Assessing with the Stars: Best Practices at Nassau Community College

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2008 ASSESSMENT SYMPOSIUM

Friday, May 2, 2008
Preface

Assessment of student learning outcomes has been an ongoing and integral part of Nassau Community College since the 1980s. The process involves every faculty member of NCC, but overall coordination is the product of the cooperative efforts of the Office for Assessment and Program Review and the Academic Senate Assessment Committee (ASAC).

One of the cornerstone activities of the ASAC is to conduct an annual Symposium for the college community to assist faculty in conducting their assessments of student learning. This publication is designed to provide a synopsis of the presentations of the 2008 symposium, as well as to serve as a reference and a guide for the campus community.

We wish to thank all the members of the ASAC who participated in our tenth annual Assessment Symposium—and especially the speakers for sharing their experiences with conducting assessments in a broad range of disciplines.

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Esther Bogin (COM)
Jane K. Brody (NUR)
Rona Casciola (MKT)
Lyle Hallowell (SOC)
Helene Guttenberg-Menco (SPS)
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Kumkum Prabhakar (BIO)
Jennifer Smith (SPS)
Susan Sobolewski (MUS)
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Table of Contents

PANEL TOPIC: Improving Class Participation and Learning Through Assessment: What Our Students Can Teach Us
  Panel Chair: Betty Borowsky, Ph.D.

Faculty and Student Impressions of Student Responsibility............................................................2
  Diana Milillo, Ph.D. and Esther Bogin, M.S., C.C.C.

“Utilizing Students’ Interests and Strengths to Gain Scientific Literacy”...............................5
  Kumkum Prabhakar, Ph.D.

PANEL TOPIC: Qualitative Knowledge/Quantitative Data: The Use of Research in Assessing Student Learning and Development
  Panel Chair: Nancy Barker, Ph.D.

“The Development of a Social and Personal Inventory for NCC Students: A Student Services Perspective on Assessment”........................................................................................................7
  Orval Jewett, M.S.W.; Genette Alvarez-Ortiz, M.A.; Molly Phelps-Ludmar, M.S.; Jennifer Smith, M.S.; and Helene Guttenberg-Menco, M.A.

PANEL TOPIC: The Complex Task of Assessing Skills and Performance in the Creative and Medical Arts
  Panel Chair: Terry O”Dwyer, Ph.D.

“Assessing Photography”...............................................................................................................10
  Robert Toedter, B.F.A., M.F.A.

“Assessment Issues in Music Performance”..................................................................................14
  Susan Sobolewski, D.M.A.

“Assessing Apparel Design Students’ Projects..............................................................................17
  Rona Casciola, M.A.

“Assessment in the Nursing Department: Putting the Pieces Together” ......................................19
  Jane K. Brody, Ph.D. and Cathy Jansen, M.A.
“Faculty and Student Impressions of Student Responsibility”

Diana Milillo, PhD
Instructor, Psychology

Esther Bogin, M.S. C.C.C.
Associate Professor, Communications

Dr. Diana Milillo earned her B.A. in Psychology and Women’s Studies from Stony Brook University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of Connecticut. Her previous research has focused on the psychology of gender, sexism, masculinity, and violence against women. She has been at Nassau Community College since 2006 and teaches classes in General Psychology, Social Psychology, Human Adjustment, and Women’s Studies. She has been a member of the Assessment Committee and Student Responsibility Subcommittee since 2006.

With close to forty years of teaching experience in higher education, Professor Esther Bogin is also a Speech-Language Pathologist specializing in accent/dialect management and treatment of voice and articulation disorders. Her consulting practice, People Communication Skills, LLC, specializes in working with professional and business people to enhance their communication competence. Prof. Bogin has served on the Academic Senate Assessment Committee in the capacity of Chair for eight years as well as Chair of the GEAR Basic Communication Committee. She has been a proponent of the pedagogical study of learning outcomes assessment for more than 13 years.

