

ASSESSMENT NEWS

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Special points of interest:

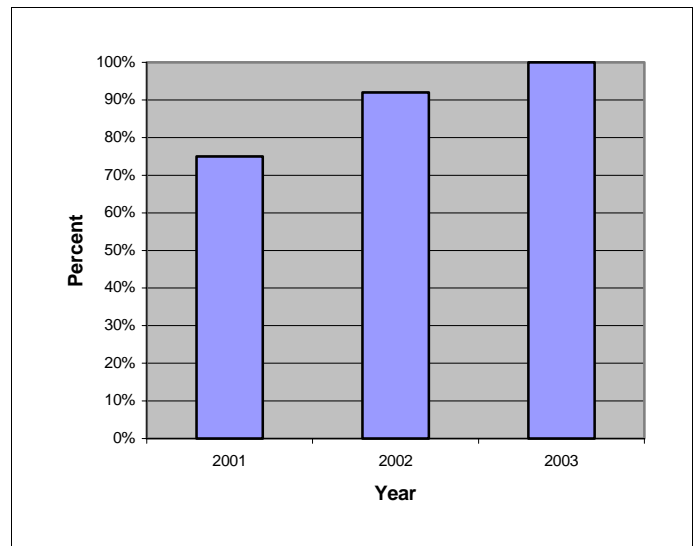
- Compliance rates continue to show growth in “culture of assessment.”
- Assessment Committee initiates departmental awards
- Departments learn from the feedback that assessment provides
- Assessment Committee now includes a student representative
- Creative products come in various forms
- College adds data to General Education assessment

Assessment Compliance Rates Improve

In their third year under the new program, faculty and students again improved their response rate to assessment information requests. For the first time in a seven-year history of assessment, every department with graduates last year produced an assessment report. Furthermore, the Assessment Committee received data from over 90% of students listed as graduating during the 2002 – 2003 academic year.

The graph to the right shows the quick rise to full compliance from departments. Increased compliance came as departments better understood the nature of the assessment assignments and the importance of assessment for improving student learning in their programs.

Student “compliance” is best for creative products. The first graph on the next page shows that compliance is almost complete and considerably improved compared with the last 2 years. Department Chairs are responsible for completing this assess-



Graph represents the percent of departments submitting assessment reports since 2001.

ment. The dramatic improvements for 2003 reflect that all departments completed assessment assignments. Some of the few students who were not evaluated completed a product before the assessment program was implemented. Others did not graduate during 2002-2003 as they had expected.

Students bear the initiative for completing general education and major field test assessments. The final graph shows student compliance for these tests. Students complete content tests in their major field at higher rates than they complete general education tests. Nevertheless,

(Continued on page 2)

Award Winners Announced

The Assessment Committee announces two special awards. The Communication and Theatre Arts Department receives the Creative Product Assessment Award for work over the last 3 years to refine criteria, feedback procedures and documentation of student achievements. The Com-

puter Science Department receives the Service Project Assessment Award for its inspiring implementation of a service project that changed student values.

Communication and Theatre Arts Department Chair Gordon Kling has consistently submitted critically evaluative

reports of student learning since the faculty approved assessing creative products. Based on the department's first creative product assessment report, the Committee complimented the department on clear creative product criteria and extensive

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Assessment
Committee
Members:

Arn Froese, Chair

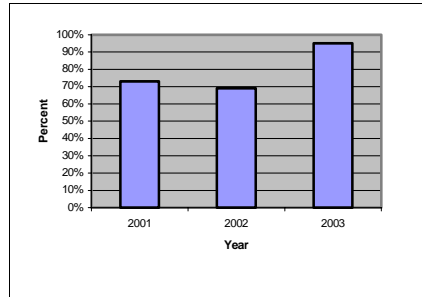
Felicia Squires

Donnie Stark

Joel Reis

“Communication and Theatre Arts students demonstrate critical self-reflection about their products in formal papers that are part of course evaluation systems.”

COMPLIANCE RATES (CONTINUED)



Percent of graduates whose creative products were evaluated.

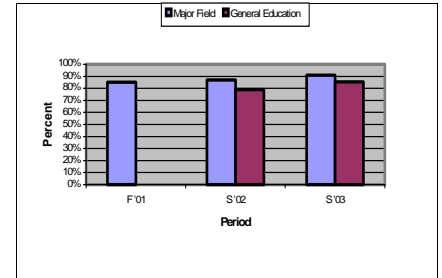
less, compliance is increasing in both areas and now averages close to 90%.

