One Size Does Not Fit All: Tailoring Assessment Through Collaboration

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2009 ASSESSMENT SYMPOSIUM

Friday, May 1, 2009
Preface

An Assessment Symposium has been held annually at Nassau Community College for the past 11 years. The goal of the symposium is to provide a forum for faculty to share methods of assessment that have been successfully employed in the classroom and to demonstrate how these have led to improved student learning. The narratives in this document summarize the talks presented at the 2009 Assessment Symposium.

We are gratified that the presentations showed that the goal of the symposia is being met, and that, as a faculty, we are building on each others’ experiences. First, the presenters indicate that student surveys are very important. Two of the presenters directly employed the results of an assessment tool described in the 2008 Symposium, a survey of student behaviors relevant to studying and learning, to modify instructional methods (see Bogin and Chai). On the basis of another student survey, workshops were increased by Student Personnel Services (Alvarez-Ortiz). Second, the presentations show that several strategies effectively improve student learning regardless of the discipline. For example, mapping thought processes in logical order and the use of step-wise evaluation as students prepare larger projects assist the successful completion of a project (Bogin and Deluty; Chai and Hromulka as well as King, respectively). This suggests that these common strategies might be effectively employed in other courses as well.

We sincerely thank all the members of the Academic Senate’s Assessment Committee and the symposium speakers for their contributions, but especially for their dedication to their students. We know that the information shared at the symposium and documented here will prove valuable to the assessment process at the college.

Gregory Spengler, M.A.
Chair,
Senate Academic Senate Assessment Committee

Patricia Radecki, D.A., and
Marilyn Curry, M.A.
Co-Chairs,
Assessment Symposium
Planning Committee

Janice Grackin, Ph.D
Associate Dean,
Office for Assessment and Program Review

Betty Borowsky, Ph.D.
Chair,
Publications Committee

Symposium Speakers:

Miguel Alonso (HIS/POL/GEO)
Genette Alvarez-Ortiz (SPS)
Esther Bogin (COM)
Victoria Chai (COM)

Janice Grackin (OAPR)
Virginia Hromulak (ENG)
Amy King (ENG)
Evelyn Wortsman Deluty (PHI)
Table of Contents

**Theme: Student Responsibility and Assessment**

“Student Responsibility and Learning Outcomes Assessment: Fact and Fantasy” ..........3
Esther Bogin, M.S., C.C.C.

“Developing a Teaching Style that Enhances Student Ownership of the Course” ............6
Victoria Chai, M.A.

**Theme: Retention and Assessment**

“Assessment/Retention: A Student Personnel Services Perspective” ..................10
Genette Alvarez-Ortiz, M.A.

**Theme: Critical thinking and Assessment**

“Vision and Revision: Assessing Critical Thinking in the Revision Process” ..............12
Virginia Hromulak, M.A., and Amy King, M.A., M.F.A.

“Thinking Critically through Philosophical Writing” ..................................................16
Evelyn Wortsman Deluty, Ph.D.
For the last 14 years, Professor Esther Bogin has been a proponent of the pedagogical study of learning outcomes assessment as it relates to quality education at the class, department, and institutional levels. She teaches and assesses courses in public speaking, interpersonal communication, voice and diction, persuasive speaking, and introduction to speech and hearing therapy. Prof. Bogin served on the Academic Senate Assessment Committee as Chair for eight years and continues to chair the GEAR Basic Communication Committee. Currently, she serves as Second Vice Chair of the Academic Senate as well as on her Department’s P&B, Assessment, and Marketing, and Public Relations Committees.

Summary of Presentation:

In the 2007-2008 academic year, the Student Responsibility Committee of the Academic Senate Assessment Committee completed a three-part student/faculty study. The results revealed several important points relevant to student responsibility and learning outcomes.

- We were able to identify and cluster those observable and measurable behaviors, both in and out of class, that were productive for student learning.

- Significantly, we found that there was a disconnect between the top ten learning behaviors that professors considered productive and the ten considered productive by the students. For example, “Student preparedness” was the number one priority on the professors’ list, but was not on the students’ list at all.
This study opened our eyes to the reality that today’s linear and digital learners need to be taught how to learn responsible behaviors in our classrooms in order to at least meet our expectations. What then is the role of teaching faculty in influencing students to fine-tune their responsible learning behaviors to claim ownership of their learning?