Summary of Presentation:

Student responsibility has been described as attitudes toward learning and the accountability and ownership of one’s education (Hassel & Lourey, 2005). The Student Responsibility Subcommittee of the ASAC has been interested in the ways in which student behaviors affect the learning outcome assessment process. Although faculty may have expectations of students’ learning, we are not sure whether students are aware of these expectations or what they consider as their own role in taking control of their learning. Toward this goal, the members of the Student Responsibility Subcommittee set out to explore the idea
and measurement of student responsibility as related to the assessment of learning outcomes. A three-part study was conducted to understand what the term “student responsibility” means to both students and faculty and whether both parties agree on what it means to be a responsible and active learner.

Our first study in Spring 2007 was a pilot survey of 19 faculty members from various academic departments. Faculty were asked to rate a list of 32 student behaviors according to whether they thought each was “not at all important” to “extremely important” in being a responsible and active learner. Faculty also had the opportunity to define “student responsibility” and explain what behaviors, attitudes, or concepts are associated with highly responsible and active learners. The top responses from faculty indicated that student responsibility means: being prepared for tests and projects ($M = 6.83, SD = .39$), reporting information ethically ($M = 6.67, SD = .49$), staying awake in class ($M = 6.67, SD = .78$), attending class ($M = 6.67, SD = .65$), and applying course content to assigned work ($M = 6.67, SD = .65$). From the data generated by the faculty’s responses, we constructed a survey to be given during the following semester to students about their perceptions of student responsibility.

In the Fall 2007 semester, a three-part survey was given to 19 classes of approximately 25 students each. For the first part of the survey, 311 students responded. Students were asked open-ended questions of what student responsibility means to them. Reflections of these responses showed that some students understood that responsible learning comes from within (e.g., “to be aware of the world around you,” “to assess your priorities accordingly,” “the ability to balance school with your outside life”) while others focused on concrete external behaviors (e.g., “being on time,” “buying materials needed for class”). Students also rated a list of behaviors and indicated that “having respect for the professor” ($M = 6.90, SD = .30$) and
“caring about their grade and GPA” ($M = 6.70$, $SD = .75$) were top indicators of student responsibility.

At the end of the Fall 2007 semester, a second follow-up survey was given to ask students about their own behaviors over the semester. Only 180 students responded to this part. Also, a final part of the survey allowed professors to rate each student on meeting learning goals and overall achievement in class. A clear majority of 98 percent of students reported highly responsible behaviors, such as “attending class regularly,” “participating in class discussion,” and “staying engaged during class.” Only 7 percent of students admitted to performing non-productive behaviors, such as “waiting until the last minute to start assignments.” Also, 80 percent of students estimated that their final course grade would be a B or higher. However, faculty assessed only 48 percent of students as meeting or exceeding learning goals.

From this second sample, approximately 70 percent of students indicated that they did not use resources such as NCC 101, the Writing Center, campus clubs, or tutoring. Almost 40 percent of students work between 20-30 hours per week. Students who indicated that they had a hard time balancing work and school were more likely to engage in non-productive behaviors ($r = .20$, $p < .01$) and received lower evaluations from their professors ($r = -.18$, $p < .05$).

Our presentation explored these results, reflected on similarities and disagreements of how students and faculty viewed student ownership of their learning, raised questions of the likelihood that these results would generalize to a wider body of students and faculty, and briefly considered how faculty could integrate these results into practices in their own classrooms.

Reference:
“Utilizing Students’ Interests and Strengths to Gain Scientific Literacy”

Kumkum Prabhakar, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Biology

Dr. Kumkum Prabhakar is presently serving as Chair of the SUNY General Education Natural Science Assessment Subcommittee, member of the College-wide Planning Committee, Critical Thinking Assessment Coordinator for the Biology Department, Advisor of the Botany Club at NCC, and President of the Alpha Phi Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma International. She also serves as Councilor-at-large on the executive board of “Phytomorphology,” a journal by the International Society of Plant Morphologists and as Archivist on the board of the Metropolitan Association of College and University Biologists. She received the SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2002 and NISOD Excellence in Teaching Award in 2007.

Summary of Presentation:

National recommendations for science education expect students to think like scientists and understand the processes that scientists use to become informed citizens (NRC, 1999). Other external and internal mandates have similar learning outcomes for general education courses in the area of natural science.

