

# Annual Assessment Report Summer 2001

## Background

The annual assessment report for the academic year ending May 2001 appears in the context of several significant assessment-related events. These are:

- ◆ Responses to the assessment program by the visiting NCA team in Spring 2000
- ◆ The Summer 2000 Assessment Report in which the director concluded that “Sterling College’s assessment plan is not working.”
- ◆ The retirement of the Institutional Assessment Committee chair and subsequent appointments to the Committee.

## *NCA Team Responses*

Sterling College’s self-study report, prepared for the April 2000 visit by a team from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, presented information from two years of assessment—1997-98 and 1998-99. The visiting team identified the following concerns about patterns of assessment:

- ◆ Too much reliance on anecdotal data
- ◆ Too much reliance on departmental units for assessment data
- ◆ Limited use of standardized data
- ◆ Limited use of data to improve programs
- ◆ Limited usefulness of assessment data
- ◆ Omission of general education from the assessment plan
- ◆ Omission of components of the college’s mission from the assessment plan (specifically “servant leadership” and “maturing Christian faith”).
- ◆ Varied understandings of the assessment perspective on campus

The team included “assessment” in its list of 3 concerns to be monitored through a focused visit in 2003-2004. Their specific concerns about assessment were:

- ◆ To incorporate general education assessment into the whole assessment plan,
- ◆ To incorporate components of the mission statement into the assessment plan,
- ◆ To build greater commitment to the assessment perspective across campus,
- ◆ To collect more useful assessment data,
- ◆ To use assessment data for institutional and curricular change.

## *Summer 2000 Assessment Report*

The North Central team’s concerns were not surprising to those involved in coordinating assessment activities. The faculty adopted an assessment plan in February 1996, and an Institutional Assessment Committee worked to generate data from academic departments from academic years 1996-97 through 1999-2000. Most of the assessment work during this 4-year period involved trying to get departmental understanding of and

compliance with assessment plan requirements. By the summer of 2000, the director reported that “only two academic departments . . . have fully effective plans,” and that “only half the department(s) and units turned in assessment reports for 1999-2000.” Furthermore, the director reported that the assessment plan is “incomplete since it does nothing about GE assessment or the assessment of majors.” The director reported these additional deficiencies in assessment:

- ◆ Little interaction between departments and the Institutional Assessment Committee
- ◆ No review of the assessment plan or committee functions as called for in the plan

The director’s ultimate conclusion was that “the assessment plan was not working,” and that if the faculty agrees, “the faculty need to revise it.”

### ***Institutional Assessment Committee Personnel Changes***

For several years the Institutional Assessment Committee included Dr. Tom Keith, Director, Professor Donnie Stark, and Mr. Ken Boersma. Dr. Keith retired at the end of the 1999-2000 academic year. Mr. Boersma accepted a position at another institution in Fall, 2000. The President appointed Dr. Arnold Froese as Director and Chair of the Committee, and added Dr. Richard Robl to the Committee.

The North Central team knew that a change in Chairs was immanent and suggested that the new committee “is an opportunity to provide for advancement in this important area.” (p. 25)

### **Analysis of Plan Deficiencies**

The North Central team and the Institutional Assessment Committee reports reflected that the assessment plan was deficient because:

- ◆ It didn’t create a “culture of assessment” directed at improving student learning
- ◆ It relied on non-standardized measuring instruments
- ◆ It wasn’t comprehensive.

The following characteristics of the assessment plan contributed to these deficiencies. The plan:

- ◆ Requested data on many complex institutional objectives
- ◆ Assumed that departments could generate reasonable links between their program objectives and the institutional objectives
- ◆ Permitted departments to sample objectives in ways that failed to assure comprehensive coverage of institutional objectives.

The plan presented institutional objectives that were derived from the college’s mission. The brief mission statement--“to develop creative and thoughtful leaders who understand a maturing Christian faith”—is explained in greater detail in the College’s Catalog. That detailed description served as the source of institutional objectives. The

plan contained 13 objectives. Each objective had either 1 or 2 action verbs—the mode was 2—and up to 4 target objects. This complexity confused faculty as they had to select whether they would assess “understanding,” “applying,” or both, and whether their assessment measures needed to cover all or some target objects in the objectives statement. Furthermore, faculty could not imagine appropriate standardized measures for the complex objectives.