These improving compli-

ance rates reflect the growing culture of assessment at Sterling College. Faculty have seen how the assessment data can help them identify strengths and weaknesses in their programs, and students are becoming more aware of their role in building a

stronger institution in the future through their participation in assessment. Other stories in this

Newsletter highlight several of the recent improvements in which assessment has played some role. ▲



Percent of graduates taking standardized tests.

AWARDS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

evaluation forms. The following year, the Committee encouraged the Department to implement similar quality criteria and evaluative forms in all tracks of the major. The Department documented progress on that work during the 2002-2003 academic year.

Students completing creative products for the department receive extensive feedback on their products. The Committee examined samples of that feedback and found it to be specific, encouraging, and demanding of student quality.

The Department has developed an extensive documentation set for student products. Theatre students directing plays for their Senior Project must turn in the following materials for evaluation:

- Director's concept of the play
- A production history and background paper
- Annotated design concepts for the play
- Audition sheets
- Publicity materials
- Prompt books
- Rehearsal notes
- A summary assessment

of the play

Directing students meet with their professor regularly during the semester to review concepts and production progress. The Department also collects evaluation forms from the production team.

Communication and Theatre Arts students demonstrate critical self-reflection about their products in formal papers that are part of course evaluation systems. In addition, professors use external evaluation sources for creative products—a procedure that adds validity to creative product evaluations.

The Communication and Theatre Arts Department has modeled effective assessment. Their work demonstrates the value of a working

instructional goals. Congratulations to this Department on its well-deserved award.

The Computer and Information Science Department created a service course for their majors. Students assist some local agency or the general public in computer applications. In January 2003, two students assisted with computer support at the local school district and five students assisted community members as they completed a free computer applications class.

Course instructor Sally Haggerty collected information from the school computer supervisor and from local residents who completed the class. Professor Haggerty wrote to the stu-

assessment program. They have “opened their books” to public scrutiny of their evaluation processes, responded to the feedback from that inspection, and served their students well by increasing the clarity of in-



Communication and Theatre Arts Department faculty, Carl Isaacson, Gordon Kling, and Diane DeFranco-Kling.

students who assisted local residents, “I want to commend you on the great job you did working with community members during the service project. . . It was great to witness your pa-
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LEARNING FROM ASSESSMENT

The purpose of assessment is to improve student learning. Based on information collected during the last academic year, the Assessment Committee has identified a variety of strengths and weaknesses in current academic practices. This year the Committee has included all three aspects of the assessment triangle—knowledge, skills, and values—in its report and recommendations. As departments build on strengths and address the weaknesses, student learning will improve.

To assess student knowledge in their majors, most departments have their stu-

dents take a standardized content test. Some of these tests provide sub scores for various components of the discipline. Departments receive information about how their students' scores compare with national samples. Some departments have discovered that their students are consistently scoring low in some areas. Departments must then decide if they should change their curriculum. Departments can also determine areas they should protect because their students score well.

Students demonstrate their discipline-related skills



Coleman Crenshaw produced "Waiting for Godot" as his creative product.

in creative products (see *Senior Creative Products Reflect Variety* in this issue). The Assessment Committee evaluates samples of these creative products to see if product

(Continued on page 5)

AWARDS (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 2)

tience, understanding and kindness with individuals who are just learning to appreciate how technology might benefit them."

Community members were equally enthusiastic in their praise for the service and the student assistance. "Hurrah for student instructors," commented one pleased participant.

Most importantly, students reported a remarkable change in their attitude about service as a result of the class experience. "I learned more than they did. It was a great experience," commented one student.

"This project was a lot of fun and more and more worthwhile every time someone said 'Thank you,'" said another.

Computer science students completed self-reports about their service projects. One question on the report asked their level of agreement with the statement that "I would have participated in this experience even if it had not

been required." The average response for computer science students was the lowest average for all departments at Sterling College. On another statement, "Because I participated in this experience, I am more likely to use my skills to serve the community in the future," these same students ranked third from the top of all departments at Sterling College.

Computer and Information Science students have demonstrated that a well-designed service experience has power to change values. We congratulate the department for excellent leadership in service project development and assessment. They have documented deliberate value-added components of the Sterling College academic program! ▲

"Hurrah for student instructors," commented one pleased participant.



Computer Science student, Jack Dillard, assists Louise Snyder, Dorothy Johnson, and Earl Anthony in the January class.

ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE CHANGES FOR 2003-2004

The Institutional Assessment Committee will look different in 2003-2004 than it did in Fall 2002. The President has appointed a student



Joel Reiss, new committee member

member to the committee, and one regular committee member will serve in an advisory capacity while he is on leave this academic year.