Although liberal arts students find the course content of laboratory science courses to be challenging, they learn actively during guided inquiry involving a modular approach of learning. With different levels of preparedness, we need to explore students’ preferred learning styles. It can be done by administering a pre-test (learning profile survey) assessing time management, study skills, and some simple content. Knowing our student population, we can provide them a
menu of learning styles, in addition to traditional and non-traditional assessment tools, instead of one-size-fits-all exams (Tomlinson, 2001). Using objective and subjective approaches to assess learning involves all faculties of student capabilities (Gardner, 1993).

Academic performance dramatically increases when students share responsibility in their learning by completing homework assignments, conducting research of applicable topics, and participating in class activities. This strengthens the belief that affective and cognitive domains complement each other. Structured guidelines for each activity, including ways to earn the maximum number of points on their assignments, act as self-assessment tools. Active participation in and timely feedback on these formative assessment activities lead to better outcome on summative evaluation. During my Assessment Symposium 2008 presentation, I demonstrated many examples from my classroom research in biology courses, including BIO 124, Plants and Society, where students are participating in the National Online Planting Science project.

It is an enormous challenge to motivate students to participate in an open-ended curriculum and non-traditional assessment. My future plans include exploring ways to encourage students to be self-disciplined and to design a comprehensive assessment model in order to avoid redundancy in data collection and address all external and internal mandates.

References:


“The Development of a Social and Personal Inventory for NCC Students: A Student Services Perspective on Assessment”

Orval Jewett, M.S.W; Genette Alvarez-Ortiz, M.A.; Molly Phelps-Ludmar, M.S.; Jennifer Smith, M.S.; and Helene Guttenberg-Menco, M.A.

Student Personnel Services

Professor Orval Jewett is an Assistant Professor in the Student Personnel Services Department. He is a graduate of Evergreen State College and earned the first of his Masters’ Degrees at Brooklyn College. He went on to earn a Master of Social Work from Fordham University and is presently completing the Doctor of Education degree. He has been with The Center for Students with Disabilities, a unit within the Student Personnel Services Department, since January of 2001. Orval works with a diverse population and has been working as the specialist for students with psychiatric disabilities since his hiring. He is also presently involved in the ongoing development of the social skills training workshops for students in the Achilles Project, a program for persons who are Twice Exceptional.

Professor Molly Phelps Ludmar is a Counselor in Educational Counseling of the Student Personnel Services Department. She holds a Master's Degree in Counselor Education from East Carolina University. Prior to coming to NCC, she was an Academic Advisor to liberal arts students at the University of Connecticut. She currently teaches SPS 093 as well as NCC 101.


Professor Genette Alvarez-Ortiz is an Assistant Professor in the Student Personnel Services Department at Nassau Community College. Her primary area of focus is educational counseling. For the past seven years, she has been teaching the freshman seminar courses and, along with her class work, she has also facilitated stress management workshops throughout the College. Prof. Ortiz earned a Master’s Degree in Student Personnel Administration with a concentration in Counseling from New York University.

Professor Helene Guttenberg-Menco is an Associate Professor in the Student Personnel Services Department. She is a graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University, and she earned her Master’s Degree at Teachers College, Columbia University. She also has a Certificate in Data Processing from NCC. She was hired as a part-time learning disabilities specialist at the Center for Students with Disabilities in 1994, and she became full time in 1998. She enjoys the many aspects of her job: assessing/counseling/advising students; providing appropriate accommodations; assisting with the registration process; teaching the SPS 093 counseling seminar; and tutoring, particularly in the area of developmental math.
Summary of Presentation:

The Student Personnel Services (SPS) Department is unique in that we not only teach courses, but we also provide counseling services to NCC students. As a result of the Middle States Review, we found it necessary to create an assessment tool to collect information about our counseling services in addition to the traditional assessment we do for teaching. As a Committee, we decided to run a one-month pilot study during February 2008. We asked each unit of SPS (Student Activities, Educational Counseling, Transfer Counseling, Job Placement, Career Counseling, Center for Students with Disabilities, Psychological Counseling) to create an assessment survey to accurately assess their services. Each unit was asked to use a Likert-type scale to collect information and, additionally, in following the recommendations of the Middle States Review, each unit was also asked to include questions which pertained to a student’s personal and social developmental needs.

