

Assessment Plan



Harry S Truman College

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Introduction

Purposes of Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to gather data that draws an accurate picture of what students know and are able to do at a particular moment. That picture serves as the necessary background for our thinking about how to improve the performance of students. Assessment is the key to measuring the effectiveness of the College as a whole, since student learning forms the center of our mission.

History and Practice at Truman College

- 1990 NCA visiting team cites the college for assessment plan, recommends focus visit
- 1992 NCA focus visit team sees progress on assessment but cites as concerns:
 - (1) The internal “feedback loop” or other means of ongoing assessment of planning effectiveness does not yet appear well developed.
 - (2) The level of computer support necessary to facilitate the collection, analysis and dissemination of data remains inadequate for an institution as complex and dynamic as Truman College.
 - (3) There still is a need to address the previously stated NCA concern that the college lacks a research office to track operational data, including program evaluations, and facilitate the documentation of student academic achievement.
 - (4) There is considerable work to be done in terms of more effectively linking the budget process to the operational planning process.¹
- 1999 NCA visiting team recommends the College “submit to the NCA by June 1, 2001, its plan to assess student academic achievement; (2) the College will undergo a focused visit during school year 2003-2004 to evaluate the implementation of its plan to evaluate student academic achievement, including the use of feedback in improving its comprehensive planning model ... ”

¹ pp.5-6. “Report of a Focus Visit of Harry S Truman College, March 21–22, 1993.” North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.



As the NCA self-study report for the 1999 visit points out, programs across the College routinely use a variety of measures of student performance and learning. On the whole, however, those practices are not well documented or coordinated. And no system of assessment is applied uniformly to all programs.

Since 1998, Truman College has had a standing Assessment Committee co-chaired by the Dean of Instruction and the Chair of Communications, the largest department in the college transfer program. In its first year of existence the Assessment Committee held a series of meetings to 1) survey the variety of standards and methods of assessment being used across the College, and 2) begin a discussion on what standards should be applied to any student earning a degree or certificate.

In the fall of 1999, the Dean of Instruction led a seminar series designed to explore with members of the credit faculty their conception of general education and the standard that accompanies that concept. One result of those seminars was the in-depth discussion of assessment documented in Appendix D.

In the Spring of 2000, the Committee discussions were followed up with a series of documents on standards to which large portions of the college were already committed—the Illinois Articulation Initiative General Education Standards and SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) Competencies. Those documents were the subject of discussion on April 30, 2000, at Truman College's First Annual College-wide Assessment Day. The discussion led to broadly shared agreement to recognize SCANS and the IAI General Education Standards as college standards.

In the Spring of 2001, Truman College held its Second Annual College-wide Assessment Day, during which the Assistant Dean of Institutional Research and Planning, the Dean of Instruction, and other members of the Assessment Committee presented the full assessment plan, the centerpiece of which is a student course portfolio based on the college-wide standards.



The Assessment Process at a Glance

Produce portfolios

1. Each teacher collects student work, grading criteria, course objectives, general education standards/SCANS competencies, and comments on the relationship between the standards, the structure of the course, and the student performance.



Report institutional data

2. The Asst. Dean Research, Registrar, and Office of Instruction collect and analyze data from indirect measures of learning: retention, completion, transfer, satisfaction surveys, etc.



Review & report on portfolios

3. The Assessment Committee looks at institutional data and analyzes course portfolios from multiple class sections, produces a report for each discipline reviewed, and a report summary for college-wide distribution.



Use reports to plan

4. Departments review and respond to institutional data and Assessment Committee report in developing a 3-year plan.

Departments negotiate performance measure for plan with deans.



Use plan to budget

5. Department 3-year plans and performance results from previous years are used by budget committee to set priorities.



Select new courses for assessment

6. The Assessment Committee designates more courses and starts the assessment process again.



Developing an Assessment System: Course Portfolios

The College's Mission

Truman College, as one of the seven City Colleges of Chicago, is a public institution serving the Chicago community under the Master Plan for Higher Education in Illinois. The Board of Trustees of Community College District No. 508 is governed by the Illinois Public Community College Act and the Rules for Management and Government of the City Colleges of Chicago with any amendments enacted or adopted thereafter. As a comprehensive community college, Truman College is dedicated to providing opportunities that meet the post-secondary, basic skills, workforce training, continuing education, and cultural needs of the diverse, multi-ethnic community the College serves.

