

Highlights of 2011 Department Outcomes Assessment Reports

The following represent highlights of recent assessment activities and related outcomes from academic departments across the University that demonstrate a comprehensive use of data to improve teaching, learning, and programs and services.

Each spring and summer for the last five years, a team of **English** first-year writing faculty and instructors have reviewed student writing assignments according to a departmental rubric and focused on a modified set of skills based in part on the assessment from the previous year. Assessment has expanded from first-year writing classes to assessment of all English majors, for which seniors are required to submit a portfolio. In a pilot assessment of portfolios in fall 2010, the department focus was on the student writer's ability to develop an argument, with particular focus on three skills drawn from a list of Learning Outcomes endorsed by the Department:

- Close reading and interpretation of texts
- Sustained development of an argument
- Nonperfunctory use of sources and citations

A total of 18 portfolios were analyzed in Spring 2011 and the evident skill in select learning outcomes was classified as "Incompetent", "Marginally Competent", "Competent", "Strong" or "Masterful". The weakest results were in use of sources and citations, in which only 4 artifacts exceeded "competent". In a follow up, faculty were surveyed on the extent to which these topics are covered in their course sections; data indicated coverage of these topics across sections. Therefore, this summer the department will strategize alternative ways on how to strengthen this skill in students majoring in English.

Data from annual surveys of **Physics** alumni indicated that one of the most important factors for students' future success is participation in research under the supervision of a faculty member. Therefore, in 2008 the department increased its efforts to involve all students in research (with presentation/ publications) as a component of their educational program. Currently, 90% of current Physics students are involved in research projects and present their results in regional, national, and international conferences. The department keeps tracks of the outcomes for its majors as one way to track effectiveness of the program. All of the graduates for 2009 and 2010 were either accepted to Ph.D. programs with full scholarships or found employment in the high-tech industry. SHU engineering students perform well at NJIT and the majority of them make the NJIT's Dean's List. According to the Dean of the College of Engineering at NJIT, these students are well prepared to study at their competitive level. In recent years seniors have gone on to graduate program in

physics at NJIT and Michigan State University, and to graduate program in Biomedical Engineering at NJIT. In 2011, graduating seniors were accepted to graduate programs such as the Mechanical Engineering program at Princeton, the Physics Department at Vanderbilt University, and to Drexel University, the University of Connecticut, Northwestern University, and Northeastern University.

A new Senior Survey was conducted in Spring 2011 by **Political Science**, with responses from 22 seniors. Strongest positive responses were for the opportunity to interact with professors (95.4% of responses were “Excellent” or “Above Average”) and for Quality of teaching (100% of responses were “Excellent” or “Above Average”). Least satisfaction was for Availability of Outside of Class activity (59.1% rated “Average” or less) and Career Counseling (50% rated “Average” or less). Department responses to these data and any subsequent action items will be part of the first Departmental meeting in the Fall 2011 semester. As part of their ongoing commitment to assessment, the department created an Assessment Task Force, chaired by Dr. Robert Pallitto, with Drs. Anne Hewitt and Jeffrey Togman as additional members. This task force is charged with considering the creation of an entrance survey, recommending improvements to the existing exit survey, and studying the possibility of creating a writing portfolio for political science majors.

The **Psychology** Department engaged in a multi-level exercise to explore the alignment of the undergraduate curriculum with recently developed curricular guidelines from the American Psychological Association. Curricular changes in response to this assessment included the proposal and approval of a new BS degree in Psychology. Both students and faculty were surveyed in different ways on the appearance of the APA’s 10 categories of psychological learning outcomes in courses at different levels of the curriculum. . One finding was that the APA guidelines related to career planning and development were among the least covered in the department’s course offerings. In response, official links between SHU Office of Career Services and the Psychology Internship course were created. The department also initiated a one-credit Orientation to the Major course that will be required of all psychology majors. This course will outline the field of psychology in the context of students’ future careers and academic training.

A new assessment of basic knowledge of Sociology was devised by the Department of **Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work** and administered in Spring 2011. The survey included objective questions and two essay questions which have been analyzed for the level of sophistication exhibited. The Department will review the results at its first meeting in the Fall 2011 semester. Also within this department, the Social Work major was assessed by a survey to students in all Social Work classes calibrating the courses in the curriculum in which students reported encountering basic outcomes and skills of the major. As a result of

new (July 1, 2010) requirements from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), faculty members in the Social Work Program have recently engaged in a thorough analysis of their curriculum via the creation of a skills/course matrix, in which specific competencies, required by the CSWE, were inserted into each course syllabus in the program. As a result of this review, all syllabi and many courses have been reworked. Each syllabus within the Social Work Program now includes a three part process to assist in assessment efforts: specific objectives, learning outcomes, and evidence of learning. The Program is required to maintain records demonstrating that specific competencies are integrated, cumulative, and well-placed. These are reviewed periodically by the Council on Social Work Education.