The committee found the pilot study to be an outstanding way to not only begin the process of collecting data, but to determine the best ways in which to do so. As a result of the pilot study, the committee was able to determine ways to make data collection more accurate in the future. For instance, when asking individual units to report data, the committee found that each unit reported information differently. In addition, the committee plans to meet again later this summer to come up with a uniform way of reporting data. Finally, the committee was able to look at individual questions and will make recommendations to individual units for ways to more appropriately word questions, particularly those pertaining to social and personal developmental needs.
In the future, we will also ask each unit to continue to use a Likert-type scale and to report findings using a mean score. This will allow the Committee to have a consistent view of how each unit is scoring.

Following a summer 2008 meeting of the Assessment Committee, each unit will be given a more specific format to follow. In November, we will conduct another data collection again using the updated format and reporting template. We hope to present our updated findings at the Assessment Symposium in May 2009.
“Assessing Photography”
Robert Toedter, B.F.A, M.F.A., Assistant Professor, Art

Robert Toedter is an Assistant Professor of Photography and Photography Degree Coordinator in the Art Department at Nassau Community College in Garden City, New York. He currently serves as the Art Department’s representative to the Academic Senate, C.W.C.C., C.W.A.C., as well as chairing both assessment and curriculum on the departmental level. He received his B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design and his M.F.A. from Massachusetts College of Art. His photographs explore the history and impact of industrialization on the American landscape. His photographs have been exhibited in galleries, museums, and universities both nationally and internationally, and have appeared in *The New York Times, The Atlanta Journal, Art Papers, and Photography Quarterly*.

**Summary of Presentation:**

This presentation focused on methods and strategies for assessing the subtle and complex balance between technique, aesthetics, and creative problem-solving in photography courses at NCC. The evolution of the design of the Art Department’s assessment matrix, which is intended to evaluate the students’ skill set as the skills relate to performance and growth, was emphasized. Modifications to a course matrix based on the evaluating of data and the inclusion of new course content were reviewed.

The SUNY general education assessment (GEAR) generic objectives in the *fine and performing arts (FA)* require the demonstration of an understanding of (1) at least one principal
form of artistic expression and (2) the creative process inherent therein through students’ ability to:

1. Identify/define the technical components (principles, methods) and aesthetic components (perspectives, values) associated with the development of works within the subject field;

2. Analyze works within the subject field with respect to their technical, conceptual and aesthetic components;

3. Interpret works within the subject field with respect to their historical cultural and social context;

4. Exhibit creativity/originality in the application of techniques involved in the development of works appropriate to the subject field; and

5. Exhibit an appreciation of and literacy/fluency in the art form.

In order to demonstrate competency in the methods of information literacy/management (IM) through students’ exposure to information resources and research techniques and to develop critical thinking skills through students’ exposure to the methods of evidence and reasoning, assessments of student learning are conducted following student completion of the required course assignments and activities. These include:

- Regular assignment of photographic projects throughout the semester is the backbone of the course. Students are expected to apply techniques being covered in class to the projects. Creativity as well as technical skill and originality are expected. Deadlines must be met or projects will be graded down.

- Each project is followed by a class critiques session during which students are expected to participate in the analysis of both their own and of fellow students’ work.

- A final portfolio is constructed based on work created for individual projects.

- Students are required to actively participate in lab sessions and critiques, as this is considered to be essential to individual growth within the medium.

- Regular testing of a student’s technical knowledge is an integral portion of ART 231 in order to reinforce classroom discussion and required reading as well as is assimilation and student use.
Students are required to submit a written project that necessitates research. Topics may range from the analyses of individual photographers who utilize the camera to tracing the history and application of the view camera: a comparison of the ways in which the camera has been implemented through specific periods, e.g. the new topographics, pictorialism, western expansion, contemporary mapping, etc.

