

Assessment Steering Committee
Meeting Notes
September 13, 2010

Present: Beau Breslin, Elizabeth Karp '11, Mike Sposili, Liza Christenson, Ann Henderson, Denise Smith, Erica Bastress-Dukeheart, Winston Grady-Willis, Mimi Hellmann, Sarah Goodwin.
Absent: Jim Chansky, Sue Layden.

1. Mike updated us on the Skidmore Learning Census for alumni. We have signed on with Factfinder to run the survey for us; funding will come from a PDF the first year, then will be put in Advancement's budget; the draft has been worked on over the summer—first in a faculty workshop, then overhauled by Leanne, Lisa and Ann—and is near completion; we will consider it next week and hope to refine and submit it to Factfinder soon for them to refine further.
2. Sarah presented materials from the Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability, which we made a commitment to over the summer. Most of what it entails we are already doing, though we will now need to report in a more public form. One new project for the Alliance is to inventory our high-impact pedagogical practices and assessments of them. Lisa has begun the inventory. The ASC expressed interest in learning more; Sarah will order Kuh's monograph on high-impact practices for everyone, and we will consider mapping them to the Goals for Student Learning and Development as a possible report that we could make public, characterizing a Skidmore education.
3. Lisa updated us on the state of departmental assessments. All but four have submitted plans; many [about half] have not reported on completed assessments. We may need to develop more strategies for cultivating faculty engagement.
4. We talked about the need to coordinate what we do with CEPP effectively. Mimi is the liaison to CEPP and will keep us abreast of CEPP's business that may be related to assessment. Sarah will visit CEPP occasionally when called for.
5. We agreed that it would be a good idea for us to consider together the analyses of the NSSE data that Ann and Lisa have been doing.
6. We looked at a list of goals for the year:
 - Periodic Review Report (PRR): vet, revise, complete
 - Learning Census: Launch
 - Increase departmental participation in assessment, if possible to 100%
 - Increase faculty ownership of assessment throughout the college; delegate, set expectations
 - Begin the process of aligning the Goals with general education
 - Begin the process of assessing the Goals:

- Undertake major discussion of Communicate effectively goal: we agreed that this would be a multi-year project and will be complex. Criteria will vary across departments, but some collaborations should be possible. One dimension will be to emphasize communication as involving an audience, and thus awareness of audience. One target will be to frame a May workshop with a significant assessment project. Work with departments: What does “Communicate effectively” mean in your discipline? This may entail course-specific assessments. Beau noted that we have significant funds from Teagle for assessing writing, so this effort can dovetail with that one. We need to brainstorm more about this initiative and also consult with CEPP.
- Continue work on CD requirement and related goals
- Continue work on the Science Vision and related goals—still in the discussion stage.

SG
9/16/2010

Assessment Steering Committee
Meeting Notes
November 15, 2010

Present: Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Denise Smith, Winston Grady-Willis, Mimi Hellman, Sarah Goodwin, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Elizabeth Karp '11, Sue Layden. Absent: Jim Chansky

1. Update from CEPP: Mimi reported on CEPP's discussion of next steps on Communicate effectively. In sum, she said:
 - a. CEPP supports assessment in general, including the idea of a project on Communicate effectively that would look across disciplines and divisions and would aim to be innovative.
 - b. CEPP feels that the ASC should steer assessment rather than conduct it. We should frame it, support projects, look at results, draw connections among projects, and ensure that we are closing the loops. We should find people who are willing and eager to do specific projects and provide support for them.
 - c. It is not a good idea to launch a major project before the end of the semester. Start instead first thing in the spring.
 - d. Any projects that are undertaken should be small in scale and "super focused." One small cross-divisional group, or multiple smaller groups, for example. Better to undertake something modest that we can complete and put to use, rather than launch into something large, cumbersome, and unmanageable.
 - e. Assessing communication should be a multi-year project that develops and becomes increasingly informative based on the cumulative outcomes of individual small studies.
 - f. One way to lay some groundwork would be to ask departments and programs, "What does 'Communicate effectively' mean to you, in your discipline?" Ask for a short narrative, or perhaps provide a checklist. This kind of process could also help with mapping the Goals to the curriculum. We need processes that will help to build a culture of assessment by getting people talking to each other.
 - g. There really are two questions for us now: What is ASC's role? And what should be our next steps?