The Stillman School of **Business** utilizes a variety of assessment activities, many required by AACSB accreditation. One of the more unique involves a required team project for sophomore students, the results of which are judged by panels of experts, including alumni placed in the field. Results of these panels have led to curricular changes such as the introduction of a Business Writing course. One of the Stillman School's general competencies is Communications and one way this skill is evaluated is through the use of an individual writing assignment. As part of the School's Senior and Sophomore Assessment Panels, students are required to prepare a brief business communiqué responding to a prompt within 30 minutes. The number of students failing the writing component of the assessment process gave rise to concerns about students' preparedness for writing concise and logically crafted memos. These findings were corroborated by concerns expressed by alumni about poor writing skills observed in their places of employment. In response, during the 2004-2005 academic year, nearly 20 Stillman business faculty members participated in a year-long initiative, "Writing Across the Curriculum." Faculty from the Department of English led workshops for Stillman faculty to address how they could increase the number and variety of writing assignments in business courses. At the same time, the School's Undergraduate Education Policy Committee worked with colleagues in the Department of English to design a course, Business Writing (ENGL 2516), which was implemented as a requirement for the first time in the Fall 2005 semester. Stillman students are now required to take ENGL 2516 as one of their required communications courses. Faculty in the Department of English score the students' writing assignments, providing direct feedback on their skills in this area. The assignment, rubric and results are reviewed each year by the Department of English as well as the Stillman School's faculty. Several minor changes have been made to the Business Writing course over time addressing weaknesses identified in the results.

In 2008, the Whitehead School of **Diplomacy**, in preparation for its first regular Program Review, conducted surveys and focus groups with enrolled students, and surveyed alumni, on a variety of topics. Results

confirmed that the recently revised undergraduate and graduate curricula were generally meeting student needs in acquiring research, analytical, writing, and oral communication skills. One of the most striking patterns was dissatisfaction with career and internship advisement, which led the School to enhance its office of Internships and Career Development.

The College of Education and Human Services also engages in a variety of assessment activities, many required by NCATE accreditation. The Department of **Educational Studies** created two new one-credit courses for students in Elementary and Secondary Special Education to increase awareness of special student needs and to increase numeracy skills. These courses were developed partly in response to Field experience evaluations and oral input from cooperating teachers, supervisors, and students.

The Department of **Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy** reviews both external tests (such as licensure exams) and local instruments (such as alumni surveys). Scores of concern on the 2009 school leader licensure exams led the department to create new opportunities in the curriculum for students to reflect on policy.

At the end of each semester, faculty in the **Department of Speech-Language Pathology** collect data on how students are progressing towards acquisition of specific knowledge and skills in speech-language pathology as required by the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology. This progress is recorded on a Knowledge and Skills Acquisition Documents (KASA) tracking form. As a result of reviewing KASA data from multiple cohorts, the faculty infused more skills-based activities into academic courses, such as the Fluency course. Students had consistently reported that there was limited opportunity to evaluate stuttering in adults and children. This was reported during exit interviews, observed during portfolio review by advisors, and reported by clinical supervisors in the field. As a result, changes were made to course content and interactive opportunities for enhanced learning were provided. These included inviting a guest speaker who stutters to class to present about the psychosocial impact of stuttering. Students ask questions of the speaker in an interactive format, which is similar to an intake process in a clinic. Students are provided a recorded sample of the individual's speech patterns for analysis. Additional samples of dysfluent speech from children and adults are provided to students to offer enhanced learning opportunities.

Faculty in the Chinese language program in the **Department of Languages and Culture** use both formative and summative assessments to evaluate student learning. A critical outcome for students in the major is meaningful, fluent communication. Therefore the department integrates the annual Chinese speech contest

and the oral interview into assessments. For the speech contest, three external Chinese language teachers are invited to judge students' speaking performance, and for the oral interview, native speakers are brought in to converse with students. Although these assessments pose a real challenge for students, they are greatly enjoyed by them, as they experience a sense of achievement in using the language by interacting with natives. The faculty also use activities such as a skit performance at China Night, a video production task, and the language exchange project to evaluate student learning. The Japanese program has adapted Digital Storytelling for Japanese Writing as an assessment activity. In collaboration with the Department of Informational Technology, students submit essays using digital storytelling software. Some of these are published on SHU Tube. Beginning with the spring 2010 semester, the program began to survey students about their digital storytelling experiences as a self-assessment tool. The results, *Applying Digital Storytelling into the Beginner's Level Japanese Writing*, were published in the proceedings of the 25th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Association of Teachers of Japanese, Duke University, August, 2010. These data confirmed the decision to include digital storytelling in the writing curriculum. Student outcomes were improved by modifying grading rubrics, and having students review their product in advance with peers, colleagues, teaching assistants and native speakers. To further improve outcomes, the program has enabled students to receive additional tutoring through the academic resource center and interactive course experiences.

As of 2009-10, two new courses were added to some curricula in the Department of **Professional Psychology and Family Therapy** as a departmental response to trends noticed in the department's comprehensive exams, administered twice a year. The faculty interpreted the patterns as reflecting a need for more knowledge about learning concepts. A review of test scores revealed increased pass rates for the overall cohort. In addition, analysis of specific concepts revealed increased scores in learning and behavior domains.

