

Annual Assessment Report Summer 2005

Background

Sterling College claims to provide excellent instruction. The work that faculty and students contribute to assessment provides an integrity check on that claim. Furthermore, the college makes statements about what its general education and major programs provide and what students should be able to do because of these programs. When evidence exists that outcomes do not match claims, integrity declines and programs must change. Assessment data provide information that can direct the changes and improve the quality of the students' learning experiences.

The nature of this year's report differs from the last 4 years. In past years, the annual assessment report had a prescriptive quality. Particularly in individual departmental reports, the Assessment Committee identified strengths and weaknesses, interpreted possible causes for the weaknesses, and suggested modifications to programs and assignments based on these interpretations. Presenters at the 2005 Higher Learning Commission convention gave several examples of assessment programs that were less prescriptive than ours has been. Some of these presenters were intrigued with the possibilities of becoming more prescriptive. Our reaction was to see value in moving in the opposite direction. Therefore, this report provides much data, as in past years, but much less interpretation of these data.

Our hope is that allowing departments a freer role in interpreting the data and developing strategies to deal with what they see as weaknesses will enhance the effectiveness of departmental changes. We know that significant changes occurred based on the prescriptive style in prior years. We also know that when department chairs disagreed with the interpretations, little change occurred. If department faculty develop their own interpretations and corresponding adjustments, their ownership of the changes increases.

Assessment Committee members are available to assist departments in understanding their data and developing adjustment strategies. Assessment data are complex. Departments receive many scores from students who vary in many ways. In addition, department programs may contain elements that are not reflected in information available to the Assessment Committee. Department chairs are in a position to best understand those program elements. The link between program elements and learning outcomes is interpretive. If outcomes are unsatisfactory, chairs need to balance the potential roles of student capacity and/or motivational limitations with program weaknesses. Chairs may want assistance and some external objectivity in making these interpretations. This year, we leave the decision for requesting interpretive assistance to the department chair. Each department has a liaison faculty member on the Assessment Committee, and departments should begin any request for assistance with their liaison.

During 2004-2005, the assessment program experienced the following significant milestones:

- ◆ Testing most students until now has been voluntary, though strongly encouraged. Participation in testing for next year's graduates is now a requirement for graduation, first published in the catalog in Fall, 2002.
- ◆ Departments and students continued their high rates of participation in assessment testing.
- ◆ The Assessment Committee began operating with liaisons from the committee to department chairs.
- ◆ For the first time, we tested randomly-selected freshmen as a baseline group for general education knowledge development.
- ◆ Students graduating in Spring, 2005 represent the last group graduating under very minimal mathematics general education requirements.
- ◆ For the first time, we received a "departmental report" for Independent Interdisciplinary majors.

This assessment report documents data collected from students and faculty during the 2004-2005 academic year. The report presents the following information:

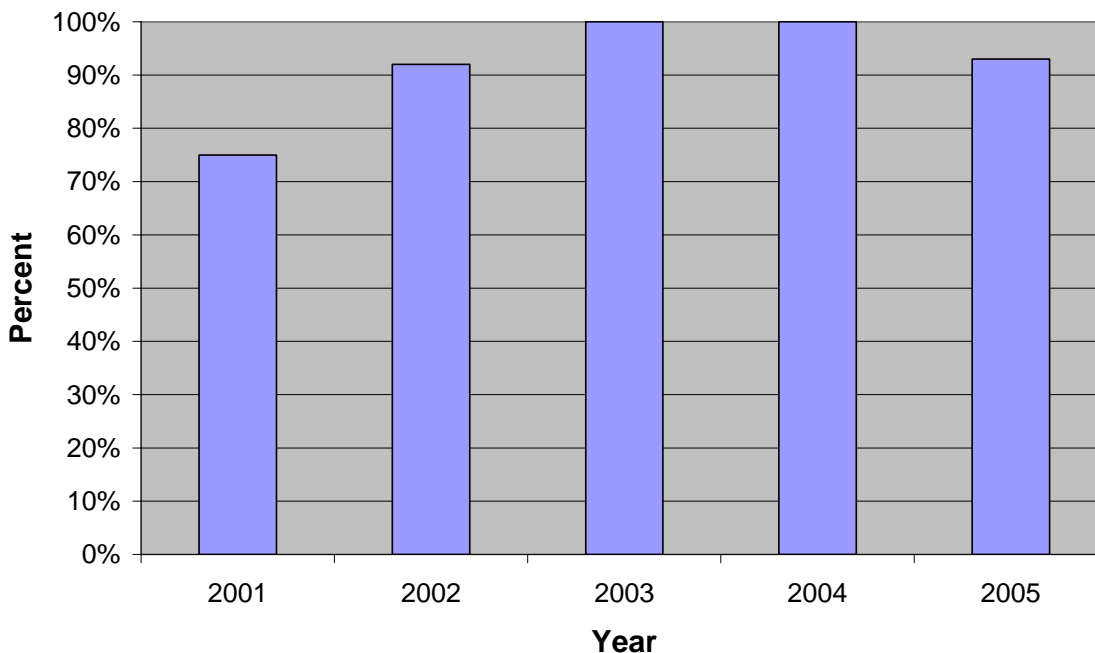
- ◆ Compliance rates
- ◆ Institutionally aggregated data on knowledge, skills, and values for graduates
- ◆ A description of "Success Stories" in assessment, highlighting departmental achievements during 2004-2005 produced by assessment processes.
- ◆ Departmentally aggregated data on knowledge, skills, and values for graduates