2. Discussion: Lively discussion ensued, largely supportive of the report from CEPP. Some points that were made:
 - Several liked CEPP's concept of the ASC as coordinating assessment, looking at results, and recommending follow-ups. There seemed to be a consensus on this.
 - Several agreed that launching a major project at this moment is unpromising and unmanageable. Chairs are feeling overwhelmed right now with requests.
 - As we talked about possible timetables, one suggestion was for us to decide now on a possible process and/or "instrument" or method and run that by CEPP, with the idea of starting in the spring.

- We talked about, but left undecided, how much ASC should decide in advance of signing people on, and how much the people undertaking the project should define its process and scope.
- Sarah asked for some freedom to cultivate conversations with potential faculty supporters/laborers, and the response was positive.
- Three major questions seem to lie before us: What do faculty mean by “Communicate effectively”? What do students understand by it? And where and how do we teach and students learn it?
- And then: How do we assess their learning?
- There was clear agreement that we need to start with existing data and put them to work for us, and also to make sure that whatever project we do does not disappear into oblivion but provides results that people will use.
- As we consider what we already know about our students’ degrees of effective communication, we need to include the sense of audience as well as “effective communication across difference,” since that is a related Goal.
- Some felt that we need to narrow our focus strategically, others that we should leave room for breadth and complexity.
- One part of the project should likely be a rubric that is adaptable to multiple means of communication.
- One possible next step would be to review results of previous assessments to see what we already know; look for gaps; and craft proposals to address the gaps.

We agreed to continue the discussion of next steps in the context of a summary of existing assessment results to be provided by Lisa at our next meeting.

Assessment Steering Committee
Meeting Notes
November 22, 2010

Present: Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Winston Grady-Willis, Sarah Goodwin, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Elizabeth Karp '11, Sue Layden, Jim Chansky. Absent: Denise Smith, Mimi Hellman

1. No update from CEPP this week. Our single agenda item was to continue discussion of next steps.
2. Question #1: Are we done with assessing writing? We considered the summary of existing, previous assessments of communication, mostly writing, provided by Lisa and Sarah. Some points made:
 - a. We have done substantial, varied, and quite interesting assessments of student writing.
 - b. The conclusions did inform our discussions of the Writing in the Majors proposal; that was a clear response to the concerns raised in the assessments that our students need more intentional writing instruction than they are getting in EN 105, the FYE, and other courses. We can reinsert that assertion in the PRR in good conscience, and should.
 - c. We should make use of this summary, amplified a bit, to communicate and establish our sense that we have assessed students' writing and can move on to other forms of communication.
 - d. That said, we should also track the departments' assessments of writing, aggregate and report on them over the next three or four years. This is the next step of closing the loop.
 - e. We need to heed what we learned from the methodological challenges in the previous assessments of writing, in particular looking for greater consistency in the sampling of student work; collecting assignments along with papers, as a context; working with effective rubrics; and ensuring that results don't go down a black hole but are disseminated and made use of.
3. Where next? Groping:
 - a. Effective communication across differences—awareness of audience and context, demonstrated ability to attend to a reader/listener—is not a factor in the writing assessments. It's there in the IGR assessment [and in the CHAS, NSSE and exit interview data that Lisa has added to the Communication Assessments Summary], but not in the context of assessing written communication.
 - b. Our next project should give us an assessment victory: it should be manageable, useful, and have a clear closing of the loop.
 - c. One possibility is to focus on communication across differences in multiple modes, as a discrete project. (Much discussion ensued.)

- d. We came around to a consensus, it seemed, that communication across differences *has* been assessed in several instruments (and also put to use in some programmatic planning, though we could press for more response to these data in multiple contexts).
 - e. And we seemed to reach agreement that we should not look at communication across differences as a discrete project, given the spirit of the Goals, in which cultural differences are referenced throughout. Instead we should ensure that as we move ahead with assessment of modes of communication, we embed attention to communication across differences within it.
4. Given that a decision had been made previously, during the summer, by the DoF in consultation with Bob Turner for CEPP, Susan Kress, and Sarah, to aim to begin with assessing visual communication, we turned our attention to that possibility in the closing minutes of the meeting. Generally, people felt overwhelmed by the scope of such a project, which didn't seem to lend itself to the kind of focused, goal-directed, useful and narrow project CEPP and we had been wishing for.