Conceptual Framework: Course Portfolios

The Assessment Plan builds on the premise that individual courses serve as the scaffolding of a college education. Occasionally, we attend to the overall shape of a college education; most of the time, however, faculty and students are thinking about and working on particular classes. Syllabi, course objectives, assignments, and student work document both the substance of individual classes and the practices of the classroom. Examining these documents provides a window onto the place where teaching and learning most purposefully intersect, where what we value and how we act upon those values is most evident.

The use of portfolios in assessment allows faculty the freedom to choose assignments and student work that most accurately reflect the goals of their courses.

Course portfolios place the work of students in the context of a particular course and of general education as a whole. Moreover, they create comparability between departments based on standard criteria while allowing for specific departmental assignments. Perhaps most notably, by linking general education goals to specific strategies and classroom assignments, the portfolio gives greater weight and meaning to what is surely the most frequently used means of assessment: grades.



Over the past two years, the College has worked on developing a set of College-wide standards. In Fall 2000, the College began to pilot a method of assessment that documents and opens to scrutiny the range of student learning in the general education program. The pilot was designed to create course portfolios founded on student work and structured around the standard institutional components of the course: grading scales, assignments, course objectives, and, finally, the larger goals of general education as they are outlined in the Illinois Articulation Initiative.

During summer 2000, the chairs of Math, Communications, Biology, and Humanities and the Dean of Instruction discussed the concept and contents of a general education portfolio. It was decided that each of the faculty in general education areas—and, eventually, all full-time faculty—would articulate in writing the connections between general education goals or SCANS competencies and their course objectives; between the course objectives and a particular assignment; and, finally, between the assignment and the grading scale. At the Fall Opening Day, November 2000, the Dean of Instruction presented the sample course portfolio to all of the full-time transfer faculty. During the rest of the Fall 2000 semester, selected faculty members produced sample course portfolios (one of which is included in Appendix D). Based on a review of the course portfolios in Spring 2001, the Assessment Committee revised and clarified the guidelines for course portfolio development. The specific guidelines for portfolio development are included below. The course portfolio pilot will continue in Fall 2001.

Guidelines for Portfolio Development

1. Materials

Faculty assigned to the selected sections develop course portfolios based on a uniform list of items that includes:

- General education, occupational, or professional standards
- Course objectives
- Sample assignments
- Grading criteria
- Samples of graded student work



2. Framework

The faculty member assigned to a particular course can use the template materials for his or her area as a basis for developing a portfolio. The teacher should:

- a) Modify the course objectives as appropriate for the course
- b) Include a selection of two assignments from course sections
- c) Write brief notes explaining the intent of the assignment and how it achieves the course objectives
- d) Include grading criteria
- e) Include samples of graded student work with brief comments on how the samples fit the grading criteria

Description of Process

At the end of each semester, the Assistant Dean for Institutional Research and Planning selects a random sample of classes to be included in the assessment program for the following semester. Those classes will typically represent multiple sections of a particular course in areas across the College. If, for example, English 101 is being assessed, multiple course sections will be represented in the sample. The intent is to focus assessment on those courses where the greatest number of students is enrolled. It is important to note, however, that course portfolios will be developed for every area in which the college offers instruction—college transfer, continuing education, adult education, technical education, or English as a Second Language.

The completed portfolio is forwarded to the Assessment Committee approximately one month before the end of the semester. The Assessment Committee reviews the portfolios and, in the context of other institutional data, submits a detailed report to each assessed department. The Assessment Committee also summarizes the findings of all departmental reports for the College.

Departments then draft specific responses to the findings of the committee and include them in their planning document, called the Departmental Effectiveness Plan.

Sample (See Appendix C)



The Role of Faculty

The course portfolio system is designed so that faculty members play an active and indispensable role in gathering the evidence for student performance and illustrating the context in which it occurs. Course portfolios encourage faculty to reflect on their practice and allow them to present the motives, ideas, and virtues of their classroom to a wider audience. The portfolio is a kind of conversation among the faculty, the students, and the course requirements and standards.