In April, 2003, President Johnson appointed Mr. Joel Reiss as student representa-

tive to the Assessment Committee. The President responded to North Central Association's concern for student representation on the committee and to Sterling College Student Government Association's (SGA) explicit interests in direct involvement in the assessment process. SGA nominated candidates from whom the President chose Mr. Reiss who is a full committee member and participant. In addition to deliberating assessment policy and programs, he reviews assessment reports and communicates assessment activities to SGA. He is also responsible to convey SGA concerns about assessment to the Assessment Committee.

Professor Donnie Stark is on academic leave during this year. Professor Stark will remain in Sterling while he works on his doctoral research. The committee wants to protect his time for re-

search. Nevertheless, he has agreed to be available for consultation and to retain his position on the committee.

The Assessment Committee requires expertise and continuity to function smoothly. That expertise comes from reading about assessment, attending assessment conferences, and working on assessment tasks over time. Professor Stark is the only charter member of the committee, having been appointed when Dr. Tom Keith—the first Director of Assessment—chaired the committee. Professor Stark has also attended several meetings related to assessment including conventions sponsored by the North Central Association and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

Professor Arn Froese chairs the Assessment Committee. The other member is Professor Felicia Squires. ▲

Assessment News is distributed periodically to inform faculty and staff of the work of the Institutional Assessment Committee. Address any comments or letters to Arnold Froese, Director, Institutional Assessment at campus box 165 or email to afroese@sterling.edu.

“Professor Stark has agreed to be available for consultation and to retain his position on the committee.”

SENIOR CREATIVE PRODUCTS REFLECT VARIETY

Students in every major produce creative products. Sterling College's Catalog (p. 61) describes these products as the outcome of learning skills related to the discipline. The assessment plan captures this link between skills and products in its attempt to evaluate student performance outcomes for the "Skills" side of the assessment triangle.

Department Chairs tell the Committee what kind of product their students create. Some departments report more than one kind of product. The Table on the right indicates which departments reported each kind of creative product

Art students mounted an

exhibit in Mabee Library. Four students used existing display cases, portable panels, and easels to display artists' statements and a collection of their work. Library guests could view the exhibit from May 10 through Commencement.

Creative products for the largest number of departments involved research papers. The Committee has suggested that faculty give top scores to papers that they would be willing to co-sponsor at a regional meeting of professionals in their discipline. Department

Chairs submitted sample papers with interesting titles like "The relationship between serotonin turnover rates and aggressive behavior," "American children: Poverty and malnutrition," and "Second

Display	Product type				
	Research paper	Performance	Media production	Problem-solving	Teaching application
Art	Behav. Sci	Business	Comm/Theatre	Comp Sci	Education
	Biology	Comm/Theatre			Ex. Sci.
	Ex. Sci	Music			Music
	Hist & Govt				
	Lang & Lit				
	Rel & Phil				

Table shows which product type students create in each department. *(Continued on page 6)*

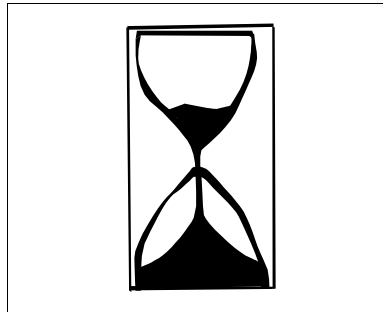
ASSESSING GENERAL EDUCATION

Sterling College is assessing its general education program, but the Assessment Committee is presenting only tentative conclusions until after next year. The faculty agreed to assess general education only under the condition that the College collect data for 3 years before considering program changes. This condition is reasonable because the College collects scores through a sampling process. Each student takes only one of four possible content area tests.

The general education test has 5 parts. The 4 content areas are English, Math, Sciences, and Social Studies.

The fifth part requires students to write an essay. Each of the 4 content tests requires 45 minutes. The essay time is 40 minutes. If students took the entire general education test, they would spend over 4 hours in testing. On the recommendation of the Assessment Committee, the faculty agreed to require less than 2 hours of testing per student for general education. Each student thus completes the essay and one content area test.

For sampling to provide reliable results, students must receive tests through a random distribution process,



One more year of waiting for data!

and the Committee needs to have a reasonable number of scores for each test area. After three years of testing, the Committee will have enough scores for each content area

(Continued on page 6)

LEARNING FROM (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 3)

quality ratings by faculty are appropriate. The Committee has urged Department Chairs to raise their evaluation standards for the past 3 years. An "excellent" product is one that faculty members should be proud to sponsor at a regional meeting of their professional society. For the last 3 years, faculty have rated more than 50% of student products as "excellent." That number seems high, especially as the Committee has identified some style and presentation problems with research papers that faculty rated "excellent." Those problems include weak bases for conclusions, incorrect citation practices, and inconsistent style requirements. Feedback to department chairs about these quality deviations should produce higher standards of excellence for the College.

