

College-Wide Assessment Committee Annual Report -- 2011-2012

With an endorsement from the Strategic Planning Sub-Committee, the College Council approved the creation of the College-Wide Assessment Committee in May, 2011. The Assessment Committee has just completed its first year of work, and the following report documents the activities of the inaugural year.

The Committee was a very conscientious and thoughtful group that advanced significantly the cause of assessment at John Jay, both through direct feedback to departments and through general discussions concerning practices and policies. The membership consists of seven faculty and three HEO's, plus the Director of Assessment (*ex officio*). The Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness served as Chair for the first year, but a faculty member (Prof. Carla Barrett from Sociology) will take over starting in the second year. It is important that faculty lead the Committee, since most of the assessment taking place on campus is assessment of student learning.

The committee first met on October 26, 2011, and ten other times during the 2011-12 academic year. The last meeting was on May 9, 2012. At the initial meeting, the Committee reviewed its responsibilities and some basic assessment documents; in addition, we decided to construct an organization site on Blackboard which would house key reference documents as well as meeting minutes, assessment plans, and reports.

One of the early topics for Committee consideration was a draft statement of policies and practices for assessment at John Jay, provided by J. Llana. After discussion by the Committee, the document would, according to our plan, go to the Strategic Planning Sub-Committee for comment and approval. Since the assessment policy document was somewhat abstract, we decided to read some actual plans and reports to inform our discussion. This proved helpful, and we spent a number of meetings reviewing departmental assessment documents—and not spending much time with the longer policy document. Initially, we read several plans—one from a support unit (Academic Advising) and two from academic departments (Humanities and Justice, and Criminology)—with the aim of developing a consensus on what we should look for in a good plan. This led us eventually to a rubric for evaluating plans and reports, and at the same time everyone became more or less familiar with the practical and theoretical issues surrounding assessment.

Since one of the responsibilities of the Committee is to review assessment plans and reports and “to make recommendations about them and to identify best practices for the College,” we collectively prepared recommendations for the first three that we had reviewed and sent them to the departments. Given the large number of reports to review, we decided to proceed by breaking into small groups and assigning one person to write recommendations for one department report and then to circulate it to the two others in the group for review. We decided on a standard format for such reports but also agreed that we would consider variations in the interest of getting better ideas. The Chair reviewed all the recommendations for rough consistency before sending them out. The Committee was able to

review fourteen additional departmental reports in this way, before the end of the year.* The Committee secured an email account so that reports can all go out through a single account.

We learned from reviewing assessment reports that departments need to pay more attention to using assessment results. "Closing the loop" is often a challenge, but without it assessment loses much of its power to improve programs. We have to resist the idea that assessment is a single cycle process, a "once-and-done" effort.

The Committee wanted to promote faculty development in assessment, and we arranged for three faculty (two on the Committee) to attend Middle States assessment workshops in Philadelphia. This practice must continue.

Next Year's Agenda

With much of our time committed to a discussion of evaluating assessment reports and of how to frame them for departments, there was no time to complete the review of the long statement on policies and practices, although we are probably close to a conclusion. This must be the first item of business in the fall. The other pressing matter is the development of an assessment website, which will promote an awareness of all assessment activity on campus, an awareness necessary for a "culture of assessment." The Committee recognizes its responsibilities to promote assessment activities and to foster a culture in which evidence, systematically gathered, is used to make decisions and improve programs.

All but one of the assessment reports reviewed this year were from academic departments; the next year should right the balance by including more reviews for administrative and support units. There are many such plans currently under development.

The Committee discussed some ideas for making assessment more valued and visible, including an "Assessment Day," for sharing assessment experiences with colleagues, and the designation of "assessment fellows," faculty who would spend time learning deeply about assessment, developing assessment practices, and sharing their knowledge with colleagues across the College. The Provost in principle supports the idea of assessment fellows and is prepared to offer release time to make such an idea work. The Committee should pursue these and other ideas.

The ongoing task of the Committee is the review of assessment plans and reports, work which must continue through the next year. The Committee should build on its experiences and take advantage of feedback from departments to improve its own operation.

*Criminal Justice B.S.; Forensic Science; Criminal Justice Management; Economics; English; Gender Studies; International Criminal Justice; Corrections; Global History; Political Science; CIS; Culture and Deviance; Police Studies; Public Administration

The Committee will soon choose a faculty Chair for next year, a position that will be supported with release time. There is a full agenda to pursue. The Committee was active and functioned well during its first year; after a fairly steep learning curve, it must perform at an even higher level in the future.

Submitted by J. Llana

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