The Role of Departments

Although assessment begins with the work of individual students and teachers, faculty in each department have a shared responsibility to use knowledge gained from assessment to cultivate institutional conditions most likely to improve performance. Each department takes the Assessment Committee reports, responds to specific suggestions, and makes a collective decision about how best to affect what happens in the classroom or elsewhere. Indeed, in the case of non-academic departments the venue may be the library, the tutoring center, or the cafeteria. But the intent is the same: all departments of the college have an obligation to gather information on their performance and to use that information to improve.

Other Institutional Data

While course portfolios provide some depth to our knowledge of individual classrooms, institutional data such as grade distributions, retention and graduation rates, transfer, and placement rates outline the larger context in which to interpret classroom performance. Interpreting course portfolios in light of institutional data begins to tell us how well the systems beyond the classroom support learning.



Assessment, Improvement, and Resources: Departmental Effectiveness Plans

Goals

Under the leadership of President Phoebe K. Helm and Vice President Marguerite Boyd, the College has established a cycle of developing three-year plans as a means of allocating resources. The Assessment Plan is designed to put student learning at the center of the planning process by making assessment and institutional data the basis for developing three-year Departmental Effectiveness Plans.

Each year, the assessment cycle begins with faculty constructing course portfolios. The Office of Research and Planning, the Registrar's Office, and the Office of Instruction assemble the institutional data that provides a picture of student performance— enrollment, retention, and completion. The course portfolios allow the academic departments and the College to document what actually happens in classrooms. Based on the Assessment Committee's analysis of course portfolios and its report, each department outlines specific steps to address concerns and improve the quality of student learning. Documented improvements in student learning along with other agreed upon criteria will ultimately become the basis of departmental evaluations and resource allocations.

The Place of Assessment in Institutional Effectiveness

For academic departments, student learning in the classroom forms the centerpiece for planning. The results of assessment provide the basis for institutional change. Beyond the classroom, however, the college must organize itself to enhance learning and create the efficient systems necessary to support students. Although departments in non-instructional areas will use measures other than student learning, they, too, will be called upon to establish evaluative criteria for performance in line with support to students and other constituencies. In this sense, the assessment process creates the framework for the measure of institutional effectiveness and a commitment to using data to improve performance.



Strengths, Challenges, and Future Plans

Strengths

The current assessment plan:

- Focuses on students and classrooms
- Begins with existing practices
- Is cost-effective
- Is faculty driven

Challenges

The current plan:

- Does not provide direct feedback to students, except through existing classroom strategies
- Provides a common framework, but not a common instrument to assess learning
- Has no built-in process for evaluating the assessment program

Future Plans

- Development of evaluation process for assessment program based on institutional mission and pilot results
- Direct feedback to students through a digital portfolio maintained throughout their college careers that will be integrated with course portfolios
- Development of a common instrument for measuring student learning in large, multi-section courses with common content
- On-line reports on assessment
- On-line reports on institutional effectiveness by department



APPENDIX A

College Assessment Annual Calendar

September	Select courses and sections for course portfolio; inform faculty (Assessment Committee)
October	Collect data on indirect measures: retention, completion, transfer, satisfaction survey, etc. (Registrar's Office, Office of Institutional Research)
November	Review data on retention, completion, transfer; report on trends to Assessment Committee (Office of Instruction, Departments, Programs)
January	Review of reports on indirect data, course portfolios; reports to departments on course portfolios (Assessment Committee)
February	Incorporate findings of Assessment Committee in Departmental Effectiveness Plan (Academic/Occupational Programs)

**APPENDIX B****Assessment Plan Roll-out**

Semester	Program Included
2001	
Spring	General Education/Occupational Programs
Fall	ESL programs
2002	
Spring	Developmental Education Technical Center
Fall	Continuing/Community Education



APPENDIX C

IAI General Education Standards



APPENDIX D

Sample Course Portfolio



APPENDIX E

Fall 1999 Faculty Seminar Series



APPENDIX F

Transcript of Faculty Dialogue about Assessment