

Senate Assessment Council

Year-End Report for 2011/2012

Members:

Heejung An, Education
Jacob Felson, Humanities and Social Sciences, chair
Martin Gritsch, Business
Wooi Lim, Science and Health
Ray Schwartz, Library
Loretta Mc Laughlin-Vignier, Communications
Tristan Tosh, Campus Activities
Jane Zeff, Director, Institutional Research & Assessment

Discussion of Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses

One of the standing charges of the Assessment Council is to stimulate faculty engagement in the assessment process. In previous years, members of the Assessment Council have sought to foster faculty engagement in assessment activities by holding workshops to review various assessment tools. In a similar vein, Jacob Felson initiated and helped organize a forum during the Fall 2011 semester to discuss a recently published book on assessment called *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (2011). This forum was organized in collaboration with co-directors of the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) Jim Hauser and Bob Rosen, whose assistance was essential to the success of the event.

CTE co-directors Bob Rosen and Jim Hauser handled the logistics of the event and provided copies of the book to all participants. At the event, Rosen and Hauser acted as mediators facilitating discussion. Felson, in his role as chair of the Assessment Council, chose the book for discussion, wrote a brief advertisement, initiated discussion of the book at the forum and provided an outline of key points in the text to interested participants.

Faculty interest in the event exceeded the expectations of the organizers. An email advertisement generated interest from twenty-two people. Approximately twenty faculty members from a great range of departments attended the event. Both full-time and adjunct faculty members were represented. A majority of participants were from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, though there were also faculty from the College of Science and Health, the College of Education, and the College of Arts and Communication.

The discussion at the forum focused on results of a longitudinal essay test of critical thinking skills called the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) test, which has been administered to

thousands of undergraduate students at a diverse array of colleges and universities. Discussion of this assessment tool is especially pertinent since William Paterson's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment will be administering this exam to a sample of about 100 students at William Paterson soon.

Assessment of Oral Proficiency Outcomes

The Assessment Council was charged with helping the UCC Council develop student learning outcomes for oral communications. As the representative from the communications department, Loretta McLaughlin-Vignier spearheaded this effort.

Based on conversations with Communications Department faculty who specialize in interpersonal communication, McLaughlin-Vignier suggested the following student learning outcomes for select UCC courses:

- Research and gather supporting material for the speech
- Effectively organize and adapt to the audience
- Demonstrate effective delivery skills
- Effective use of visual aids
- Practice an ethical approach to public speaking
 - Provide accurate information
 - Do the research
 - Don't utilize falsehoods or propaganda

McLaughlin-Vignier also provided rubrics developed by communications faculty that can be used to guide the development of rubrics for oral presentations in other disciplines.

Commentary on Proposed Dashboard Indicators for the University

As chair of the Assessment Council, Felson provided oral and written comments on the revised dashboard indicators for the University. Some key points:

- The University plans to increase enrollment by at least 500 students. A concern may be raised about whether enrollment increases can be accomplished without lowering admission standards. It appears that William Paterson is not in a position where it can lower admission standards without admitting a good number of students who lack the skills and/or study habits expected of college students. As it is, it is Felson's impression that faculty concerns about ill-prepared students are not uncommon.
- Tracking average SAT scores of incoming freshmen may not be meaningful without accounting for trends at other colleges and universities. The trends in average SAT

scores that we observe at William Paterson may simply reflect trends at the local, regional or nationwide level. Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Felson found that trends for average SAT at WPU and Montclair were essentially parallel. For this reason, it is unlikely that any change in the preparedness of students (as measured by SAT) at William Paterson over the last 5-6 years is due to something particular happening at WPU. It is more likely that trends at WPU are driven substantially by larger trends in the college-going public.

- The University sets retention rate targets. However, retention rate may not be a good metric for targeting. It is unclear whether higher retention rates are necessarily better than lower retention rates. Higher retention rates could reflect more effective instruction and advisement, but could also reflect weaker academic standards.
- In order to measure how William Paterson is doing with respect to the average SAT of incoming freshmen and/or retention rates, perhaps we should consider residual rather than absolute measures. Statistical methods such as regression can be used to examine whether and how William Paterson differs from similar institutions. These methods can also be used to adjust for change over time in order to see whether trends at William Paterson can be attributed to local, regional or national phenomena.