

Assessment of Student Learning

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Academic Affairs Launches Assessment Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of the University of Wyoming assessment of student learning newsletter! The newsletter will be published and distributed twice each year in February and September. Each issue will contain information about the latest assessment events, including the annual fall forum and other assessment related workshops held throughout the year. It will also profile interesting assessment projects happening across campus and introduce you to fellow faculty and staff who are actively involved in the assessment of student learning.

We must increase awareness of the well designed programs that assess the effectiveness of

our instruction by focusing on student learning. What do we know about learning outcomes for our majors and the USP, and are we satisfied with the results once we have some data? This newsletter is one way we can share our success and learn from our UW colleagues.

If you have an interesting project you would like to see profiled or have suggestions for articles in an upcoming issue, please contact Erika Prager in the Office of Academic Affairs at ekprager@uwyo.edu or 766-2897.

—Rollin Abernethy
Office of Academic Affairs

Meet the University Assessment Specialist

By Rollin Abernethy, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs

Last March, Erika Prager started at the University of Wyoming as the university assessment specialist. This new, part-time position was created to facilitate and organize the university's assessment efforts. Erika is currently working with the college assessment coordinators and the assessment grant recipients on a wide variety of projects, including planning and conducting workshops, updating the assessment of student learning Web site, and assisting academic departments with creating and implementing their assessment plans.

Erika has lived in Laramie since August 2004. She brings a wide variety of assessment and institutional research experience with her, having served as director of research and planning at Green River Community College in Auburn, Wash., for six of the last eight years. She also spent a year working at the Washington State House of Representatives as a research analyst for the Higher Education Committee.

Erika is available to assist with specific assessment projects or to answer your general assessment questions. Her office is located in 303 Old Main. She can be reached at 766-2897 or at ekprager@uwyo.edu.



Erika Prager, university assessment specialist, and her daughter, Lily.

In the Spotlight: Biology Program

By Erika Prager, University Assessment Specialist



Mark Lyford, director of general biology program, backpacking in the Bighorn Mountains with his dog, Sebastian.

Mark Lyford has been director of the general biology program for the past year. In addition to working with the Executive Biology Committee to revise the biology curriculum, he is also developing and implementing a plan to assess student learning as part of the process.

“Assessment is at the center of the curriculum and program,” said Lyford. “We want to identify where we think students should be, how we are going to get there, and if we got there or not.”

To assist with these efforts, Lyford applied for an assessment assistance grant from the ECTL last year and was awarded \$2,500. Under Lyford’s leadership, the biology program has made great strides. Faculty members are nearly done with extensive curriculum revision that included omitting, developing, revising, and renumbering courses in an effort to streamline the program.

In addition, faculty members identified three overarching goals for biology students and they continue to define various objectives or specific skill areas for each goal. The three primary goals include developing research skills, improving communication skills, and synthesizing/applying information in a variety of contexts.

Although faculty members are still working to refine these goals and objectives, they are moving forward with some small efforts to assess student learning. For example, this fall faculty members teaching Biology 1010 agreed to give a 50-point exam two weeks into the semester to give students earlier feedback on their performance. This was followed by a 100-point exam two weeks later where some of the same material was covered.

Faculty members also added questions on their pretest, midterm, and final regarding graphing—one of the

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UW Selected for Nationwide Assessment Study

Last May, the University of Wyoming was selected to join the Lumina Foundation sponsored Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) Longitudinal Study. UW was one of 50 colleges and universities selected for this national four-year study of the assessment of student learning. The Council for Aid to Education (CAE) leads the study, which is focusing on general education skills—specifically critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and written communication.

“The selection process was competitive with over 144 institutions applying so we are extremely excited to have been chosen,” said Rollin Abernethy, associate vice president of academic affairs. “This is a great opportunity for us.”

The University recruited 276 incoming freshman to participate this fall. Each student completed two 90-minute assessments online. The first was a set of performance tasks to measure

a student’s ability to read, analyze, interpret, and synthesize data in a variety of contexts. The second focused on writing and included presenting and analyzing arguments.

“The CLA will help determine certain skills gained primarily through the University Studies Program,” said Abernethy. “Comparing what students know when they begin with what they know upon graduation will help establish what they learned and how we might improve our programs.”

As a member of the study group, UW will receive an institutional report at the end of each testing cycle and samples of individual student reports, as well as a comprehensive institutional report at the end of the study. UW results will be incorporated into a national database of CLA results. Students will also receive their individual results and a comparison of their performance to other students nationwide.

Because of the many details involved, Academic Affairs created a CLA implementation team last May to help carry out the study. The CLA team is chaired by Erika Prager and its members are: Rollin Abernethy (Academic Affairs), Jane Nelson (ECTL), Jonas Slonaker (University Testing Center), Shelley Dodd (Admissions), Scott Johnson (Information Technology), Kelly Lowe (LeaRN), and Sue Koller (Institutional Analysis). The faculty USP Committee and others involved with the improvement of USP will be working with the results.