The language of student responsibility should be integrated into our syllabi and course development. For instance, in addition to the content learning goals, we can add such goals as: to develop time management habits for task completion and to exhibit responsible in-class and out-of-class learning behaviors. Of course, it is important to define and discuss these behaviors to help students know what we expect and what specific in-class and out-of-class behaviors tend to contribute to meeting and exceeding our expectations.

In addition, students should understand how productive behaviors contribute to their final grade. Do our students know that their grade includes good attendance and promptness PLUS meeting deadlines, demonstrating respect for classmates and the professor, applying the lexicon of the course, etc.?

We can choose to teach time literacy and awareness by putting time on their radar screens. Students should know the learning formula; i.e., each week, for every registered one credit, responsible students are expected to spend 2 to 3 hours outside of class studying, and 24 to 36 hours per week preparing for their average 12-credit program. When our students are asked how they spend these hours, their typical response does NOT include schoolwork. They probably will admit that most of their time in an average week is spent in class. Hence, how can we help students make the most of their in-class time? One suggestion is to enhance their concentration by using “important idea mapping activities.” Such activities ask them to draw/note-take main idea maps (with sub-point branches) or ask them to select a number of main
points they believe will be questioned on the next exam. Since it is important that their perceptions of important points match our perceptions, we should spend time evaluating the respective perceptions of important points.

Time management assistive devices are useful in guiding students to relate time usage to grades earned. Assigning and assessing incremental phases of task completion guide students to learn steps needed to meet and/or exceed our expectations. We can require students to keep logs of the amount of time it took to complete different phases of a task. An informal study of these time logs, especially of those students who met and/or exceeded our expectations, could be reported to future classes to guide them in their time commitments for task completion.

The relationship between student responsibility and learning outcomes assessment is an intricate one, which faces the challenges of enhancing students’ competence as learners. Obviously, successful teaching-learning partnerships require a mutual understanding of what is expected. Today, the attitude of “I teach – they learn” is slowly disappearing and being replaced by the more realistic questions: “What do I want them to learn, and how do I help them to become more skillful at learning it?” The journey to finding the answers is just beginning.

Works Consulted:


Willets, N. (2008). *Everything I Need to Know About What to Expect in This Class, I Learned From My Course Syllabus*. NCA SPECTRA, 44(8), 20, 22.

Rcampus.com/rubricssearcheditc.cfm

DEVELOPING A TEACHING STYLE THAT ENHANCES STUDENT OWNERSHIP OF THE COURSE

Victoria Chai, M.A.
Instructor, Communications Department

Professor Victoria Chai earned an A.A. in Liberal Arts from Nassau Community College; a B.A. in Japanese Language and Linguistics from The University of Rochester; an M.A. in Linguistics from Indiana University; and an M.A. in Communications from Hofstra University. She serves as the speaker series co-chair of the Academic Senate International Education Committee and as secretary to the ESL/LINCC advisory board. She was assessment course manager of COM030/103 and COM220, and co-advisor of the Communications Club.

Summary of Presentation

I am always looking for ways to make the classroom interactive, student centered, interesting, and effective. Each of my courses is a living thing, ever changing and growing, and hopefully getting better. But how can I get my students to take responsibility and ownership? Many instructors agonize over this question. At the 2008 Assessment Symposium, Professors Diana Milillo and Esther Bogin presented the results of their study “Faculty and Student Impressions of Student Responsibility.” This inspired me to develop a way to encourage students to take responsibility for and ownership of the course. I focused on four main areas: student behavior, course content, skills, and making connections.
Student Behavior

Students must know what it means to be a college student—what behaviors will enable them to be successful in college. To this end, the first day of class was spent making students aware of what they need to do. They worked in pairs making a list of what they think a successful college student does in and out of the classroom. After the pairs completed their list, they were given the list of Student Responsibility Survey Items, developed by Professors Milillo and Bogin. They were then instructed to note anything they didn’t understand or anything they found surprising. This lead to a discussion of some differences between high school and college, as well as the reason some items are important, such as joining clubs or attending events on campus.

They were then required to create a Self Fulfilling Prophecy, beginning with their grade in the class and all of the behaviors it would take to get that grade. The Self Fulfilling Prophecy was written as if it were already true, and as a positive statement, i.e.

“My grade in COM 220 was an A.”
“I always attend class.”
“I am prepared for class.”
“I keep track of what was going on through the syllabus.”