Outcomes assessment in the Department of **Physician Assistant** is extensive and sophisticated, and the Department deliberates regularly on changes suggested by the results. The placement of the Biostatistics Course in the curriculum has been modified twice since 2007 in reaction to student satisfaction results and performance on standardized tests. An exercise to compare the program's curriculum with national accreditation standards led to a number of curricular changes in Fall 2010. Every summer, at their annual retreat, the faculty analyze data gathered throughout the year (course grades, rotation grades, summative evaluation scores, preceptor evaluations, standardized test scores, etc.) to see if the program is meeting its goals and objectives. They revisit the program's mission statement as well as the program's goals and objectives, and recommend changes to strengthen the overall program and improve student learning.

Graduates of the **Physical Therapy** program are required to pass the Physical Therapy Professional examination administered by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) before beginning

practice. While the graduates' 3-year cumulative passing rates approximate 95%, the number of students needing to take the exam more than once is higher than desired (between 14-20% over the past 3 years). The department has initiated a number of efforts to improve graduates' first-time pass rate: incorporated electronic test-taking methods into courses to increase familiarity with the FSBPT exam; provided board exam review materials for students; restructured course examination questions to be consistent with the format of licensure exam questions; revised course syllabi to reflect a greater breadth and depth of content consistent with contemporary practice; integrated lecture and contextual learning experiences into the final capstone class to enhance test-taking abilities; and evaluated and adjusted admissions requirements to be consistent with FSBPT requirements.

In Fall 2008, advisement practices in the **College of Nursing** were changed to provide students with a panel of advisers that would remain the same through students' careers; this change was in response to trends in the annual EBI Exit Survey of Nursing graduates. The College uses data from the Health Education Systems Incorporated (HESI) exam to adjust curriculum and evaluate individual student progress. Data from the exam is used to review student knowledge in content areas and provides the faculty with the ability to review data individually as well as by cohort. Individual students are counseled on their performance and those at risk are offered remediation and required to take alternate versions of the exam. Faculty plan to track trends in critical thinking scores on the test and institute appropriate actions based on data.

Students in Graphic Design from the **Department of Communications and the Arts** are required to submit a final portfolio in front of faculty and external evaluators. Students are assessed on presentation skills, portfolio assembly, creative design, technical expertise, and overall portfolio quality. Following assessment of the Class of 2011, the faculty reviewed the portfolio results and suggested a number of program modification based on the data which will be considered by the department:

- Introduce presentation skills into earlier courses to foster confidence and improve communication;
- Put greater emphasis on visual presentation skills in the senior practicum seminar course;
- Merge the interactive media, computer graphics, and animation concentrations with the graphic art and design program;
- Assure that the typography courses address print and web production issues; and
- Enable students to develop artwork that is more fully original and digitally crafted to improve the quality of the imagery in the print and web mediums.

The University launched a new **Core Curriculum** in Fall 2007 with a staggered introduction of its chief components, being three uniform courses taken by all first-year students, sophomores and seniors, and a

system of proficiencies infused into select courses in other departments. Assessment had been built into the implementation plan, and during the introduction phase, a faculty member was assigned to manage the year's assessment plan for the Core with support from the University's Institutional Research office. Because of the high proportion of the Core courses that are drawn from a uniform syllabus, faculty responses to assessment results generally affects all sections (and thus all students). For example, a universal film critique assignment proved unsatisfactory and unpopular among students and was phased out; readings that students found particularly unrewarding were carefully reviewed and faculty given more options with regard to coverage of the relevant content. Data from the survey conducted in Fall 2010 indicated, with rare exception, the assigned texts were viewed favorably by students and faculty by a 2 to 1 margin or more.

Based on feedback from students completing pediatric fieldwork placements, and review of evaluations completed by fieldwork educators, the faculty in the **Department of Occupational Therapy** revised the content of the didactic pediatric course, updated the syllabus, and assigned the course to a new instructor. As the department plans their new curriculum, they are increasing the number of credit hours offered in pediatrics, as well as ensuring that relationships between fieldwork and didactic courses are strengthened.

Each year, the Department of **Biological Sciences** has each senior biology major complete an outcome assessment form which involves a number of multiple choice questions related to content in required and elective courses. Instructors are provided with aggregate data from the assessments so they can learn how well students are retaining information from their courses and make adjustments in coverage of certain concepts. Many of the biology alumni go on to take standardized tests for admission to medical, veterinary, or dental school. The department works with the Director of the Pre-Health Program to identify particular areas of difficulty students have in these tests. Numeracy has been identified as an area of difficulty. This has led to discussions among chairs of Biology, Chemistry and Physics on how to address this concern. The Biology department increased the number of lab-based numeracy problems into the four required courses. As of Fall 2010, the Math SAT requirement for admission into the Biology major was raised from 550 to 580 in response to these findings.

Among its other assessments, the Department of **Athletic Training** reviews the Board of Certification (BOC) test results taken by graduating students to earn their credential to practice in the profession. Recent results led the Department to make changes to strengthen the domain of health care administration in coursework and to change the start date of the program to allow time to address the material in sufficient manner and allow enough time for students to study for the board exam. The success rate on the BOC examination and employment placement rate of graduates are key indicators that SHU Athletic Training graduates are well prepared for entry-level practice.