We agreed that one place to start would be to

- a. inventory where we are currently likely to be teaching visual communication;
 - b. work out a possible rubric for assessing visual communication from existing models;
 - c. cultivate faculty interest in the subject of visual communication.
- Sarah and Lisa agreed to return next week with a sketch of some possibilities.

Assessment Steering Committee
Meeting Notes
December 6, 2010

Present: Mike Sposili, Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Winston Grady-Willis, Sarah Goodwin, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Elizabeth Karp '11, Sue Layden, Jim Chansky, Denise Smith, Mimi Hellman

1. Mike Sposili noted that he was present at the last meeting and omitted in the Meeting Notes. [Apologies-SG.]
2. Update on the Learning Census: Mike noted that both the email and the paper surveys have been sent. The closing date will be Dec. 21. Approximately 5100 were sent, to the members of classes ending in 1 and 6. Responses are coming in.
3. There was no update on assessment from CEPP, which has been busy with other matters.
4. We discussed the rough sketches of possible next steps on assessing visual communication circulated before the meeting. Some points expressed/questions raised:
 - Do we want to do this top down or bottom up? That is, to create a structure that is broad, general, and perhaps not useful? We might instead encourage individual departments or affinity groups—perhaps faculty interest groups, potentially quite small—to do discrete projects with our support and then look for common denominators.
 - We could encourage three different areas to start: performing arts; physical and life sciences; and student organizations.
 - Problems with a more top-down, pan-curriculum assessment—based on what we learned from the FYE assessment—include: the rubric may be so broad as to yield no real interesting results; samples may be so different that the assessment can feel arbitrary, all over the place, lacking in points of comparison; student work is closely related to assignments, which also vary and may or may not be available.
 - We might consider a hybrid approach: to explore common possibilities, and support smaller projects while aiming for a common rubric. What might the common goals of visual communication be? It might be valuable to have at least an initial broad conversation.
 - Written communication may be easier to assess across disciplines because of fundamental shared elements. Is visual communication more disparate in the disciplines? Are there too many elements that are discipline-specific? (Can we reasonably compare dance with poster presentations, power points and maps?)
 - Maybe we could ask each department to answer: What are the top 3-5 ways your students are learning to communicate visually in your discipline?

- Many disciplines are quite specific and intentional in teaching visual communication. In our group, Health and Exercise Sciences was cited: students learn to use visual representations of anatomy; schematics that show physiological processes; graphs and tables; and posters, for example. In the arts, students are creating performances and exhibitions, also with instruction in visual communication.
 - Are we talking about *reading* texts visually? Or *producing* them? Some uncertainty, but we seemed to agree the two are interconnected [just as creating a text requires awareness of audience/reader, reading well requires awareness of the conventions and context the creator is working with], but that we are focusing here primarily on producing visual texts (as we have previously, and still are, focusing on writing).
5. It was suggested that Sarah convey to Academic Staff on the 14th that we are considering ways to look at visual communication and will encourage/support projects to do so. There was broad interest in the idea of a Senior Week Symposium on visual communication in the disciplines. Mike asked about including alumni, and we also agreed we should include students in our planning.

ASC Meeting Notes February 23, 2011

Present were Joe Stankovich, Lisa Christenson, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Mimi Hellman, and Sarah Goodwin.

Our discussion was lively and resulted in substantial changes to the Assessment Plan. The revised plan is attached. CEPP will be discussing it next week. I will also circulate two small bits of it privately: to Justin Sipher, the description of IT's role; and to Bob Turner for his specific attention, the description of CEPP's role (and Mimi, note that I made an additional change there that may or may not be accurate—I'm feeling my way a bit in the dark here but just putting it all out there for discussion).

In addition to minor edits, **I've changed the plan for assessing the Goals from a year-by-year to a more narrative statement, and I have included both the "Communicate effectively" bullet and the three bullets related to learning about diversity (forgive the shorthand).** I think this is what you were saying at the meeting today, but am open to more suggestions before I send this to CEPP tomorrow or Friday. I've also tried to strengthen the emphasis on making use of results and following up on changes, though that actually is fairly strong already in this version.

