

## Assessment Steering Committee Summary – 2011-12

This was a year of transition for the Assessment Steering Committee (ASC): during the year we worked with FEC and the VPAA to establish a new structure and membership for the ASC. (See attached memo from Sarah Goodwin, Faculty Assessment Coordinator, to Josh Ness, Chair of CEPP.) While the ASC was in slight disarray, we still proceeded with the work of assessment in the departments and programs and on all-college projects.

### **Department and Program Assessment**

We worked closely with department chairs and program directors to help them design and conduct assessment projects that would provide useful information to their faculty. We met with individual faculty and in small groups to explain that each department/program could be anywhere on the assessment cycle, as long as they are moving forward: fine-tuning learning outcomes, mapping outcomes to curriculum, assessing student learning, examining results, designing changes to address needs that were uncovered in the process.

### **All-College Assessment**

We continued our work on assessment of visual communication, holding a symposium in May, 2012, following up on the workshop of spring, 2011. The symposium was held on May 14, 2012, at the Tang Teaching Museum. See attached schedule. The symposium was attended by more than 100 students, faculty, and staff, and conversations were lively and fruitful.

We are in the middle of our Writing in the Majors initiative, funded by the Teagle Foundation. Nearly half of departments/programs have assessed writing and are using the results to revise courses. We will continue to work with chairs and directors to ensure that all departments/programs complete this initiative.

### **Alumni Learning Census**

We are working with Alumni Affairs to implement the Alumni Learning Census, a survey being administered to alumni in each reunion year, and to analyze the data. The questions in the survey are designed to determine how well alumni feel that they acquired the knowledge and skills embodied in the Goals for Student Learning and Development. We are working with Dan Forbush in Communications to publicize the results.

### **Student Affairs Assessments**

Rochelle Calhoun has provided an inventory of existing assessments and we will continue to talk with her about further assessments.

### **MALS Assessment**

We are working with the MALS staff to design and implement an appropriate assessment plan.

### **Middle States Reaccreditation**

We are beginning to plan for the upcoming Middle States re-accreditation, scheduled for 2015-16.

May 16, 2012

To: Josh Ness, Committee on Educational Policy and Planning  
From: Sarah Goodwin, Faculty Assessment Coordinator  
Subject: Assessment Steering Committee

### **History**

Some weeks ago I promised to provide CEPP with a memo updating you on my thinking about the future structure and membership of the Assessment Steering Committee.

A year ago, the ASC disbanded de facto, because most of its members left either the committee or the college (Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Denise Smith, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Mike Profita, Winston Grady-Willis). At the time, the ASC and CEPP both held discussions about the possibility of changing the membership and structure of the committee. Once we had drafted the Goals for Student Learning and Development and sent them on to CEPP, who shepherded them through the faculty approval process, the ASC had some trouble determining next steps in carrying out its mission of overseeing assessment of student learning at the college. At CEPP's retreat last year, a consensus of sorts was reached, summarized in CEPP's annual report:

CEPP devoted considerable attention to discussing the relationship between the ASC and CEPP. This is not a new issue. Ray Rodriguez, the first assessment coordinator, came to CEPP in 2002 to discuss what the relationship between CEPP and assessment should be, and we have continued to struggle with the reporting and institutional arrangements between CEPP and ASC during the intervening period. CEPP and ASC have concluded that the existing institutional arrangements, with ASC reporting to both CEPP and the VPAA, do not work well.

CEPP and ASC concur we should create an independent Assessment Committee. Many other colleges have independent assessment committees. We have asked Sarah Goodwin and ASC to draft a proposal for FEC about what the new committee's membership, mission, and relationship to CEPP should be. CEPP should discuss the proposed new institutional arrangements with ASC in the Fall and we can jointly present the proposal to FEC. (CEPP Annual Report 2010-11, p. 5)

Although I lobbied for an independent ASC last spring, I confess that I remained unsure how that would actually function, and was also wary of severing ties with the faculty committee that rightly should be the most closely connected to and affiliated with assessment of student learning. During my assessment-related travels over the course of the past year I have held numerous conversations with other Teagle Assessment Scholars and with faculty from other campuses, observing how governance structures can make assessment work most effectively. I believe that the structure we adopt should ensure not just that we are studying student learning outcomes, but also that we are putting those studies to good use in discussions of educational policy and planning. In conversations with VPAA Susan Kress, Dean of the Faculty Beau Breslin, and Associate Dean of the Faculty Paty Rubio, I raised new

doubts about the potential effectiveness of a separate ASC, and we talked about possible other solutions to the kinds of problems we encountered last year on the ASC.

