

Institutional Assessment Committee
Tuesday, November 29, 2016 (2:00 pm - 3:30 pm)
CAS Conference Room

Members Present: Todd Bruce, Scott Moore, Brittiani McNeil, Brent Brossmann, Mike Nichols, Cathy Rosemary, Michelle Walker

Visitors: Angela Krueger

The team reviewed the feedback that reviewers had generated and discussed the big-picture recommendations for the core committee in regards to their assessment report. The attached feedback document summarizes the conversation.

The committee will next meet in early spring to discuss a rubric for assessment reports and to divide up reports from calendar year 2016 for the purpose of providing feedback.

The committee had little to no interest in electing a new chair, but Dr. Rosemary will consult with the HLC campus advisors about the necessity of electing a faculty chair.

The Institutional Assessment Committee would like to commend the Core Committee for an excellent beginning. Instituting an assessment process for something as complex as the new Integrative Core is not easy. The Assessment Committee members divided up and reviewed the sub-committee reports so that each larger category (Foundational Competencies, Languages, Integrated Courses, and Jesuit Heritage) was reviewed by two members of the committee. The written comments included as an appendix represent the comments, questions, and suggestions of those reviewers. Some category reviewers worked together to produce a unified response, others did not. A long dash (---) separates comments of different reviewers. The Assessment Committee then met to review the comments and create a set of suggestions for the Core Committee to consider as it embarks on future assessment cycles.

Overall Suggestions

Data Presentation and Reporting

- We recommend reporting percentages of students scoring at each level rather than single measures of central tendency and spread for a course. Data are then easier to interpret and use and can be more easily cross-tabulated to examine populations of interest or aggregated across the category.
- Reports should make clear what the expected level of performance is and the committee should eventually establish targets for what percentage of students should meet or exceed expectations, once those expectations (as expressed in the rubrics) have been validated.
- Moves toward making data presentations consistent within categories would be welcome, particularly in languages and foundational competency (oral expression was a bit of an outlier).

Process

- The assessment committee strongly recommends the core committee move toward developing sampling methodologies to evaluate student work in all areas to reduce the burden on instructors.
- Both data reporting and feedback survey had relatively low response rates. The Committee should consider ways to raise both.
- The committee should consider ways to improve inter-rater reliability on the rubrics. Some possible suggestions include selecting exemplars of student work at each level of performance and holding calibration sessions for the instructors.

Larger Issues to Consider

- Information/technological literacy, given its lack of attention in the core document, needs clearer definition, as well as clarification about where and how it is threaded through the core. Perhaps a portfolio approach might be helpful in assessing this.
- While assessment is being conducted to assess the performance of the core and John Carroll students as a whole, what are the implications for students who do not meet expectations? Particularly in the area of writing, are they being set up for failure? Should there be intervention, remediation, or some type of follow up for those students not achieving the expected level of performance?
- The process as it was conducted last spring was focused on two distinct concerns: assessment of student learning (looking at rubric and proficiency scores) and successful implementation of the core (such as concerns about applying for designations). We would strongly recommend separating those two areas, at least in the reporting if not also holding distinct meetings. Core implementation issues may continue to overshadow learning assessment, if not.

Foundational Competencies: Written Expression

Was the report clear and easy to understand?

For the most part, the report was clear. I would make the following suggestions for future reports to make it easier for a non-written expression subcommittee member to understand what the relationship between the assessment data, the conclusions, and proposed future actions. For example, a key for the assessment data would be helpful - what are the maximum and minimum values (I am assuming 3 - 0), what values are considered indications for action?

Also, it was not clear how or if independent assessment from the subcommittee was performed? Did they perform an independent evaluation of random samples of student work? That should be made clear in the next report, again for the non-members of the subcommittee.

Also, it is not clear why the committee made the recommendation to instructors to evaluate the complexity of the research papers. Were they too complex? Not complex enough? How do the recommendations that were made help overcome the issue that prompted this change?

What was the reason for changing the wording of the expectation for the incorporation of writing within the discipline in the integrated courses? What is expected as a result of this change?

