently discussing mechanisms to improve the delivery of General Education goals to the faculty, so that they in turn can share them with the students in their courses.

Table 1. Summary of General Education Syllabus Audit

Classification	Number of Courses	Course Identified as General Education	Percentage of Appropriate Goals Described In Syllabus – Based on 12-Goal Model		
			0-49%	50-74%	75-100%
Inner Core	17	3	4	6	7
Middle Core	39	10	8	12	19
Outer Core	54	8	21	22	11
Totals	110	21	33	40	37

The 12 goals of the program have recently been aligned with the four [Shared Learning Outcomes](#) of Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving, Public Opportunity, Diverse and Global Perspectives and Life-long Learning available at the [General Education website](#) for the University. Tips for creating a syllabus for a General Education course and a pull-down [menu](#) to find the General Education Goals and Shared Learning Outcomes for a particular course are also available at this site.

The General Education Syllabus Audit precedes a more in-depth assessment of the program by UAO and CGE using the Institutional Artifact Portfolio process. University faculty will utilize data collected from this portfolio to recognize areas of strength and improve weaker elements in

the General Education curriculum. During the Fall of 2008, faculty members teaching courses in the shared learning outcome of Public Opportunity were invited to submit student artifacts that reflect assessment items found in the Public Opportunity rubric. A similar study of Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving is occurring this spring. Following collection and review, these reports will be delivered in September to CGE. The plan is for the council to publish a report in the spring issue of *Progressive Measures* documenting any outcomes from the analysis. The other two shared goals will follow the next year alternating with those addressed this year, so that assessment of General Education will be ongoing with CGE providing the final review each year.

Information Literacy Assessment in General Education Inner Core Courses

Chad Kahl, Coordinator for Library Instruction and Information Literacy, Milner Library

Information literacy teaches library users to search for, locate, retrieve, evaluate, use, and value information resources through learner-centered instructional programs, initiatives, and materials.

Milner Library's instructional program offers sessions for General Education courses; disciplinary and subject courses; orientations; and outreach and training. The commitment to campus is quite extensive. In FY 2009, Milner Library taught 792 instructional sessions for 16,253 learners. This is the highest number, per capita, of instructional sessions of any of the other Illinois state universities.

More than 40 percent of Milner Library's FY 2009 instructional sessions focus on reaching the 3,200 incoming freshmen that enroll in Communication as Critical Inquiry (COM 110) and Composition as Critical Inquiry (ENG 101). A typical student receives a total of three instructional sessions that teach information literacy learning outcomes that develop students' ability to recognize their need for help; learn basic search tools (library catalog, article database, federated search engine); explain the nature of academic research and scholarship; find known items; and effectively search. A total of 20 librarians taught sessions in FY09, including librarians who do not typically perform public service (reference, library instruction, collection development) duties.

Milner Library not only provides library instruction to the students, but it is also an active member in the College of Arts and Sciences' Committee on Critical Inquiry (CCI). This committee is chaired by Sally Parry, the Associate Dean for Student & Curricular Affairs. The Committee brings together the coordinators of COM 110, ENG 101 and Milner Library's Instructional Services. The committee meets to discuss the development of students' critical thinking skills in the first year; transition of students from COM 110 to ENG 101, or vice-versa, from the fall to

spring semester; and the development of information literacy skills. The collaboration is unique and productive.

The collaboration first began when the Foundations of Inquiry (FOI) course was removed from the General Education Inner Core before the Fall 2005 semester. The Academic Senate, Academic Affairs, Ad Hoc Committee on First Year Curricular Revision, chaired by Jon Rosenthal, was created to integrate elements of FOI into COM 110 and ENG 101 and ensure that the information literacy instruction, affiliated with FOI, was continued in the reconstituted courses.

So how does Milner Library ensure that the students are developing these essential information literacy skills in COM 110 and ENG 101? First, learning outcomes were created that define how the students will develop the information literacy skills. Second, Milner Library assessment tools were developed in an effort to measure students' mastery of the information literacy learning outcomes.