This document goes back and forth between the professor and students until the grade and the behaviors match. The students were also required to take an online quiz, on Blackboard (CE6), in reference to the syllabus, which holds them accountable for the content of that document.

During the semester, to ensure that students read their assignments before class, students were required to present part of the class content every class. Also, I wanted the students to see one another as resources. Therefore, when students asked a question in class, the question was
redirected to their classmates, i.e.: “Who can answer that question?” The students were also required to peer review one another’s work on a regular basis, thus reinforcing the idea that they could help one another, and that the professor was not the only resource for help and information.

**Course Content**

Of course, we want students to remember the content of the course. Holding the students responsible for presenting the content of the class helps tremendously in this goal. Teaching was the best way to remember. It also required the students to understand the content because when their classmates asked questions, the presenter needed be able to answer them.

**Skills**

There are four skills I want students to have by the end of the semester. They are: how to 1) do research; 2) write a research paper, 3) write a bibliography using MLA format, and 4) how to present their work effectively. In the beginning of the semester, students were required to start their research by reading one journal article or book chapter on a related topic that interested them. They built on this throughout the semester, expanding their research and learning how to find credible, college level resources, and how to figure out what does not fit into that category.

They wrote a research paper in five stages. The first four stages were evaluated but not graded. They were also peer reviewed. There were no formal classes on how to conduct research or how to write a paper, and questions were addressed in class as they came up. However, part of one class was devoted to learning how to write a bibliography using MLA format. This was reinforced in their peer review sessions, which made the concept more relevant to the students and their work.
As mentioned above, the students presented in every class. At the beginning of the semester, they presented in their seats, informally. The presentations become more and more formal as the semester progressed, until they stood at the lectern in front of the class. The professor evaluated the presentations. Additionally, during the course of the semester, the class attended presentations on campus, which stimulated discussions of concepts and skills of public speaking. Only the final presentation was graded formally.

Make Connections

Finally, it is helpful when students can make connections. I wanted the students to make connections between my class and other classes, as well as between my class and the world outside the college. To do this, I began by asking them if there were connections, which lead to discussions of connections between this class and other classes. When the students did not see a connection, I suggested them.

According to an informal survey at the end of the semester, the students did learn all that I was hoping. Their grades and work also support this. They did mention in the survey that the class was a lot of work, and it was. I believe, however, that it was worth it.
ASSESSMENT/RETENTION: A STUDENT PERSONNEL SERVICES PERSPECTIVE

Genette Alvarez-Ortiz, M.A.
Assistant Professor, Student Personnel Services Department

Professor Genette Alvarez-Ortiz's 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.

Summary of Presentation

The Student Personnel Services Department is unique in the educational system of Nassau Community College in that we not only teach courses, but we provide counseling services to students as well. These roles have provided us with an opportunity to better understand the challenges faced by the students both inside and outside of the classroom. Our departmental committees (Assessment, SPS093 Steering, Planning, and Public Relations) work together to develop outreach initiatives that can help our students become successful in their pursuit of earning a degree. One of these initiatives is the development of an assessment tool to collect information about the students' personal and social development. This assessment survey has been invaluable in helping the Department improve services to our students. It has also identified ongoing challenges in providing outreach efforts to the student population.

In response to the Middle States Review, the Department created an assessment tool to collect information about our counseling services. This was in addition to the traditional assessment we conduct for teaching. We asked each unit (Student Activities, Educational Counseling, Transfer Counseling, Job Placement, Career Counseling, Center for Students with Disabilities, and Psychological Counseling) to create an assessment survey to accurately assess their services. We then consolidated these surveys into one tool with questions that assessed the
personal and social development of students, and conducted a one month pilot study during February 2008.

The results showed that the students benefitted from interactions with counselors and by attending the various workshops offered throughout the semester. Based on the findings from the survey, our department took concrete actions such as offering workshops at different days and times including evening hours. As an outreach initiative, our department held its first SPS Fair in the College Center Building, which attracted many students and classes. During the academic year, satellite tables were set up outside of Top Flight and the Multipurpose Room. Counselors volunteered to meet with students and to give out flyers and informational pamphlets. Also, counselors from the various units were invited as presenters to speak in the NCC 101 classes and other classes as well.