Again, these are just examples that would make the report easier to understand for a non-member of the subcommittee.

Explain why there are two rubrics for foundational writing; use one scale in the rubric—3 point or 4 point. Table formatting is unclear. Report number of students (n) in each section and overall n. Explain the FW-Involvement in other Categories and its importance.

Are there suggestions for improved analysis of the data?

Just more clarity in the scale used for the assessment data, the process used by the subcommittee to independently evaluate the student work.

Provide an interpretation of the data and also give percentages of students on each level of rubric—not just the mean and standard deviation. Provide a rationale for the benchmark for Writing.

Are there other sources of data or other measurements that would be useful?

The amount of instructor feedback was very small, given the number of instructors in the EN125 courses. In future reports, it would be helpful to solicit more feedback from course instructors, perhaps from a focus group.

Describe how the feedback and recommendations were collected. Describe next steps for increasing response rate.

Do the recommendations in the report follow from the data? Are there other actions that should be considered?

Since the scale of assessment data was not explicitly stated, it cannot be independently determined that the recommendations follow from the data. Again, reasons for the proposed recommendations were not explicitly given, nor possible results.

Explanation of the benchmark score will help with interpreting the data. Also, reporting frequency of students scoring at, below, and above benchmark may give a more holistic interpretation of the data and the extent to which foundational writing competencies are met.

Is the investment of time and energy balanced by the value of the insights gained?

It does appear that the data was used to make recommendations for changes and that some degree of normalizing occurred when the instructor assessments were compared to that of the subcommittee. However, the few comments provided by the instructors indicate that there is considerable frustration with the assessment system. My reading of the comments is that the instructors did not fully understand the difference between grading and assessment, which is common. The subcommittee may need to provide guidance to instructors on how to both grade and assess student work in a more efficient process.

Describe how the data will be used to improve core competencies in writing and to improve performance of students scoring below benchmark.

Could the process be simplified, streamlined or improved?

I think that the process is fairly straightforward and the rubrics are also clear and straightforward. As stated in the earlier question, it appears that there needs to be a discussion between the subcommittee and instructors about integrating assessment into the grading process so they occur at the same time and minimize work (real or perceived).

Improve communication with instructors through multiple venues to clarify expectations for the assignments [integrated within course] and the scoring of essays.

Foundational Competencies: Oral Expression

Was the report clear and easy to understand?

I found this report to be very clear, thorough and easy to understand. All of the information and background information was presented so the reader was not left guessing about which data were used or how interpretations were made.

The report is clear in description of the sub-committee's review. The rubrics are incomplete in that the scale is not defined for each criterion, i.e. the qualities of excellent, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory.

Are there suggestions for improved analysis of the data?

The subcommittee has done a thorough job of analyzing the assessment data and provided recommendations that follow from them. The only suggestion that I might have for the subcommittee is as they begin the norming process, they may want to select presentations from higher and lower sections and independently evaluate them to help determine if there are particular sources of potential "grade

inflation". If they find that the instructors are interpreting various aspects of the rubrics differently from the intent, then specific language changes could be made to narrow the interpretation gap.

Describe how the data were reported and how they were converted to a 10-point scale. The data charts do not match the 10-point scale, but show points, and these vary by criterion and type of speech: 100 points total for informative; 150 for argumentative; 135 for persuasive. Define "threshold" and rationale for the values associated with each criterion. Explain why criteria have different point values. Report n's for each section.

Are there other sources of data or other measurements that would be useful?

I cannot suggest any other measurements that could be used.

Do the recommendations in the report follow from the data? Are there other actions that should be considered?

It seems to me that the recommendations follow from the data. As stated above, independent evaluation or perhaps an instructor focus group could be conducted to see if there are significant differences in interpretations of rubric dimensions and wording. That may help produce more consistent grading/assessment. Perhaps even in the training of instructors, the subcommittee could illustrate examples from speeches of excellent, good, and poor aspects to instructors.

I agree with subcommittee's recommendation to address inflation; adjunct training is clearly warranted.