The plan was built on the idea that institutional objectives were accomplished through departmental units, and that departments would have a set of objectives that their administrators could link with institutional objectives. Faculty were confused by this assumption. Departmental objectives generally reflected the demands of the major, and faculty did not know if they were to assess their majors or general education courses. This confusion continued through 4 years of data collection and produced much frustration.

The plan asked departments to select 3 or 4 objectives that they most directly addressed from the list of 13 institutional objectives. All institutional objectives were assessed by at least one department. However, this procedure created some strange assessment assignments. In some cases there was no apparent academic content link between the assessing department and the institutional objective. The links often appeared artificial. Furthermore, many departments assessed some objectives while single departments assessed others. The plan thus used departmental self-selected sampling procedures to cover objectives. The deficiencies in sampling reduced the credibility of the assessment data.

Faculty were confused about assessment, and in some cases hostile to it. Collecting assessment data seemed an impossible job. Some faculty simply didn’t do it; some used grades as proxies for outcome data; some collected many assignments from students; a few generated appropriate outcome data summaries. The result was a mass of data that no one but the department administrator and those on the Institutional Assessment Committee ever examined.

## **Developing an Alternative**

The Academic Dean called Department Chairs to a meeting prior to the Fall 2000 semester. At that meeting, the new Director of Institutional Assessment presented a critique and options to the chairs and asked for feedback (see Appendix A). The chairs agreed that a new assessment plan was necessary, expressing the sentiment that the sooner we could do this the better.

The Institutional Assessment Committee began their work in Fall 2000 by interviewing department chairs about their reactions to current practices and proposed assessment possibilities. (See Appendix B for minutes of committee meetings) Based on those interviews, the Committee decided to:

- ◆ Restructure assessment plans by departments to focus on the major
- ◆ Use common objectives of majors as a basis for the restructured assessment plan
- ◆ Use the three categories of common objectives as the bases for departmental assessment plans

- ◆ Find standardized tests for assessing knowledge and skills for as many majors as possible
- ◆ Develop common formats for the 3 assessment bases, with appropriate concern for flexibility across departments.

The Committee described its work in 2 newsletters, 1 published in November 2000 and one published in January 2001. (See Appendix C for newsletter copies.)

The Committee located tests for 10 of the 13 academic departments. Two other departments might have tests that are appropriate for standard assessment in their areas. One department agreed to develop its own knowledge test.

Simultaneously, the college appointed a General Education Committee which also began examining standardized tests. (See Appendix D for initial documents and meeting minutes.)

These activities culminated in college personnel making the following commitments to new assessment measures:

- ◆ Faculty approved using national standardized test to assess knowledge components in their majors (Faculty minutes, 3-7-01)
- ◆ Administrators created a budget line for standardized tests (See Appendix E for budget copy)
- ◆ General Education Committee began evaluating standardized tests for relevant knowledge and skills assessment
- ◆ Institutional Assessment Committee developed, and faculty approved, standard forms for departments and students to report student skill development on creative products (Faculty minutes, 4-11-01).

## **The New Assessment Plan**

Sterling College's new assessment plan is mission-driven. The mission—to develop creative and thoughtful leaders who understand a maturing Christian faith—is achieved through curriculum, faculty-student interaction, and a residential lifestyle. All programs work to develop one or more of the components, knowledge, skills, and values. The structure of the emerging assessment plan has been presented in the following clear and simple terms:

- ◆ We will assess knowledge, skills, and values in our majors, our general education program, and related institutional programs
- ◆ We will use national standardized tests, when possible, to assess the knowledge component and aspects of skills development
- ◆ The Institutional Assessment Committee will create standardized forms for faculty and students to assess components not covered by standardized tests.

A diagram of the plan is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Components and levels of the new assessment plan.

Levels	Components		
	Knowledge	Skills	Values
<b>General Education</b>	Procedures planned Data collection Spring, 2002	Procedures planned Data collection Spring, 2002	Procedures not in place No data yet
<b>Major</b>	Procedures in place Data collection Spring, 2002	Procedures in place Data collection has begun	Procedures not in place No data yet
<b>Institution</b>	Procedures not in place No data yet	Procedures not in place No data yet	Procedures not in place No data yet

### **Knowledge Component**

#### Majors

Table 2 shows the tests that departments have agreed to use or are considering to assess knowledge in their disciplines.

Table 2. Specific tests for departmental major assessment.