Assessments conducted using these criteria in the Spring 2006 and in Fall 2007 showed that most students met or exceeded expectations:

It was determined, however, that the assessment of student learning should be more specific, reflecting changes in the number of contact hours, the course outline, and the syllabus. Accordingly, the assessment was modified by adding the requirement for a final portfolio and student responses to a series of ten articles/essays/audio-visual files which addressed contemporary issues in image literacy. The following figure compares the students’ competency in the three semesters that the tool was used.
“Assessment Issues in Music Performance”

Susan Sobolewski, D.M.A.
Associate Professor, Music

Dr. Susan Sobolewski is a pianist who has performed extensively throughout North America, Europe and Asia, under the auspices of the United States Information Agency. She has appeared as soloist with the Rochester Philharmonic, the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, the Syracuse Symphony, the Warren Symphony Orchestra, the Liederkranz Orchestra, and the Bronx Chamber Orchestra, under the batons of David Zinman and JoAnn Falletta, among others. As an orchestral pianist, Susan has appeared with the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, performing at the Caramoor Music Festival, Carnegie Hall, and on Broadway. An avid chamber musician, she has collaborated with members of the Lenox Quartet, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Recent performances include a recital with the Virtuosi Quintet and recitals at Weill Recital Hall (at Carnegie Hall), the Goethe Institute, and at the 2007 International Double Reed Society Conference. Susan is a member of Duo Vivace and Serio Divertimento, and her solo and chamber recordings have been released by CRS Artists and the Windsor Classics labels. A recipient of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree and the Performer’s Certificate from the Eastman School of Music, Susan also holds degrees from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Ithaca College. She has been on the music faculty of Nassau Community College since 1996, where she currently is the director of the Chamber Music Ensemble and teaches piano, applied keyboard harmony, and aural skills.

Summary of Presentation:

Assessing musical performance differs from the assessment of attainable facts or knowledge typically evaluated in other academic fields. Since musical performance synthesizes and balances left-brain and right-brain activity, there are complex issues that form the sub-text of
the performance. There are three main areas that must be assessed: craft, artistic impressions, and performance mastery.

**Craft.** Students must understand and master the craft of their instrument (which includes the human voice if the student is a singer). This is the easiest of the three areas to address in an assessment tool because there are measurable parameters common to all music performance. For example, we evaluate:

- Tone production
- Intonation/breath support (for voice or breath-induced instruments)
- Position (how one holds and plays one’s instrument or sits at one’s instrument) and posture
- Dexterity, fluency, and control over a wide spectrum of tempi (speeds)
- Pitch and rhythmic accuracy in performing music
- Ability to perform a wide spectrum of dynamics that are nuanced and well-controlled
- Ability to perform a wide range of musical articulations that are nuanced and controlled

In addition, certain majors have issues of craft specific to them—for example, string players work on bow control, pianists on pedaling, percussionists on stick or mallet technique, and wind players on embouchure. Singers must have knowledge of several languages in addition to English, and they must project clear diction in each language in which they sing.

Each of these parameters can be assigned a numerical value and the sum employed for a complete assessment of the student’s craft.

**Artistic Impression.** Students must study the music, or repertoire, itself. Though the parameters here are harder than the “craft” category to evaluate, there are elements that define a
highly artistic performance that can be quantified objectively and to which a numerical evaluation can be assigned. These include:

- Musical phrasing
- Dynamic control/shading (also mentioned in craft—but meaning here, as it applies to the specific repertoire being performed; for example, there is an entirely different scale of sound when considering certain Baroque music, versus late 19th century and early 20th century music
- Understanding and conveyance of structure and form
- “Timing”
- Fluency/Ease (or that old phrase: “but they make it look SO easy”….)

**Putting it all together: Performance Mastery.** Finally, students must understand and master themselves as performers. Some students’ performances are transfixing. When that happens, no numerical score need to be assigned—everyone appreciates what they have witnessed. But that, obviously, is not the norm. Most notably, performance anxiety can interfere with a student’s performing up to their true capabilities, which of course reduces their scores on craft and artistic impression.