Is the investment of time and energy balanced by the value of the insights gained?

It appears that is the case here.

It is difficult to interpret the sub-committee's findings without further clarification in rubric (attributes per rating).

Could the process be simplified, streamlined or improved?

Since the assessment rubrics are meant to be used for grading, it appears that the system is streamlined. I would just encourage the committee to examine instructor comments and feedback for suggestions that could be used in the future.

See previous comments on rubric and data reporting. Gather instructor feedback through various means to increase responses.

Foundational Competencies: Quantitative Analysis

Was the report clear and easy to understand?

Yes, the report was thorough, clear and easy to understand. All of the processes and minimum/maximum values of the assessment data were clearly explained so a non-subcommittee member could understand the data analyzed.

The process is clearly explained.

Are there suggestions for improved analysis of the data?

Not at this time. The committee has analyzed the assessment data received from the instructors.

Define the level of expected performance or benchmark for the QA criteria. Report n's in all tables. Overall, it would be helpful to know the frequency of scores at each performance level, not only the mean and std. deviation. Some explanation is offered re: use of data to revise/address assignments linked to criteria.

Are there other sources of data or other measurements that would be useful?

I cannot suggest any at this time. Perhaps having instructors provide samples of student work that they believe illustrate the different levels of achievement in each dimension might help the subcommittee develop clearer rubric descriptions and standardize expectations for each dimension.

I agree with sub-committee's Suggestions for Instructors.

Do the recommendations in the report follow from the data? Are there other actions that should be considered?

The recommendations are based upon the data available. Many of the recommendations have started to be implemented and others might not be necessary given the recent changes to rubrics and the core QA requirements. Perhaps at the annual assessment meeting next spring, the variety of different QA courses (both foundational and in ENW) could be surveyed as to the contexts that QA is used to help provide examples to faculty developing both types of courses.

Perhaps the subcommittee can identify exemplars for each performance level to use alongside the rubric.

Is the investment of time and energy balanced by the value of the insights gained?

From the standpoint of the subcommittee, the time investment in the process of obtaining assessment data from the instructors is balanced by the value of the data. Insight from instructors from the survey at the end of the year is also worth the time invested, although these data should be viewed through the lens of being from instructors, some of which feel it is difficult to collect all of the data required by the subcommittee. The Core Committee should support the QA subcommittee's proposal to hold more development workshops.

Seem to be mixed reactions to the time/energy balance in relation to the insights gleaned. There appears to be some frustration with the data reporting process, which should be addressed through training and technology.

Could the process be simplified, streamlined or improved?

The subcommittee may want to consider whether to require assessment of all assignments is worth the time and effort of instructors and just collect data on signature assignments. In lieu of all data, perhaps asking instructors to provide a short narrative indicating the students' strengths and weaknesses and whether they improved in the signature assignment. These assessments could be evaluated at the annual assessment meeting.

Data reports provided to instructors and discussed would help show value of the assessment. At the same time, gather suggestions on course revisions to address areas of weakness, which may be a way to streamline the reporting/using data/revising processes. Use variety of communication tools for such reports/communication.

Foundational Competencies: Information/Technological Literacy

Was the report clear and easy to understand?

The report was clear, thorough and easy to understand. All of the data minimums/maximums were explained, as was the process of evaluation by the subcommittee and librarians.

Easy to understand. That the benchmark [level of expected performance] was identified is important to data interpretation.

Are there suggestions for improved analysis of the data?

The assessment rubric data was analyzed well. Specific examples of how the student work failed to meet one of the SLO's was provided. I wonder if there are other examples of student weaknesses that emerged after evaluation for the other SLO's. Could those be used to help instructors and librarians construct assignments to improve student performance?

The sub-committee's recommendations are clear and data-driven. Suggest developing exemplars from student work to illustrate the rubric criterion and rating levels to support training on scoring and also increase reliability.

Are there other sources of data or other measurements that would be useful?

I cannot identify any other data or measurements, other than the suggestion above, that would be useful.

Do the recommendations in the report follow from the data? Are there other actions that should be considered?