Department	Test
Art	Area Concentration Achievement Test--Art
Behavioral Science	Major Field Test in Psychology or Sociology
Biology	Major Field Test in Biology
Business	Major Field Test in Business II
Communication/Theatre Arts	Praxis II: Communication**
Computer Science	Major Field Test in Computer Science II
Education	Praxis II: Principles of Learning and Teaching
History and Government	Major Field Test in History II
Language and Literature	Major Field Test in Literature II
Mathematics	Major Field Test in Mathematics II
Music	Major Field Test in Music II
Physical Education	Praxis II: Physical Education: Content Knowledge**
Religious & Philosophical Studies	Department-generated test or Area Concentration Achievement Test—Philosophy*

\*This test is under construction. It should be available in several years.

\*\*The Institutional Assessment Committee is exploring whether these tests are available and appropriate for assessment.

Test scores will provide information about student learning relative to other institutions. In addition, test scores can give comparisons about average student learning among departments within the college. Most of these tests provide subscores that permit departments to determine adequacy of student learning in various content areas.

Student self-reports of content mastery are questionable. Students are inexperienced judges of discipline content. However, graduates who go on to graduate school find a basis of comparison in their graduate instruction and among their graduate school peers. The Institutional Assessment Committee will develop a standard form to be sent to those graduates who attend graduate school to add another dimension to knowledge assessment.

### General Education

The General Education Committee examined reports and materials about 4 general education tests (Academic Profile, CAAP, College Base, and COMP). The COMP test has been discontinued. The Committee examined sample copies of the Academic Profile and the College Base for their relationship to general education objectives and their quality. All raters agreed that the College Base provided a better quality test than the Academic Profile for components of our general education that the tests covered. The College Base omits knowledge assessment in the Fine Arts area, and both tests omit Biblical information and measures of creativity. The College Base provides more sub scores relevant to our general education curriculum. Table 3 presents a list of general education knowledge content areas and related College BASE scores.

Table 3. General education content areas and relevant College BASE scores.

<b>Content areas</b>	<b>College BASE subject scores</b>
Natural world experiences	Science, Fundamental concepts
Human social experience	Social Sciences
Historical experience	History
Aesthetic experience	Reading and Literature
Religious and philosophical experience	None

College BASE does not provide scores for 2 content areas important to the curriculum—non-literature aesthetics and religious and philosophical experiences. The college could seek supplementary standardized tests in these areas or develop local instruments to fill these gaps.

This summer, the Committee will consider a recommendation to use the College Base to assess general education outcomes. Because the college’s general education courses are spread over 4 years, the recommendation will be that outgoing seniors be tested. The college will administer a standardized test to assess general education content knowledge at the end of the 2001-2002 academic year.

### Institutional Level

The college must yet identify the knowledge components relevant to servant leadership and a maturing Christian faith. These institutional outcome objectives are embedded in curricular and co-curricular programming. The faculty are working to clarify the nature and structure of the experiences designed to produce these student learning outcomes. As they are clarified, the Institutional Assessment Committee will develop standard assessment forms to collect information about student learning.

## **Skills Component**

### **Majors**

Skills instruction in every major is designed to prepare students to participate creatively in the professional fields most closely linked with that major. The faculty agreed that skills assessment should target the professional-like products required of students. The Institutional Assessment Committee classified various types of products, and created standard forms (see Appendix F for copies of the forms) for department chairs and students to evaluate these products. Department chairs indicate whether these creative products are:

- ◆ Displayed visual art products (gallery displays)
- ◆ Performances (theatre, music)
- ◆ Scholarly products (research papers, creative writing)
- ◆ Media productions (audio tapes, video tapes)
- ◆ Problem-solving products (business scenarios, computer problems)
- ◆ Teaching application products (lesson plans and presentations, coaching plans and presentations).

Chairs then describe how these creative products reflect the essentials skills employed by professionals in the discipline. The Chair's report, accompanying students' reports, and samples of products judged at various quality levels comprise a departmental portfolio of creative products that reflect student skills related to the discipline.

This strategy for assessing skills in the majors was adopted by the faculty in Spring 2001 and these reports constitute the assessment data collected by departments for 2001. The forms provide for quality evaluation and for information from students that could help a department improve student learning.

Many of the major field tests also include questions related to discipline-specific skills. As departments clarify the skills their students should learn, and begin using the major field tests, sub scores from those tests can provide additional evidence about skill development.