UW is currently recruiting 100 seniors to participate in the study this spring. For more information, please go to uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/acadaffairs/assessment and click on “Collegiate Learning Assessment Project” on the right hand side of the page.

Fall Assessment Forum a Success

The Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning hosted the annual Fall Assessment Forum, featuring Linda Suskie, on September 19 and 20. Over 100 faculty and staff members attended the various workshops, plenary session, and individual/group meetings. Suskie is the author of *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (2004) and is currently an executive associate director at the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

"It was great to have Linda here. The forum was a good opportunity to kickoff the year. We tried to plan an event to meet the variety of faculty assessment needs," said Jane Nelson, ECTL director. "Some people attended the entire event and others chose sessions of interest."

Suskie conducted five workshops: developing learning outcomes, portfolios, rubrics, published instruments, and using assessment results. True to her style, she provided lots of examples, as well as a reading list on each topic. With her permission, her handouts and other session materials are available on the assessment Web site at uwadmweb.uwo.edu/AcadAffairs/assessment. Click on "Fall Assessment Forum" on the right side of the page to view them.

The ECTL and Academic Affairs are currently in the process of planning next year's forum. If you have ideas on how to improve the forum or would like to suggest potential speakers, please contact Nelson at jnelson@uwo.edu or 766-4847.



Jane Nelson, ECTL director



More than 70 faculty members attended the Fall Assessment Forum workshops to strengthen their abilities to assess how well students are learning. Participating in a break-out session were, from left, Jane Beiswenger, senior lecturer of Zoology and Physiology; Suskie; Phil Holt, professor of Modern and Classical Languages; and Tom Edgar, associate professor of Civil and Architectural Engineering. The Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning facilitated the forum. (UW Photo)

ECTL Announces Assessment Grant Recipients

The ECTL, in conjunction with Academic Affairs and the college assessment coordinators, awarded over \$26,000 in November to help fund various assessment-related projects.

Ten assessment assistance grants were awarded ranging from \$1,690 to \$3,000 each. The grants will fund a wide range of projects including those at the department or program level and others for various components of the University Studies Program.

Applicants have a year to complete their assessment projects. Upon completion, they must turn in a short report to the ECTL and are asked to share their project with the larger campus community either by presenting at a future ECTL workshop or by posting on the assessment of student learning Web site.

The 2004-05 academic year was the first time the ECTL awarded these grants. The 13 recipients from last year are just completing their projects and their reports will be available in February.

ELLBOGEN  CTL

Congratulations, 2005-06 Assessment Grant Recipients

John Allen, Geography
 Jessica Arnold, Criminal Justice
 Jane Beiswenger, Zoology and Physiology
 Marianne Kamp, University Studies Program
 Garth Massey, International Studies/University Studies Program
 Ed Muñoz, Chicano Studies
 Mark Potter, History
 Margaret Skinner, Zoology and Physiology
 Bill Weber, Math

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objectives identified under the research skills goal. The intent was to see what skill level students had gained with regard to graphing over the semester.

Another change was the incorporation of the classroom performance system keypad or “clicker tool” into biology lectures. The clicker is a way for students in large classes to individually respond to questions so the instructor can get an idea of how well students understand a particular point or key concept.

“We are making serious efforts to improve the outcomes in Biology 1010. This includes making sure students learn what is necessary for them to be successful in their next biology class, said Lyford. “We are also concerned about the number of students who complete the course and receive a passing grade.”

When asked to give assessment advice to fellow faculty members, Lyford recommends the following:

- ▶ Have a clear process in mind from the beginning
- ▶ Start small and don't do everything at once
- ▶ Get faculty buy-in, which means involving them in the process
- ▶ Provide clear examples of what assessment is
- ▶ It is relatively easy to embed questions into existing assignments—which can serve as both course- and program-level assessment



Mark Your Calendar

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) & Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) Results Brown Bag Session
Wednesday, April 5, 2006, from noon to 1 p.m. (Coe 307)

Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) Study—
First Year Results Brown Bag Session
Wednesday, April 12, 2006, from noon to 1 p.m. (Coe 307)

ECTL Spring Colloquium with Ken Bain,
author of *What the Best College Teachers Do*
Thursday, June 1—Friday, June 2, 2006



Congratulations,
Henry Bauer,
on your retirement!

Thank you for your service
on the College Assessment
Coordinators Committee.

The University of Wyoming assessment newsletter is published each semester (Erika Prager, university assessment specialist, editor). Any editorial comments reflect the view of the editor and not necessarily the university. Send comments, questions, and/or suggestions to Erika at 766-2897 or ekprager@uwyo.edu. Past issues are available at uwadmweb.uwyo.edu/acadaffairs/assessment/Pages/News.asp. • Persons seeking admission, employment, or access to programs of the University of Wyoming shall be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, or political belief. • If you would like more information about support for students with disabilities at UW or to receive this publication in alternative formats, please call University Disability Support Services at (307) 766-6189 or TTY (307) 766-3073. • Graphic design by Elizabeth Ono Rabel • 2006/2M/JT

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