

**University-wide Assessment Committee
Meeting Notes: November 17, 2010**

Members Present: Inno Onwueme, Karen Rose Cercone, Jack McKara, Barbe Moore, Todd Potts, Michael M. Williamson, Dan Burkett, Holly Travis

Introduction: Inno Onwueme suggested that the committee explore the possibility of a conference bridge in the spring to allow members a chance to participate by phone if they are not on campus. Spring meetings will be scheduled for a day/time other than Wednesday afternoon to allow more members to attend.

Subcommittee Reports:

a. Liberal Studies Subcommittee (Karen Rose Cercone for Dave Pistole)

A discussion of the LS capstone writing assessment will be placed on the agenda for our first spring meeting to create appropriate Key Performance Indicators and Expected Outcomes for this assessment in TracDat

b. Data Management Subcommittee (Karen Rose Cercone)

TracDat's internal architecture (nomenclature, unit definitions, linkages, etc) was finalized at our Nov 16 consultant work session. KR will meet with staff from the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment over winter break to make sure the academic affairs organization of the database does not overlap or create any problems for IRPA reporting requirements.

c. Middle States Periodic Review (Karen Rose Cercone)

A first draft of the PRR will be produced in the next 2 months, and it will begin being reviewed and edited by the Advisory Workgroup in early spring.

Analysis of Collegiate Learning Assessment Outcomes

The committee held an extensive discussion of the data obtained from two administrations of the CLA instrument at IUP. Please see the analysis summary on the next page for our initial conclusions, follow-up questions and planned actions based on this conversation. If any additional comments or questions arise as you read this document, please share them with Karen Rose by email or phone as she plans to incorporate this analysis into her report to Middle States.

Diversified Schedule of Assessment

After discussion of the value of our current assessment schedule (NSSE bi-yearly, CLA yearly), the committee agreed that it would be worthwhile to alternate CLA either yearly or biyearly with another assessment instrument. Karen Rose will prepare a list of options for our first spring meeting which include cost and benefits of alternate assessments, including one suggested by Jack Makara that focuses on student retention. Depending on costs, we may be able to use the money saved from staggering the CLA instrument on either one or two alternative instruments.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:00.

Meeting notes taken by KR Cercone

CLA Analysis Summary (Fall 2010)

Data were examined from two administrations of the Collegiate Learning Assessment or CLA, one from 2008-09 and one from 2009-10. Each administration used approximately 80 freshmen (survey taken in the fall) and 80 seniors (survey taken in the spring) recruited from the entire student body at IUP through email invitation.

I. Initial Conclusions

- IUP freshmen and IUP seniors perform at or near expected levels given their incoming academic ability. Their scores plot near the center of the national range of student outcomes. Conclusion: our student population conforms to a median level of academic ability on a national basis.
- IUP seniors perform all tasks at higher levels of ability than freshmen. Conclusion: students are significantly improving their academic abilities at IUP.

II. Questions about CLA Results

- IUP freshmen outperform roughly 60% of their national peers at most tasks, while IUP seniors outperform significantly fewer of their peers (as few as 31% for one task in particular in the 2009-10 administration). The 'value-added' increase in task performance score between freshmen and seniors at IUP therefore appears to be lower than at other institutions.

Question 1: Is this random variation in data? Only 40 seniors performed this task and we cannot be sure whether this represents a real drop in performance or a function of which students were randomly assigned to this task. Support for this interpretation is the much stronger performance on the 2008-09 version of the same task for our seniors.

Question 2: Does this represent motivation or selection bias between freshmen and seniors? Given that students are recruited by means of gift certificates, the population of seniors who desire that reward may differ in their academic abilities and/or their motivation to perform well when taking the task. Support for this interpretation is the consensus at a conference of commercial assessment vendors that the selection process probably does not capture the true performance ability of all students (Inno Onwueme, personal communication).

Question 3: Does this represent yearly variation in how the essays are scored by the CLA evaluators? For example, the simple use of passive voice by students can have a large negative impact on their scores even though use of the passive voice is encouraged by some fields such as science. CLA evaluators may receive different instructions in some years than in others (Michael Williamson, personal communication).

Question 4: Does lagging senior performance represent a lack of recent practice in critiquing or making written arguments among students in programs where upper-level classes focus on non-writing tasks such as chemical analysis, computer programming, field mapping, accounting software, etc. Note: This would not explain why IUP seniors perform less well than peers at other institutions unless those other institutions do more effective writing practice in their senior capstone courses than we do. This question can be addressed by examining NSSE data where our students self-report their writing assignments.

III. Planned Actions (subject to committee approval in Spring 2011)

Action 1: We will administer the CLA in 2010-11 and compare results to see if the 2009-10 data represent a statistical fluke or a real trend. (This is already in progress)

Action 2: We will cross-check CPA methodology by commissioning a different commercial vendor such as CAAP to assess similar tasks and see if they show the same trends. (This depends on our final decision re: diversifying assessments.)

Action 3: We will perform an internal freshman to senior writing analysis to compare to the commercial version by pairing the Liberal Studies capstone writing analysis to the stored essays done by the exact same students during the pre-freshman year English writing placement exam. This study will be formulated and carried forward by Michael Williamson and TESOL doctoral students (ideally with some funding from the Faculty Professional Development Grant program). Student identities will remain hidden from writing evaluators following the pairing of samples, as is done in the current Liberal Studies writing assessment protocol. Data from this paired-writing study could yield insights into the 'value-added' gap shown by CLA results for IUP in particular and on overall reliability of results for seniors versus freshmen given their different motivations for performing non-graded CLA tasks versus the graded freshman placement/liberal studies writing samples. (this action depends on logistics and funding).

Action 4: Our CLA results will be compared to the much larger sample of students taking NSSE to see how the amount of student writing (self-reported to NSSE) compares to the performance on CPA tasks. (This will occur as part of the PRR).

After all or most of these actions are completed, the University-wide Assessment Committee will re-convene to discuss the results of our investigations and then make further recommendations about whether the 'IUP senior slump' really exists and if so, what academic actions should be initiated to improve learning outcomes at IUP.