### **General Education**

Faculty identified the following 3 categories of skills-related objectives for general education:

- ◆ Information acquisition skills
- ◆ Thinking skills
- ◆ Communication skills

Each of these skills contained several components. The College BASE test reports scores for skills related to 14 of the 17 skills components of the general education curriculum. Appendix G identifies Sterling College skills components and the related College BASE assessed skill(s). If the faculty agree to use College BASE, much of the assessment for general education skills components will be complete. A few significant gaps remain. Table 4 lists these gaps and possible approaches to their assessment.

Table 4. Gaps in general education skills assessment by College BASE.

<b>Gap in College BASE</b>	<b>Possible assessment remedy</b>
◆ Faculty intended information acquisition to cover library and computer information retrieval skills.	Develop a standard assessment tool for these components linked with composition course, computer course, and major capstone course.
◆ Oral communication is not assessed in College BASE	Develop a standard assessment tool at the level of the introductory speech course and in the major to assess oral presentations.
◆ Use of media technology is not assessed in College BASE	Develop a standard assessment form for students and faculty to evaluate media technology use and/or presentations.
◆ Thinking reflectively is not assessed directly as the objective is stated	Critical, creative, and synthetic thinking all require reflection, incorporating new information with what one retains about old information. This objective is covered in other assessment categories.
◆ Using information responsibly and ethically is minimally assessed in College BASE	Develop a standard form to assess student understanding of plagiarism, and ethical use of computer technology.
◆ Thinking compassionately is not assessed in College BASE	This objective is related to the college's servant leadership initiative. Link this general education objective to developing servant leadership assessment.

If this plan is adopted, the college can assess general education skills by using the College BASE and 5 additional standard assessment tools.

### **Institutional Level**

Servant leadership skills need to be assessed at the institutional level. Faculty are working to identify requisite skills. As these skills are identified, the Assessment Committee will develop procedures to measure student learning of these skills as a result of their college experiences.

### **Values Component**

Assessing values involves measuring students' level of commitment to the stated value. Commitment is evident in student action, from passively receiving information about a value, to responding to probes in ways that are consistent with that value, and finally to incorporating that value into their own decision-making processes. The Assessment Committee can use this progression to structure standardized forms for recording how programs present values, student responses on assignments, and faculty/student reports of voluntary activities that reflect commitments to the stated values.

## Majors

The faculty have identified the following values that should be common to every major:

- ◆ Relating discipline-specific knowledge to other areas of inquiry
- ◆ Applying ethical guidelines to discipline-specific activity
- ◆ Relating discipline-specific content to Christian faith
- ◆ Using discipline-related information to provide voluntary service to the community.

The first and third values specify that students should develop interdisciplinary thinking habits. Because these values are interdisciplinary, their assessment will be covered in the General Education section below.

The second and fourth values relate more directly to the academic major. The Assessment Committee will develop the following forms to assess these values:

### **Ethics**

- ◆ Departmental report of curriculum inclusion of ethical guidelines related to the discipline. This will document the initial level of values development—that students receive information.
- ◆ Departmental report of assignments requiring students to use ethical principles to make appropriate decisions.
- ◆ Student report of decision-making and acting consistent with the discipline's values.

### **Service**

- ◆ Departmental report on the nature of the service component(s) for their students. This could be updated on a 4-year cycle.
- ◆ Departmental report of annual service projects completed by students.
- ◆ Student self-report evaluation of service project.
- ◆ Student self-report of activities that reflect the service value.

## General Education

The first and third value objectives common to all majors involve interdisciplinary thinking. The general education components related to this value include:

- ◆ Interdisciplinary thinking skills (#2)
- ◆ Whole person development (#4)
- ◆ World-view and leadership development (#10).

To assess whether students come to value these thinking habits requires some measure of whether they increase their frequency of integrative, holistic, and servant-leadership thinking as they progress through their college years. The third value requires that the college attend to integrative thinking between discipline content and Christian faith.

Beginning in Fall 2001, seniors must complete a capstone course, Faith and Life Seminar. The objectives for this course are directly linked with the integrative values specified in major and general education objectives. A copy of the course proposal that was approved by the faculty is located in Appendix H. This course is a prime vehicle for assessing student integrative thinking and action related to the values components at the

end of their college experience. The Assessment Committee will propose developing standardized forms to report levels of commitment to the stated values. The forms should be designed for use by incoming freshmen and graduating seniors for pre- and post-collegiate responses.