The question: “Why do we care about assessment?” always comes up. The answer is: “Because we want our students to succeed!” It is our responsibility to be mindful of our goals and objectives to help students succeed, and we have to ask ourselves on a regular basis if we are doing a good job. Therefore, the Student Personnel Services Department believes that assessment helps us to stay on focus with that task.
VISION AND REVISION: ASSESSING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE REVISION PROCESS

Virginia Hromulak, M.A.  
Assistant Professor, English

Amy King, M.A., M.F.A.  
Assistant Professor, English

Professor Virginia Hromulak earned her B.A. in Literature at SUNY Purchase, her M.A. in English with a concentration in Composition Theory at Western Connecticut State University, and has done her doctoral work in British Romanticism at Fordham University, expecting to complete and defend her dissertation in the fall of 2009. Her academic interests and research focus on concepts of aporia and self-reflexivity in British Romantic poetry as well as the study of British print culture of the early 19th century. Prof. Hromulak has been a member of and secretary for the department Assessment Committee since 2003 and has served as Assessment Coordinator for the English Department and the Department Coordinator for the SUNY/GEAR campuswide assessment of Critical Thinking. She joined the Academic Senate Assessment Committee in 2006. Prof. Hromulak also co-coordinates the annual Honors colloquium and serves as Faculty Advisor to the Honors interdisciplinary research journal, Veritas. She received the Honors Program Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2009.

Professor Amy King received a B.S. in English and Women’s Studies from Towson University in 1994, an M.A. in American Studies from SUNY Buffalo in 1997, and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Brooklyn College in 2000. She has been a member of the Academic Senate Assessment Committee for five years. She is the author of I’m the Man Who Loves You and Antidotes for an Alibi, both from Blazevox Books, The People Instruments (Pavement Saw Press), Kiss Me With the Mouth of Your Country (Dusie Press), and forthcoming, Slaves to Do These Things (Blazevox Books). Prof. King edits the Poetics List, sponsored by The Electronic Poetry Center (SUNY-Buffalo/University of Pennsylvania), moderates the Women’s Poetry Listserv (WOMPO) and the Goodreads Poetry! Group. For information on the reading series Amy co-curates, visit The Stain of Poetry: A Reading Series blog or visit her at http://amyking.org.
Summary of Presentation

Our presentation focused on a modification recently implemented by the English Department in response to findings of the Fall 2008 Critical Thinking assessment project. The results of the project, in which faculty analyzed students' first and second essay drafts for substantive changes, indicated a need to strengthen the process of revision across the department’s writing courses. After providing a brief background on the assessment, we outlined the findings and then shared the department's response to those findings, namely, a department-wide colloquium that examined the role of critical thinking in the revision process. A summary of our presentation follows.

At the outset of the Fall 2008 semester, the English Department implemented the SUNY/GEAR Critical Thinking initiative, specifically considering the following learning outcomes required to be assessed by SUNY: (1) students will identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and others’ work and (2) students will develop well-reasoned arguments. The department assessment committee opted to use an essay developed by argumentation as the instrument of assessment because thesis-driven writing is directly correlated to critical thinking and the SUNY learning outcomes. The assessment involved a sample size of 300 with a reliability size of 60; normed faculty readers analyzed first and second essay drafts against both outcomes. The overall findings of the assessment indicated that students' ability to analyze and evaluate arguments whether their own or those of others "generally approached" instructors' expectations. Overall, the data suggested that students experience difficulty in suspending their worldview and in applying critical thinking to their own writing, steps they must take in the revision process.
The results of the Critical Thinking assessment clearly indicated to members of the committee that the process of revision needed strengthening. In response to those results, the committee sponsored a department-wide colloquium entitled “Creating a Culture of Revision” on November 8, 2008, in order (1) to speculate on reasons for student lack of engagement in substantive revision and (2) to suggest modifications that would enhance student learning in the revision process.

In addressing the former goal of the colloquium, faculty discussed possible causes for the revision dilemma, including the likelihood that students are unaware of the meaning and importance of revision, that they tend to conflate editing with proofreading, or that they consider revision optional or punitive. With regard to the latter goal, faculty were invited to attend workshops by four faculty members offering pedagogical strategies that have proven effective for them. A brief description of each workshop is provided herein:

- **“Revising the Personal Narrative to Generate a Connection with the Scholarly Community”**. A two-part assignment was offered, using photography as a medium through which students cultivate a personal narrative and then reimagine/revision their narratives by responding to scholarly articles or published essays.

- **“Incremental Assignments as a Means to Revision”**. A cumulative approach to revision was shared, one that involves incremental assignments, thereby building into it the revisioning process with the completion of each part of the assignment.