With their encouragement, assessment consultant David Paris (former DoF of Hamilton College, Teagle Assessment Scholar, and currently the Executive Director of the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability in Washington) came to visit Skidmore on April 12-13, 2012, and talked with a number of different individuals and groups about several different assessment-related concerns. The primary topic of concern was the ASC; we sought both information from him about structures at similar schools and his advice about our context in particular. His brief report is attached here.

### **Recommendations**

After all these conversations and long reflection, I would like to recommend to CEPP that we actually *not* change the existing structure of the ASC. Instead, I suggest that

1. We assemble a new committee with similar membership;
2. The ASC continue as a standing subcommittee of CEPP, making routine reports to CEPP, but with an operating code that defines its autonomy from CEPP in facilitating assessments;
3. We clarify the mission of the ASC so that it oversees primarily the assessment of student learning and development in Academic Affairs, with input from Student Affairs;
4. We build into the operating code the understanding that the full ASC meets at most three times annually to develop and recommend to CEPP each year's assessment agenda, and that the faculty members of the ASC meet separately as needed to ensure faculty engagement specifically in assessment of student learning in general education and the disciplines;
5. The Chair of the ASC, the Faculty Assessment Coordinator, sit on CEPP as an ex officio member or invited guest.

The rationales below address each of these in sequence.

### **Rationales**

#### **1. We assemble a new committee with similar membership.**

The existing membership provides the right people for annual or biannual overview of the assessments that are taking place and the ongoing plans for conducting and also making use of further assessments. In addition to the members listed below, in 2010-11 the ASC added the Director of Alumni Affairs (because of the Alumni Learning Census project); the Director of Intercultural Studies; and the newly-hired Assessment Facilitator. The original members are:

- a. Two faculty members at large
- b. The faculty director of the first-year experience
- c. A faculty representative from CEPP [or one further faculty member at large]
- d. The Director of Institutional Research
- e. An Associate Dean of Student Affairs
- f. The Director of Career Services
- g. A representative of Special Programs who is involved with academic programs
- h. Two student representatives

The original membership included the Dean of Studies, but he stepped down after the first year. I would urge us to retain the Director of Intercultural Studies and the Assessment Facilitator, and to consider regaining the Associate DoF for Academic Advising.

Maintaining this membership would give us an excellent body to consider our assessment programs as a whole in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and to steer our assessment course. The four faculty members (including the Director of the FYE), plus the Assessment Facilitator and the committee chair, would be an appropriate group to set the agenda, review reports, and make any recommendations to CEPP. It might not be necessary to have a faculty liaison from CEPP, if CEPP agrees to invite the chair to meetings as an ex officio member. Instead, the DoF/VPAA could aim to appoint (in consultation with CEPP and the FEC) at-large faculty who would represent a spread of disciplines.

**2. The ASC continue as a standing subcommittee of CEPP, making routine reports to CEPP, but with an operating code that defines a degree of autonomy from CEPP in facilitating assessments.**

In the past year, CEPP has made enormous progress in making use of assessment results for just about any initiatives. For CEPP to function effectively and for our assessments to be useful rather than exercises in producing unread reports, there should be strong and clear lines of communication between CEPP and the ASC. The ASC should be as responsive as possible to CEPP's needs for academic planning. The ASC also has an independent charge to ensure that the assessment agenda is both set and implemented, since this is a requirement for accreditation. CEPP is not directly responsible for every step the ASC takes; but CEPP should have excellent access to the data we do have, and should make requests of both the ASC and Institutional Research, as necessary.

**3. We clarify the mission of the ASC so that it oversees primarily the assessment of student learning and development in Academic Affairs, with input from Student Affairs.**

Student learning and its assessments (Middle States Standard 14) are located in Academic Affairs, but are supported directly or indirectly by every division of the college. Institutional assessments (Middle States Standard 7) occur throughout the college and may include many types of data that are only tangential to student learning; these are rightly overseen by the college's senior leadership in each division. The Assessment Steering Committee consists primarily of faculty, staff who are directly involved in assessment, and two members from Student Affairs who lead some assessment efforts themselves and/or are closely associated with work supporting student outcomes as they make the transition from Skidmore to their post-college lives. The ASC and CEPP should not be responsible for leadership in institutional assessments appropriate to Standard 7, and this should be clarified.