**Conclusion**

In my area, the core of our performance examination assessment must include verbal and written comments. That permits us to factor in how performance anxiety may play a role in our assessment of both craft and artistry. The numbers can help focus our comments and spotlight areas of strengths and weaknesses. However, the words still offer the human touch.
“Assessing Apparel Design Students’ Projects”

Rona Casciola, M.A.
Assistant Professor, Marketing, Retailing and Fashion

Professor Rona Casciola received an Associate of Applied Science Degree from the Fashion Institute of Technology and a Bachelor of Professional Studies and Master of Arts from Empire State College. Prior to working at Nassau Community College she was employed for many years as a Fashion Designer/Merchandiser of misses, junior, and children’s clothing in the fashion industry. She designed for manufacturers who produced clothing under their own label as well as for private label manufacturers. She is currently an Instructor of Draping & Design, Flat Pattern-making, Garment Construction, Fashion History, and Apparel Design Seminar courses in the Apparel Design Area of the department.

Summary of Presentation:

Introduction:

The Apparel Design Area is a career program. We offer technical courses for students interested in pursuing careers in fashion design and related areas of the fashion industry.

Main Points:

The Apparel Design courses are not part of the SUNY General Education curriculum. We do, however, use the Goals-Based Assessment Matrix in the course-level assessment of our students’ learning and progress. In this highly competitive field, we must see to it that our students are prepared to handle the challenges encountered in the fashion industry. Our students
need to be proficient in many areas with emphasis on the technical courses, which include draping and design, pattern-making, and garment construction.

This is reflected into creating our goals, student objectives, and measurements. When assessing the creative student we use design projects as a form of measurement. Students are assessed on both technical abilities and creative skills. Faculty use standardized methods so that all faculty teach the required coursework applying the same technical skills to ensure consistency in coursework each semester.

In our program the faculty use standardized grading sheets to evaluate student projects and collect data. Since evaluating creative work is subjective, we have devised a system that helps guide faculty to determine a fair grade. The grading sheets are broken down by grade points into specific categories such as technical skills, design/creativity, and fit of garment. Using the grading sheets enables the students to understand which of their skills are deficient and which need to be corrected for the next project. These grading sheets are used as a tool for collecting data and evaluating results.

**Recommended Modifications and Changes in Pedagogy:**

Projects and grading sheets are modified based on recommendations by design faculty and as changes occur in applicable technology and trends in the fashion industry evolve. In this way, the program stays current with the ever-changing business of fashion so that our students will be employable in this highly competitive field.
Professors Jane Brody and Cathy Jansen are members of the Nursing Department faculty. They have served on the Departmental Assessment Committee since its inception. Cathy has been the secretary of the Departmental Assessment Committee for several years.

**Summary of Presentation:**

Assessment in the Nursing Department is a complex process because there are external criteria such as the state licensing examination (NCLEX-RN) and the passing rate and accreditation set by both the NYS Department of Education and the National League for Nursing (NLNAC) which must be addressed. Ongoing course and program assessment assists in the fulfillment of the NLNAC criteria expected by the NLNAC. Because the courses are sequential and have classroom, clinical, and laboratory components, the Assessment Committee must utilize various approaches (such as grades, faculty feedback, and student records) to gather assessment data. Factors influencing retention must also be addressed in the assessment process. Based on the Assessment Committee’s work, the instruction of laboratory skills has been modified, resulting in improved passing rates. Presentation of clinical written work has been
changed, resulting in improvements in student performance. Clinical rotation summaries were reorganized to clarify criteria for students and faculty. After the Committee reviewed course outcomes, minor discrepancies in terminology and phraseology were identified and changes were made through the departmental curriculum committee.

Examination questions are currently being assessed for their relationship to course outcomes. The Committee recently revised the graduate survey and, beginning in the fall, will work on developing surveys for potential employers and for transfer BSN programs. These revisions will allow the Nursing Department to respond to cultural and social changes. Information about retention gathered by the Assessment Committee also helped the faculty in making changes to admission policies and creating a five semester alternative for new high school graduates. By providing ongoing assessment, the Committee has made the preparation for external review more efficient and effective and also helped clarify issues surrounding NCLEX-RN passing rates and retention.