Your further thoughts are welcome.

We touched briefly on the question of whether our committee needs to exist; after today's discussion it was clear to me that we do need to, but I am not sure we do, given the difficulty of getting people in the room. As I noted, Jim and Mike Profita are gone; Winston has asked to step down; and I believe we are at a crossroads. The attached Plan gives us a role. Who will play that role if we don't? Can we play that role with a much-reduced timetable, meeting for example once a semester to review what everyone is doing, read and discuss any reports, look for trouble spots, update the Assessment Plan for the year, and make recommendations to CEPP?

About meeting again: We could meet next week, same time, same place, to talk about our life-support system. Or we could do it on the 23rd. The 23rd would be better for me because I am struggling to wrap up revisions and additions to the PRR. But if March 2 is better for most of you than the 23rd, let's do that. If you can't come to either, it might be time to consider stepping down from the committee, much though I hate to say that. As always, all suggestions welcome. PLEASE DO LET ME KNOW ABOUT THE 2ND AND THE 23RD.

Sarah

Assessment Steering Committee
Meeting Notes 3/30/11

Present: Denise Smith, Elizabeth Karp, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Joe Stankovich, Lisa Christenson, Sarah Goodwin. Absent: Mike Sposilli, Sue Layden, Mimi Hellman, Winston Grady-Willis (on leave from committee this spring)

1. We talked briefly about the report on the Alumni Learning Census data and about how and when to disseminate this information (and make more sense of it). The group agreed that Sarah can go ahead and talk with Mike Sposilli and Dan Forbush about a preliminary story in *Scope*, in part to encourage broader participation this year.
2. We discussed the suggestion from CEPP via Bob Turner to re-structure the ASC; he wrote to Sarah saying that CEPP would like to see a proposal to establish an independent, standing assessment committee, which CEPP would then consider and ultimately present with us to FEC.

In addition, it's a time of transition for the committee. Denise Smith announced today that she will have to step down for next year because of duties on the IPPC. Jim Chansky has departed; Winston has requested an indefinite leave because of heavy time commitments elsewhere; Erica is stepping down because of her new role with the faculty network; and others may also be unable to continue to serve. Even without a change in structure, the committee will undergo a major change.

The discussion was lively and took up the rest of the hour. Some major points made:

- We need to be careful about the process if we make any substantive changes to the current structure, including consultations with both the Acting VPAA and the (as of May 1) VPAA. We need to consult with all three—Paty, Muriel, and Susan—to determine more clearly what they need from the ASC and what structure might best provide it.
- CEPP has too much on its plate to invest a great deal of time in assessment, though it needs to be connected or involved in some way.
- There seemed to be several related questions:
 - Do we need an Assessment Steering Committee?
 - If so, is its role to oversee all assessments or to advise the Assessment Coordinator and Facilitator?
 - And if so, what should be its relationship to CEPP?
 - Must it include faculty?
 - Would we be better served by a regular meeting of key leadership figures to set the assessment agenda and align it with institutional priorities?
 - Or might it consist of representatives from major committees with bearing on assessment matters, such as CEPP, the IPPC, and the CC?
 - How often must it meet?

After much discussion, we appeared to agree on the following, tentatively:

- It is good to have a group that is advisory to the Assessment Coordinator and Facilitator on matters of assessment.
- Assuming we do continue to have a committee, though with a changed roster and role, we do want to have faculty on it. (This point probably does not have 100% agreeing.)
- The committee should not meet often—at most once monthly—to avoid lapsing into busywork. It should help the Coordinator and Facilitator set the assessment agenda, look at results, and think about how best to convey the results so that they can be used for improvement. It should not actually do assessments, and the Coordinator should have wide latitude to implement projects within an agreed-upon framework.
- Whatever the committee structure is, it's equally important to consult regularly with the right leadership—both administrators and key committees—to ensure that assessments align with institutional priorities and also to continue the transition to data-driven decision-making.

We adjourned with the hope that we will be able to meet again to consider a draft proposal for CEPP on a new structure for the committee, as well as to vet the results of the Alumni Learning Census.