4. **We build into the operating code the understanding that the full ASC typically meets at most three times annually to develop and recommend to CEPP each year's assessment agenda, and that the faculty members of the ASC meet separately as needed to ensure faculty engagement specifically in assessment of student learning in general education and the disciplines.**

It would likely suffice for the whole ASC to meet once or twice a year in a retreat format to review assessments for the year and to set the agenda for the following year. The ASC should not itself do assessment work, but should ensure that good processes are being followed and the agenda is appropriate and serves the college's strategic planning with regard to student learning and development.

5. **The Chair of the ASC, the Faculty Assessment Coordinator, sit on CEPP as an ex officio member or invited guest.**

In order for CEPP and the ASC to work together as smoothly as possible, so that the ASC can provide CEPP the information it needs and can serve CEPP's agenda, it is essential for the ASC chair to be present for CEPP's deliberations. In the past, the CEPP faculty liaison was in the often difficult position of navigating between two chairs with two separate agendas that did not always overlap. The solution was typically for the two committee chairs to meet, often after some misunderstanding had taken place. The best way to avoid such misunderstandings and to ensure that the college's assessments are useful is to include the Faculty Assessment Coordinator in CEPP's meetings.

I'll add to this last point that this recommendation is personally disinterested; it will be a challenge to find the additional time to attend CEPP's meetings. But there seems to me no other way to ensure the necessary communication between the two bodies.

I remain of course happy to discuss these recommendations with CEPP.

Attachments:

- 1) David Paris' memo
- 2) Middle States Standards 7 and 14

Assessment Steering Committee Summary – 2011-12

To: Sarah Goodwin

From: David Paris

Re.: Reflections and suggestions, post April 12-13 visit.

Thank you for inviting me to Skidmore to discuss your assessment work. As I said starting almost every meeting we had, Skidmore is ahead of many institutions in doing assessment, and the issue is now less one of accepting the need and desirability of assessment than of how to organize and do the work better.

Over the course of the two days three issues surfaced. Here is my understanding of what they are and my suggestions of how best to deal with them.

The first issue is the status and form of the Assessment Steering Committee. As I understand it, at the end of last academic year the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning and the ASC had come to an understanding that there would be a proposal for a new, independent assessment committee as a successor to the ASC. That proposal has not been developed, in part because most of the personnel on ASC have, for various reasons, not worked with the committee during this academic year and in part because you and others were unsure that a new committee was desirable or what form it would take.

For both policy and practical reasons I believe you should **keep the current structure, i.e. have ASC as a subcommittee of CEPP**. Student learning assessment is central to academic policy and decision-making. If CEPP is the faculty's primary committee, it should "own" assessment, and the ASC should be seen as serving and enhancing CEPP's work. Having a separate committee doing assessment apart from CEPP seems to suggest that assessment is something different and separate from policy, which is something I don't think you or CEPP believe.

From a practical standpoint, creating a new committee gets you into the political process of, I presume, changing your handbook and all that entails. Engaging in that process is likely to distract from and slow down the work you need to do. And it has to be asked whether, even if the process went smoothly, the gain (which I have a hard time imagining) is worth it, that you will be in a better place as a result.

In fact, the structure you have seems, with some minor tweaking, to be quite adequate for what you want to do while being potentially very flexible. I would suggest that you **keep the current membership and designation as a steering committee, adding only individuals or "seats" if they are doing assessments that bear on student learning and policy related to it**. That broad steering committee need not meet often; we discussed it meeting once at the beginning of the year to set an agenda, once for progress reports, and once at the end of the year. Within the steering committee I'd suggest you **have a smaller group that is tightly focused on direct assessment of learning (meeting CEPP's "small, nimble" test) that would review departmental work, assist other assessments as needed, ensure that you continue to assess your students' general education learning, and report to CEPP**. This working group would probably include you, Lisa Christenson, Joe Stankovich, a CEPP representative and one or two others as you saw fit, meet more often, gather and review learning assessment reports, and report regularly to CEPP on them and other policy issues at CEPP's direction.

