

# LEARNING ASSESSMENT BULLETIN

NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM THE  
LANEY COLLEGE LEARNING ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE  
ISSUE 1 - MARCH 2006

## Assessment Inventory Survey Results

The results of the survey have been tabulated and the comments have been collected. You can take a look at the complete results on the Learning Assessment Committee website (go to the address below, and then click on "documents").

From the survey results, we decided that one very important task for the Learning Assessment Committee should be to disseminate information about assessment to faculty. We decided on creating a newsletter, which will provide information in small, easily digestible pieces.

One of the most obvious things apparent from the results of the survey was that most respondents didn't seem to know what we meant by "assessment". As you may know, the accreditation standards were changed just after we completed our last accreditation self-study report. The new standards will rate us on whether or not we're systematically assessing student learning and whether or not there's a broad, institution-wide commitment to assessment. This means that if only a few instructors are assessing outcomes but there's no serious, college-wide progress, the accreditation commission will not be very impressed with us.

## What is Assessment?

The "assessment" that we are talking about is not the same as what happens in the

Assessment Center on campus. The Assessment Center gives tests to place students in the appropriate Math, English, or ESL class. The "assessment" that we're talking about actually has nothing to do with placing students in appropriate classes. Here are a couple of useful definitions of assessment:

"Assessment of Student Learning can be defined as *the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning.*" (Barbara E. Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, p. 2)

"Assessment is the ongoing process of:

- Establishing clear, measurable expected *outcomes* of student learning.
- Ensuring that students have sufficient *opportunities* to achieve those outcomes.
- Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting *evidence* to determine how well student learning matches our expectations.
- Using the resulting information to understand and *improve* student learning."

(Linda Suskie, *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*, p. 3.)

Assessment is not meant to single out any specific teachers or students – the intent is to get a broad, overall view of general strengths and weaknesses and come up with changes

Want to learn more? Highly recommended: *Assessing Student Learning in Community Colleges* (2004) – an online course or downloadable workbook for various topics and hands-on work in assessment. You can access it at: <http://online.bakersfieldcollege.edu/courseassessment/>

Also check out the Learning Assessment Committee website:

[http://www.laney.peralta.edu/apps/comm.asp?\\$1=30343](http://www.laney.peralta.edu/apps/comm.asp?$1=30343)

To navigate to the LAC website from the Laney website, click on Office of Instruction: Shared Governance: Committees: Learning Assessment Committee

**Come to our bi-monthly brown bag discussions on assessment!**

Friendly, low-key, and informative.

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Wednesday April 5, Wednesday May 3, Thursday May 11

that can help all students learn better.

The aim in the assessment movement is to focus on what the students are able to demonstrate by the end of the course or program, rather than focusing on what the instructors are teaching. One of the important parts of this is to collect **evidence** of student learning in order to be accountable to external audiences.

It turns out that accrediting organizations are not necessarily interested in the results of the assessments, but they do want to know that the college has a system in place to ensure that assessment is happening in a systematic way and the results are used for improvement and planning.

#### **Assessment vs. Grades**

Assessment is not the same as giving grades. Grades do not give any information about specific strengths and weaknesses of students. If a student gets a B in a class, does that mean that their performance was uniformly very good on all assignments and tests? Maybe they did very well on certain aspects and not so well on others. In fact, maybe the entire class did very well on certain aspects and not very well on others. If this is what you find, you can focus your efforts for improvement on the problematic aspects.

#### **General Information about Assessment**

Each college is expected to assess student learning at the course level, at the program level, and at the institution level. Course level assessment is something that each individual instructor can do. Program level assessment

will involve discussion and cooperation among the entire department. Institution-wide assessment will involve discussions across the entire college.

The first step in the assessment process involves developing **student learning outcomes**, which are statements that describe what a student will be able to **do** at the end of the course or program. Learning outcomes include active verbs and should be assessable. Outcomes should emphasize higher-order thinking skills and should focus on the “big picture” rather than on minutiae. An example of a course level learning outcome might be: “Analyze the results of laboratory experiments and evaluate sources of error.” Another example: “Perform laboratory techniques safely and accurately.”

The second step is to decide how you will assess whether students are able to do the things you want them to be able to do. Assessment methods can be direct or indirect, and it is recommended that a combination of methods be used. Examples of direct assessment methods would be tests or individual test questions, embedded class assignments, and portfolios of student work. Indirect assessment methods include surveys, interviews, and focus groups. As you can imagine, some of these assessment methods are more time consuming than others!

After you collect assessment data, the next step is to organize it, think about it, and analyze it, and then (most importantly) **use the information for improvement** of your class or the program as a whole.

Stay tuned for more information!

Learning Assessment Committee Members: Linda Sanford, Cheli Fossum (co-chairs), Tracy Camp, Vina Cera, Jackie Graves, Evelyn Lord, Ann McMurdo, David Mitchell, Mae Frances Moore, Louis Quindlen, Karolyn van Putten, Ed Wright

**Comments? Questions? Feedback? Send e-mail to [mfossum@peralta.edu](mailto:mfossum@peralta.edu)**