For the first time in Sterling's brief assessment his-

tory, the Committee collected information about values. Sterling College's mission strongly reflects a commitment to service. Some years ago the faculty adopted a requirement that all majors require a service project of their students. That project should demonstrate to the students how they can use their discipline-related skills to serve the community. Department Chairs described each department's project, and students completed brief surveys about their reactions to the projects. The Assessment Committee discovered several interesting relationships between project characteristics and whether the students completing those projects increased their commitment to voluntary service after project completion. Projects

most likely to increase student likelihood of volunteering in the future were those projects that were discipline-skill dependent, those that clearly met a community need, and those that clearly demonstrated how to serve. These data will certainly help some departments build stronger service projects that influence student values in the future. ▲



Student presentations at regional conventions can validate quality ratings of student creative products. These Behavioral Science students presented a research paper at Southwestern Psychological Association in New Orleans.

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Institutional Assessment Committee

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Look for Assessment
under Academics at
www.sterling.edu



PRODUCT VARIETY (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 4)
chances," a paper on possibilities for redemption based on Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

Performances included business internships, senior theatre shows, and musical recitals. The theatre and music performances were public, demonstrating the real connection between academic work and the life of professional performers. Although the business internships can not be public in the sense of performing arts, students participating in these internships were involved in real business settings.

One student in Communications produced a short

video describing a day in the life of a Sterling College student. This product illustrated effective analysis and synthesis of sounds and images to convey one perspective on college life.

Computer Science students participated in several group projects that involved programming applications. One involved creating software in a "Jeopardy" game format to review basic business concepts.

Several departments ask their students to develop lessons for presentation to student groups. Education students must "student teach" and the department films samples of their teaching in their assigned commu-

nity classrooms. Exercise Science students prepared lessons for students in their college classes. Music department faculty evaluated conducting ability of their students as they prepared the band or choir for public performances.

These examples illustrate how creative products reflect professional skills. The best creative product assignments provide the college valuable information through what educators call "authentic assessment." Such assessment focuses evaluation on what people really need to do in settings that are not artificially academic. ▲

GENERAL EDUCATION (CONTINUED)

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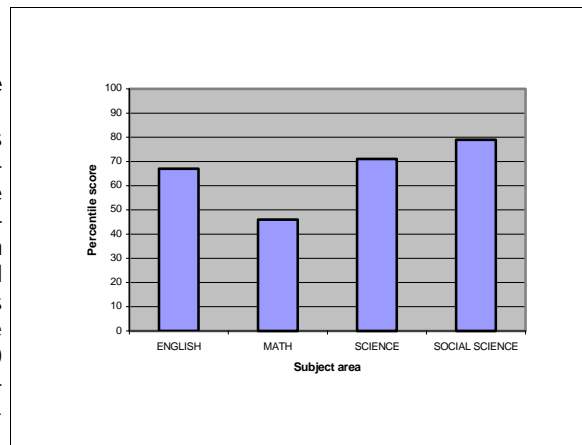
to reflect reliable patterns.

After two years of general education testing, the College has collected scores from 134 graduates. All of these graduates have completed the essay, and over 30 students have completed each of the 4 content area tests.

The tentative picture that is emerging is one of a strong general edu-

cation program. The figure shows the average scores so far for the 4 content areas. Students score particularly well in the social sciences. Scores are lowest in math, reflecting the minimal requirements that recent graduates had for math in their general education program.

Those who see the general education scores must place them in a meaningful context. It is possible that Sterling College selec-



Percentile scores in General Education subject areas. Scores are cumulative after two years testing.

tively admits or retains students who know social sciences well when they enter. The Committee has developed two ways to evaluate whether the scores are related to the experiences students have while they attend Sterling College. The Education Department requires students to complete entry tests for admission to the teacher education program. That department uses the same tests the College uses for senior

testing. The Assessment Committee will examine scores of entering freshmen for at least some of the content areas. Differences between freshmen and senior averages tell us something about the effects of our curriculum. Furthermore, those students who take the test as freshmen will take it again during their final semester.

The College will be able to examine the actual score changes for students who complete their education at Sterling College. The College can anticipate useful information from general education testing after the Committee collects more scores in Fall 2003 and Spring 2004. This year's graduates should look forward to the valuable contribution they will make to improvements in learning structures as they prepare to take the general education assessment tests. ▲