### **Institutional Level**

The forms developed for general education values assessment must include values related to servant leadership. In addition, forms for co-curricular programs could be used to assess student development of servant leadership values.

### **Summary**

The assessment plan presented above is comprehensive. Its simplicity lies in using standardized tests where appropriate and standard forms across departments and programs for reporting student learning. Faculty and administrators can use data presented in standard formats to identify strengths and weaknesses across programs and can use that information to improve student learning.

The faculty has adopted only portions of the assessment plan described above. The plan presents the parts it has not adopted in a format that is consistent with the parts that it has adopted. The college should adopt the proposed or modified comprehensive plan during the 2001-2002 academic year and begin testing new parts during this year. A first criterion of whether the plan can be successful is whether faculty demonstrate their understanding of the plan by submitting the relevant data. The college can not afford to spend 4 more years building an understanding of what we are measuring.

## **Assessment Information from Spring, 2001**

Assessment information for the 2000-2001 academic year focuses on skills for a student's major reflected in a creative product. The procedure for assessing these skills was adopted by the faculty in April 2001. Thus, there was a short time frame to implement this assessment. This report contains 2 parts—a general summary of assessment information across departments and specific feedback to each submitting department. The summary and feedback are based on the original documents submitted by departments and appended to this report.

### ***General Summary***

#### **Assessment completion measures**

The assessment plan called for each department with graduating seniors to submit assessment forms for those graduates. Twelve departments had graduating seniors. Nine of those (75%) submitted departmental and student assessment forms and materials. One department submitted only student self-report forms, and one department indicated that the assessment work was in progress.

Fifty-two students were listed as May graduates in the Commencement program. Students graduating in December or January left the college before the faculty adopted the new assessment plan for skills in the major. Therefore, these students were omitted in estimating assessment completion rates. Thirty-eight of the May graduates were assessed

for skills development through creative products (73%). Nine of the 14 students not assessed were in departments that did not submit their assessment reports.

### Assessment scores

Department chairs indicated the nature of the creative product the students completed. Five chairs indicated “Research papers” and four indicated either performances, displays, or problem solving projects.

Faculty and students independently rated the same student products. Students rated their own product. The rating question was “how well do you think the product reflected essential skills for professionals in your discipline?” The response categories were:

- 0 = product did not reflect essential skills for a professional
- 1 = product minimally reflected essential skills for a professional
- 2 = product moderately reflected essential skills for a professional
- 3 = product clearly reflected essential skills for a professional

Faculty generally rated the products higher ( $M = 2.43$ ) than did students ( $M = 2.38$ ). This difference existed in 5 departments, while in 4 departments students rated their products higher than did faculty. Mean ratings by department faculty ranged from 1.7 to 3. Mean ratings by department students ranged from 2 to 2.9.

Students responded to the following additional 3 questions about their products:

1. To what extent did your ability to complete the product depend on skills you had learned through the department’s curriculum?
2. To what extent did you interact with faculty on the product as you worked on it?
3. To what extent would you be pleased to share your product at a graduate school admissions or employment interview?

Scores for these questions were based on the following scale:

- 0 = not at all
- 1 = minimally
- 2 = moderately
- 3 = greatly

Table 5 shows means and ranges for each of the 3 questions. The Table also shows means for departments evaluating research papers and those evaluating performance-related products.

Table 5. Student ratings on 3 questions.

Question	Mean	Range	Research paper mean	Performance-related mean
1	2.54	2 – 3	2.44	2.68
2*	1.98	1 – 3	1.80	2.24
3	2.36	1.8 - 3	2.30	2.44

\*Scores on this question were significantly different,  $p < .05$ .

Appendix I (in administrative copies only) presents scores for each department.

The Director of Institutional Assessment examined departmental reports for completion and quality variables. Each department submitting assessment reports

received an **Assessment Report Feedback** form. That form provided information to the department on 10 issues. A summary of responses to these issues appears below:

*Issue 1. Omitted documentation*

This section itemized for the department the material that should have been in the report that was omitted. Summary findings are that:

- ◆ 2 departments did not submit any material
- ◆ 4 departments did not have any missing documentation
- ◆ Missing documentation for the remaining departments included not evaluating all graduates and not including samples of evaluated products or evaluation forms as requested.

*Issue 2. Percent of graduates evaluated*

This section presents the percent of May graduates for whom self-reports and departmental evaluations were completed. Scores ranged from 0 to 100%. Summary findings are that:

- ◆ 6 departments completed evaluations for 100% of their graduates
- ◆ The 9 departments which submitted reports included an average of 90% of their graduates.