The recommendations do follow from the assessment data. The only other suggestion I could make is outlined above.

See above.

Is the investment of time and energy balanced by the value of the insights gained?

It appears so.

Co-teaching for some portion of appropriate classes looks to a promising practice for clarifying performance expectations for the informative writing assignment.

Could the process be simplified, streamlined or improved?

From what is described, it appears the

See suggestion on team teaching and developing exemplars from student work samples to illustrate criterion and ratings.

Languages

Are there suggestions for improved analysis of the data?

If the Languages programs are using a similar assessment (i.e., the exams), it would be helpful for all programs to use the same data reporting form/tool. This would make interpretation and analysis of data easier to read and follow.

Are there other sources of data or other measurements that would be useful?

I like the use of pre- and post-tests. I think a robust picture is provided.

Do the recommendations in the report follow from the data? Are there other actions that should be considered?

Yes, the recommendations and considerations seem to follow from the data. Just be sure to “close the loop” in terms of implementing change and reflecting upon it.

Is the investment of time and energy balanced by the value of the insights gained?

See below.

Could the process be simplified, streamlined or improved?

As mentioned previously, using a template reporting form would streamline the process and make the reports easier to read and follow.

Process Description: The typical assessment procedure for Languages is good with their focus on tying language proficiency and language skills to the learning goals. With their procedure, however, I’m left with some questions as to which years they focus on language proficiency and which years they focus on other learning goals. (Is this an odd year/even year assessment? What kind of schedule do they use for assessing student learning?). The process seems simple, easy to analyze, and time efficient. The process should be more specific as to the schedule of analysis as well as how the data is being used after assessing student learning.

Instructor feedback: The subcommittee did not have any helpful suggestions for Language instructors based on the assessment data. One of the benefits of assessing student learning outcomes is to determine improvements that instructors can make in their courses. It would be helpful to provide suggestions for instructors for each language. Based on the assessment data (per language), what can instructors take away from it? What is working well/what can be improved in their courses?

Recommendations for internal changes: *“Continue making assessment for language proficiency smooth and easy”* In what ways can Language assessment continue to be smooth and easy? Are there ways to make it easier and simpler? This assessment procedure seems fairly easy and time efficient. For each course, it is explained in detail how students are assessed based on certain learning goals. I would just be curious to see change over time with these learning outcomes. Do students show improvement over time with the learning goals (per language)?

Integrated Courses: Engaging the Global Community

General comments:

The movement from two classes to eleven was excellent.

It appears that assessment is happening every semester. While laudable, that pace may prove to be too much. It is unclear that this is necessary, although a periodic assessment of the material from each semester is potentially important.

The results of the data are troubling. While it is good to know that there are significant deviations between students who are meeting the goals and those who are not, it is unfortunate. More troubling is the lack of discussion of those exceeding the goals. This is even more unfortunate if it reflects the lack of student achievement. Most troubling is the difficulties in student writing. These revelations are “victories” for the assessment process as it reveals valuable information. However, they suggest a strong need to consider what can be done to help students achieve our goals.

Overall, EGC did a tremendous job of assessing this process. They have a variety of meaningful recommendations which stem from the process, especially with regard to helping instructors make the process more effective for those who assess the program.

The discussion of integration and writing is more problematic. There are legitimate questions about the effectiveness of our current efforts to prepare students for those challenges. Potential solutions could include delaying the integrated classes so that the students are more developed, but that trades-off with focus on the major. The other is to prioritize more of the linked-light approach fostered by the First-in-the-World program, but without a specific focus on writing and integration in those courses, there is little hope for improving that process.

Learning outcomes assessment is getting lost in a sea of other issues. The discussion around the actual learning outcomes data is very limited. It is understandable as the summary of the data at present is a bit hard to get one’s head around. Nevertheless, the means are generally quite low which suggests a fair number of students are not meeting standards. A variety of factors may explain this. A much greater focus of this report should be on elaborating the factors and plotting a course for future evaluation.

Integrated Courses: Examining the Human Experience

General comments:

Again, the growth from two courses to 16 was excellent.