The first set of learning outcomes, utilized in [FY2006](#), defined a set of 33 skills. These skills were divided into four categories: Know, Access, Evaluate and Use/Incorporate Ethically/Legally. The progression of skill development was divided into two semesters and targeted to COM 110 and/or ENG 101. After the first year of use, the learning outcomes were evaluated. Two main problems emerged in this analysis. One, the skills did not acknowledge the lack of "library skills" that students had entering the university. Students did not have rudimentary skills, such as using a call number to locate a book on a book shelf. Second, the set of skills, despite being termed "learning outcomes," were not actually, because they lacked details on how the students could demonstrate their mastery of the skills.

A new set of learning outcomes was created for [FY2007](#) that incorporated the development of basic library skills and provided greater clarity on how students would demonstrate their skill development. The seven outcomes were how to

ask for help; find a book; find an article; find a reserve item; perform keyword search; understand information cycle; and evaluate search results. The outcomes were designed to be taught sequentially during three instructional sessions over two semesters. The annual review highlighted some issues with the revised learning outcomes. First, the sequential development of skills was not realistic given the different pedagogical approaches taken in the 160-plus sections of COM 110 and ENG 101. Second, the learning outcomes failed to take into account the information-seeking skills the students brought to the university and how they differed from the expectations of academe.

A new outcome was added for [FY2008](#) that required students to explain the nature of academic research/scholarship. The addition of this learning outcome provided a real foundation for discussions on the development of information literacy skills.

A new learning outcome was added prior to FY2009 in response to experiences with students in the instructional sessions in the previous academic year. Librarians noted that more and more students were utilizing Milner Library's new federated search tool *Search It*, so a learning outcome was added. Other than some other minor edits, the learning outcomes document is essentially the same for [FY2010](#).

Milner Library has also created corresponding assessment tools to measure students' development of the information literacy learning outcomes. Paper-based research logs were piloted in FY2004, in a limited number of COM 110 sections, where students had to note their development of their topics; research strategies; list found articles, books and web sites; and properly cite found items.

For FY2005, the paper-based logs were adapted for use in WebCT and corresponding rubrics were created for evaluation, in an effort to minimize the challenges faced by nearly 10,000 paper-based research logs moving from the classroom to the library for evaluation and then returned by the librarians. However, this effort was highly unsuccessful. WebCT proved to be a poor platform for the conversion of the paper-based research logs. The administrative and technological challenges of so many students logging into the online environment were overwhelming. Librarians and classroom instructors were

inundated by student queries and implementing the rubric-based evaluation. The online-based research logs were abandoned during the Fall 2005 semester.

In conjunction with the new learning outcomes for FY2006 (detailed above), a set of lesson plan and evaluation worksheet templates were created by Milner Library's Library Instruction Committee. These were made available to librarians to utilize in discussions with the classroom instructors. However, these too proved to be too time-consuming for both the librarians and classroom instructors. It was difficult to cover all seven learning outcomes in two to three library instruction sessions and evaluate the students' work.

Milner Library decided to attempt a new assessment model. An online information literacy pre- and post-tests were created. The 25-question pre-test was designed to be given to students at the start of the semester and again at the end of the semester. The pre- and post-tests were piloted in COM 110 sections in the Spring 2008 semester. The effort did not succeed. Since the pre- and post-tests did not clearly tie to the assignments, they proved to be problematic in terms of additional workload for the students and the classroom instructors.

So where does that leave the development and assessment of information literacy skills in COM 110 and ENG 101? In the Committee on Critical Inquiry, Milner librarians have proposed information literacy assessment as components of the portfolios that students complete at the end of the semester in both COM 110 and ENG 101. The Committee is currently discussing how students' reflection of the research process might allow for assessment of their information literacy skills.

The information literacy efforts are a result of the collaboration of many faculty members in the last five years. I would like to acknowledge Sally Parry and Jon Rosenthal as current and former Directors of General Education; Bob Broad, Julie Jung, Kathryn Kerr, Claire Lamonica, Nancy McKinney and Jan Neuleib in the Department of English; John Hooker, Steve Hunt and Cheri Simonds in the School of Communication; and Jennifer Hootman, Jean MacDonald, Patricia Meckstroth, Deborah Rhue, Sharon Van Der Laan, and Sean Walton from Milner Library.

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Campus Box 2500
Normal, IL 61790-2500
(p) 309.438.2135
(f) 309.438.5602
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