*Issue 3. Was the link between the nature of the student product and professional skills clearly described?*

Department chairs were asked to describe the link between the product students completed and skills required of professionals. Summary findings are that:

- ◆ 6 of the 9 reporting departments clearly described the link
- ◆ Departments not describing the link instead described the nature of the student product without references to its relation to professional activity.

*Issue 4. Comments about who completes the evaluation.*

Department chairs indicated whether the product was evaluated by faculty, peers, and/or external reviewers. Summary findings are that:

- ◆ All reporting departments indicated that faculty evaluated the products
- ◆ 2 reporting departments indicated that peers evaluated the products
- ◆ 1 reporting department indicated that external reviewers evaluated the products
- ◆ 1 department included a peer evaluation form to corroborate its claim that peers evaluated products.

*Issue 5. Was the product appropriate for skills assessment for majors?*

This issue included evaluative comments about the appropriateness of the product for assessment of professional skills based on total information available on the assessment forms. Summary findings are that:

- ◆ 6 of 9 reporting departments assessed products that were judged appropriate for requisite professional skills.

- ◆ For the remaining 3 departments, questions about appropriateness involved 1) the link between the student product and professional activity, and 2) whether available information for assessment was effectively used.

*Issue 6. Comments about faculty ratings.*

This issue involves how faculty used the available scores to assess the student products. Comments included information about the range of scores used and the standards for scoring. Summary findings are that:

- ◆ 4 departments reported a range of 0 for their students. In all cases, the scores were the maximum rating of “3”. These scores were given to 16 students (46% of evaluated graduates).
- ◆ 4 departments reported scores ranging from 1 to 3 for their students
- ◆ Scoring differences suggest that departments have in mind different standards for assessing professional skills development.

*Issue 7. Comments about the match between faculty and student ratings.*

This issue involves discrepancies between faculty and student ratings. Comments include information about averages for faculty and students and individual scores that seemed markedly misaligned. Summary findings are that:

- ◆ For 8 of 9 reporting departments, faculty and student ratings varied by no more than 1 point across all students in those departments
- ◆ One department had 1 student score that was considerably higher than the faculty score.
- ◆ 4 of 9 reporting departments had average faculty scores that were lower than average student scores. The remaining departments had higher faculty than student averages.

*Issue 8. Did product completion depend on requisite skills?*

This issue was based on student self-reports to Question 1 summarized in Table 6 above. That table presents the range of department means. Within departments the summary findings are that:

- ◆ 8 of 9 reporting departments had no students scoring this item lower than “2”.
- ◆ 1 department had a fairly large minority reporting a score of “1”.

*Issue 9. Do samples reflect quality differences suggested by the ratings.*

Departments submitted either samples of products or evaluation forms for products that reflected each of the quality score levels they used. In some cases, departments submitted multiple samples for a given score level. The summary findings are that:

- ◆ 6 departments submitted samples that could be summarized
- ◆ Samples in 4 departments reflected quality differences that were evident in score differences
- ◆ Even when quality differences were evident, there were so many kinds of differences that it wasn’t clear how quality differed for requisite professional skills.

- ◆ In 1 department, the sample revealed quality deficiencies that could have produced lower ratings.
- ◆ In 1 department, evaluative comments from department faculty reflected qualitative differences among student products that all received the same score.

*Issue 10. Other comments.*

Other issues arising from the assessment forms for the department to consider were placed here. The following kinds of comments were included :

- ◆ Suggestions for improving faculty feedback mechanisms when student scores on faculty interaction were low
- ◆ Suggestions to clarify student responsibilities for completing the self-report form
- ◆ Suggestions for improving the match between skills and evaluation processes

The final item on the Assessment Report Feedback form listed questions for the Department Chair to answer about the skills assessment report. Those questions requested 1 or more of the following kinds of information:

- ◆ An evaluation form for the student product that focused student attention on the requisite professional skills.
- ◆ A revised description of the link between the student product and professional skills.
- ◆ Responses to specific issues raised in the Assessment Report Feedback form.
- ◆ An evaluation of the department's assessment scoring standards.
- ◆ A list of requisite professional skills expected in the discipline.
- ◆ An evaluation of feedback processes on student products.
- ◆ A plan to eliminate omitted material for future assessments.