The decision to prioritize a single area of focus is good. Integration was a worthy choice.

The decision to cut back on content to focus on writing is interesting, but potentially problematic. There is a strong need to improve writing, but it is hard to imagine that faculty will support cutting back on content. Another option may be to create video or written content designed to help students improve their writing and/or integration. Such material can be presented out of class. While it would be essential to use that material in a way which features grading (in order to secure the interest of students), such a requirement may help prioritize both writing and class content.

There were some obvious difficulties in the assessment team's process, including their lack of face-to-face meetings to discuss the process. However, they were very forthcoming about those issues and of working through ways to improve that. There is little need for concern if the process is improved in the coming year.

The moving target criticism is both fair and common. It will continue until the ICORE committee resolves all the issues facing it. Given that they are still being presented with new concerns, that end is not in sight.

It seems like the ability of the Core Committee to override subcommittee decisions is grounded in the fact that the subcommittees answer to the Core Committee. It seems reasonable that deference should be made in most situations, but the subcommittees ought to be advisory.

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Vital to separate the two processes – 1) implementing the core curriculum and 2) assessing student learning. The report has almost no evaluation of student learning data or issues related to the process of assessing student learning.

Despite limitations, the summary statistics do indicate some differences in the application of the rubrics and criteria. Again this is borne out in at least one comment. This should not be troubling. We are in the nascent stage here. Understanding, operationalizing, and assessing abstract concepts takes time and experimentation.

Integrated Courses: Exploring the Natural World

General comments:

The repetition of an onerous process is accurate and common. There is a need to reduce the rigidity and length of the process, although it seems that ICORE has done a lot to streamline the process. Seeing the repetition of this complaint from all groups provided meaningful data to the committee.

The request to share statistical data is meaningful.

The request to broaden the definition of Q&A warrants additional attention, both in this report and in the core.

The breakdown of recommendations and groups for appropriate action was excellent. The subcommittee deserves credit for their hard work.

The comments on the rubric in this section are among the few that actually deal with the assessment process. They are really important. I think the commenters suggestion that the creators of the rubrics may need to go out and explain them – especially the writing rubrics.

We should pay attention to the concerns expressed in ENW. My take on this is that we may need to back up a bit and look for ways to simplify the assessment process. The rubrics here are complex. One way to proceed might be to pick an outcome to focus on for a given semester or group of courses rather than attempt to assess all outcomes for an assignment. Frustration here is well articulated; there is power in reasonable expectations.

Jesuit Heritage (Theology and Religious Studies, Philosophy, Issues in Social Justice, Creative and Performing Arts)

Improved Analysis

Rubrics for Philosophy and ISJ courses needed further refinement in order to fully and consistently analyze data. Lack of definition of areas beyond meeting expectations may lead to more subjective interpretation of data.

Other Data Sources/Assessment Measures

The data provided was based on written assignments, with the exception of Creative & Performing Arts who provided observation-based data. Is there a way to incorporate observation-based data into other disciplines--through assessment of presentations or class discussion, for example?

Recommendations

The recommendations provided by TRS and ISJ provided the greatest insights about and challenges related to the current assessment model. The suggestions made around time, rubric development and distribution, and faculty development demonstrate the challenges and opportunities as the assessment process matures.

The data provided by TRS indicates that students in service-learning classes met expectations of the learning goals to a greater degree than those in non-service-learning courses. There, however, was not discussion about how this information may inform future course development or expectations.

Process

Common to the departments who had completed the assessment cycle was the question of the amount of time required for the assessment process. The suggestions offered by TRS and ISJ indicated process-modifications that may simplify in some manner the assessment process. The concern about lack of support and the need to improve electronic mechanisms in Canvas was mentioned in the ISJ report, but could have significant impact across the curriculum.

While this was not suggested, it may also be important to explore if all learning goals need to be addressed in all courses. Is there a way to reduce or simplify learning goals so the time spent assessing is less and may provide opportunity to for multiple assessments or to engage in assessment of longitudinal change?