- **“Reframing Writing through Reordering and Restructuring”**. A method of reframing the essay through restructuring was offered along with an overview of current scholarship on integrating critical thinking strategies into the revision process.
“Using Student Conferences to Generate Revision”. Conferencing was offered as a medium through which to guide students into understanding revision, providing students with sample handouts as well as sample student papers before and after revision so that students can evaluate the extent and success of revision.

The colloquium concluded with an open session designed to give attending faculty an opportunity to share their own methodology on revision and to speculate on what we might do as a department to improve this aspect of student writing.

Faculty feedback on the colloquium was extremely positive, some of which was captured in a document entitled "Summaries of Responses to Revision Presenters" and distributed to department faculty.

Our department assessment committee is currently following up on the colloquium in two distinct ways: (1) a questionnaire was created and distributed to faculty to determine whether they have opted to use some of the strategies of revision shared at the colloquium and (2) the department is preparing to reassess critical thinking in the revision process in the next academic year.
Thinking Critically Through Philosophical Writing

Evelyn Wortsman Deluty, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Philosophy

Dr. Evelyn Wortsman Deluty has taught at Nassau Community College since 1993. Dr. Deluty completed her B.A. at Barnard College of Columbia University and her Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. She has published in the *International Philosophical Quarterly* and *Consciousness and Emotion*. Her research focuses on the work of Kant, Cassirer, and Wittgenstein. Dr. Deluty is a recipient of the Honors Program Excellence in Teaching Award (2001) and the SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching (2003). She is the incoming chair of the Promotion and Tenure Committee and served previously as the Secretary of the Academic Senate.

Summary of Presentation

Introduction

Philosophical writing serves as a pedagogic tool that taps students’ inner resources to nurture reflective inquiry. When students analyze arguments in texts through philosophical writing, they are animated to think for themselves and become participants in the process of inquiry rather than passive bystanders. Some students do not think critically because they have never cultivated the habit, just as some people are physically out of shape because they do not exercise. Philosophical writing transforms students from passive bystanders to active thinkers. As an assessment tool, it measures performance—not just competence.
Thinking Critically in Philosophy

In philosophy, the question of how to think critically is anchored in the concept of an argument. When we argue in everyday life, our disputes more often than not spiral into shouting matches that sometimes risk spilling over into physical assaults. A philosophical argument differs from verbal, emotionally charged sparring of this kind. In a philosophical argument one or more statements, called premises, ground a conclusion. The logical inference, i.e., the pattern of reasoning, arises when a claim functions structurally to provide evidence for a conclusion. This structural relationship helps us to evaluate and judge situations based on reasons rather than emotions or persuasive influences.

The concept of philosophical argumentation emerges in the 6th century B.C.E. when Thales, the philosopher of science, justifies his claims about the universe through independent reasons rather than the gods or goddesses of Greek mythology. Two hundred years later, Aristotle challenges the infinite regress in Thales’ reasoning, thereby acknowledging the advent of philosophical argumentation.

Concrete Actions in the Classroom

My teaching methodology has been strongly influenced by my participation in the 2007 Active Learning Seminar. Students learn to think critically when the classroom culture engages them actively. Philosophical writing harnesses that energy to guide students to express their thoughts. Techniques I use to animate students to think critically in their writing include:

- Dividing class into small groups to generate discussion as a preamble to writing
- Mapping steps of inference on the board
- Establishing relevance of abstract concepts
- Guiding students to identify when they are begging the question
Distinguishing a textual critique from an opinion

Results of Philosophical Writing as an Assessment Tool

Some students never realize that thinking matters. Their smug mockery of any reflective endeavor threatens their comfort zone and creates an obstacle to thinking critically. They simply devalue it. Others have only been told to regurgitate information but have never been asked to develop a critical position of their own. They are simply not motivated to work at writing. However, in many instances, even the most recalcitrant student is jolted by Socrates’ claim that blind obedience to authority culminates in brainwashing and threatens any democracy. Then there are the rare moments when a student shares the realization that philosophical writing can be empowering.

Conclusion

Learning how to think is a slow, painstaking process but one well worth cultivating. The viability of our democracy hinges on whether or not we as citizens think critically. Philosophical writing can begin to nurture this ability in our students and awaken their judgment. It not only infuses learning with an essential competency, but also fosters the habit of reflective inquiry.