## Interpretation

Each department received summary scores for their students. Departments can use the data above and their summary scores to answer several questions about their students' skill-learning reflected in student creative products. The following questions will help departments determine if they can improve student skill-learning by adjusting aspects of their programs and/or procedures:

- ◆ Do the faculty quality ratings reasonably reflect what professionals would be expected to do?
- ◆ Do the average student quality ratings correspond with faculty ratings? A discrepancy could indicate inadequate feedback mechanisms to students.
- ◆ Do the average ratings for Question 1 indicate that students see their products as products expected of professionals? Lower student scores could indicate that students don't understand the nature of professional activity or that the department's creative product assignments do not require students to use professional skills.
- ◆ Do the average ratings for Question 2 indicate that students perceive appropriate faculty involvement in guiding the student's progress on

products? Low scores could indicate instructional and/or monitoring feedback problems.

- ◆ Do the average ratings for Question 3 indicate that students are proud of their products? Low scores could indicate that students do not recognize the professional value of their product.

### ***Departmental summary***

This section contains data summary scores for individual departments.

### ***Executive summary***

- ◆ **Sterling College's assessment program has taken significant steps forward this academic year.** Although data collection is limited, faculty have responded positively to the new directions for assessment. Furthermore, plans for future data collection have been established and will be implemented in the 2001-2002 academic year. Informal comments by faculty suggest that the new directions for assessment are clear and simple and that completing the assessment assignment for the 2001 year was not an arduous task. The reports generated even by the limited data for 2001 have the potential to improve student learning as departments consider the feedback in the context of the general findings for the institution.
- ◆ **Not every department completed its assessment assignment for 2000-2001.** The Assessment Committee recognizes that the assignment was adopted by the faculty late in the year, and that departments may not have had appropriate time to collect the products they were to evaluate. However, faculty were informed of the pending plan several months in advance of its adoption. Compliance is a prime indicator that a culture of assessment has been established. The Assessment Committee must diligently interpret the assessment assignments and their value to non-compliant departments and initiate interactions that could lead to 100% compliance. The administration should note non-compliance and assist the Assessment Committee to clarify the necessity of completing assessment assignments. Several departments that did not submit assignments this year also did not submit them last year.
- ◆ **For assessment information to be meaningfully interpreted across the institution, departments must include all requested documentation in their reports.** Some departments omitted some documentation, though the level of omissions is relatively low, and departments should easily understand what they have omitted.
- ◆ **Faculty need to consider professional skill standards.** One possible criterion for products scored "3" (clearly reflected essential skills for a professional) could be that products would be acceptable for presentation at professional meetings beyond the local campus. Such meetings could include intercollegiate competitions and/or professional association meetings. If faculty consistently used this standard, they would use a wider range of scores than evident in the current data. Furthermore, students would be exposed to a common standard of excellence that challenged them to their best efforts.
- ◆ **Faculty need to adopt standards for meeting assessment criteria.** This task will continue until all forms of assessment data are regularly being collected. For the current data, 60% of student products were rated at the highest level. If common standards are used as suggested above, this percentage would likely drop. It would be reasonable to expect that 75% of our graduates would reach a level 2 or higher rating, indicating at least moderate reflection of professional skills in their products.
- ◆ **Departments have received feedback that could affect student learning of professional skills.** Feedback to departments included one or more challenges based on information collected through assessment. Some departments need to clarify the nature of professional skills that their program develops in their graduates. Others need to consider formative feedback mechanisms as students work on their products. Departments may need to develop rating forms that reflect expected skills in student

products. All of these tasks can make the goals of instruction clearer to students, enhancing their attention to skills development. Furthermore, the Assessment Report Feedback forms to departments ended with requests for responses from the departments. Thus, assessment can create a cycle of feedback to insure that the Assessment Committee clearly understands what the department is doing and the Department clearly understands what the assessment information can mean for improving student learning.

- ◆ **The administration must also become involved in the feedback cycle.** A culture of assessment can only emerge as administrative decisions are visibly guided by assessment results. Academic administrators must study the assessment information and reflect their commitment to budget for improvements based on that information. Assessment-based decisions about budgets must extend beyond allocating funds for testing to allocating funds to improve weak programs. When this happens, assessment will be viewed as friendly to students whose learning is improved by it, and to faculty who see assessment results as ways to support their requests for resources needed to assure student learning. This annual assessment report includes a form for administrators to complete (Appendix J) that will lead administrators to helpful uses of assessment information.