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The second issue has to do with communication between ASC and CEPP generally and specifically your role with respect to this. As I understand it, currently there is a CEPP representative on the ASC who is the liaison to CEPP. This arrangement has not been satisfactory apparently because communication often gets garbled and because it puts the CEPP representative in a difficult position.

I would suggest that **the chair of the ASC should serve *ex officio* on CEPP**. If, as I expect, CEPP retains a representative on ASC, having the ASC Chair on CEPP would make communication much clearer and allow quicker response and action. It also reflects the fact that because assessment is integral to the work of CEPP, having someone present who can speak more directly to learning assessment and knows well the recent assessment history would be desirable.

In our conversations there was some doubt raised about adding to CEPP, particularly adding someone who might be seen as representing an administrative point of view. We could argue about whether the chair of the ASC is an administrator or a faculty member with release time like a chair of a department or committee. But however the chair of ASC might be viewed, the point remains that assessment as an issue and the results of ongoing learning assessment should be constantly present in CEPP's work. If for whatever reason formal membership is not created, I would suggest **alternatively, the chair of ASC should have a standing invitation/have invited guest status on CEPP**. The key, again, is to have these issues more clearly and integrally part of what CEPP does, and to enable the ASC to serve CEPP's agenda.

The third issue concerns the work of institutional assessment more broadly understood. As I understand it, because you have taken the lead in doing the periodic review, there has developed some tacit understanding that assessment is the ASC's responsibility. However, student learning assessment and institutional assessment are different, if partly overlapping, things, as reflected by the fact that there are two Middle States' standards (14 and 7 respectively) for these two areas. The latter pertains to how well all the operations of the institution set forth outcomes and gather and use evidence in doing their work.

The ASC cannot do both. Its membership is not broad enough in terms of personnel, it does not have the materials (e.g. financial reports, admissions data) to do this, and frankly trying to do it would be beyond its capacity. Perhaps the only bodies with the appropriate reach and membership are the cabinet and the IPPC. Both Beau Breslin and Barbara Krause seemed to agree with this diagnosis, so the issue is how to start organizing institutional assessment.

I would make two suggestions about how to begin. First, **either the cabinet or the IPPC (or both together) might conduct an audit of what institutional assessments are currently being done, especially in light of the requirements of standard 7**. Doing such an audit would allow the administration to see what might be missing in light of the standard and how existing and future assessments better organized. **Either before or after such an audit, a team from the College might participate in a Middle States' workshop focused on standard 7**. This would create a better understanding of the standard, and such workshops often include examples of good reports and practices.

Again, I think Skidmore is doing a great job, particularly because of your outstanding efforts and the support of the administration and faculty for your work. I would be happy to discuss these suggestions further with you or anyone else at the College.

**Symposium on Visual Communication:**

**May 14, 1012, the Tang**

**Draft schedule**

- 8:30-9:00 Coffee and scones
- 9:00-10:00 5x5: Five **five-minute** TED talks: examples of visual communication in **research/professional work**, from multiple disciplines, followed by discussion: Mary Crone Odekon, Physics; Jordana Dym, History; Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Anthropology; Gary Wilson, Theater; Katie Hauser, Art History
- 10:15-11:15 5x5: Five **five-minute** TED-talks: examples of visual communication in the **classroom**, from multiple disciplines (analyzing and/or creating visual materials), followed by discussion: David Domozych, Biology; Janet Casey, English; Deb Hall, Art; Gove Effinger, Math/CS; Ray Giguere, Chemistry
- 10:00-10:15 Break
- 11:15-11:30 Pause
- 11:30-12:30 **Plenary** remarks—John Weber and Sarah Goodwin
- 12:30-1:15 **Lunch**
- 1:15-2:15 Concurrent hands-on workshops/roundtables
- Finding and using images in the classroom—ArtStor, presentation software, Blackboard –David Seiler, Kelly Dempsey-Little
  - Using images in research—sources, copyright, reproduction: Scott Mulligan
  - Digital humanities roundtable: Alex Chaucer
  - Best practices/student work: film, posters, object-based learning: Tom Lewis, English; Beck Krefting, American Studies; Bob Jones, Economics; more examples welcome
- 2:15-2:30 Break
- 2:30-4:00 **Integrating the Visual: Tools for Teaching with Images, Objects, and Museums** — Alison Barnes and Ryan Lynch
- 4:00 **\*\*\*\*Sumptuous reception\*\*\*\***