The Assessment Committee has examined and approved the full report. The Committee delivers that full report to the President and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. A shorter report, excluding the departmentally aggregated data, is public information and is distributed to all departments through their department chairs and to students through Student Government Association. The public report is also available on the Sterling College web page. Each department chair or assessment director for a major also receives a copy of his/her departmental report.

Compliance Rates

During the 2004-2005 academic year, students graduated with 16 majors from 14 departments. Thirteen of the 14 departments submitted assessment reports. The one department that did not submit a report had 2 graduates, both with double majors, whose creative products were reported by the other department. Figure 1 shows the departmental compliance rates for the last 5 years.

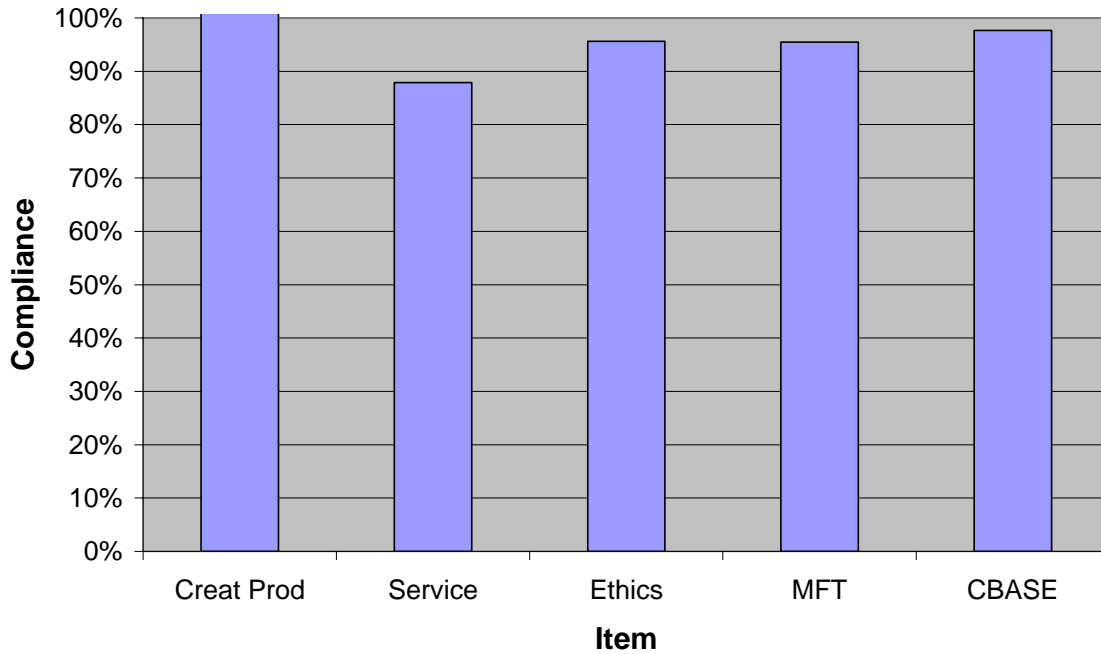
Figure 1. Departments submitting reports



The decline for 2005 is entirely a product of the 2 students with double majors. The Assessment Committee will need to clarify expectations for students with double majors. The open issue is whether these students should complete all assessment requirements for each major, or whether documentation for a single major is appropriate. Given that assessment is program evaluation, not individual student evaluation, the reasonable solution to the issue is that if a student graduates with a double major, that student should demonstrate meeting the assessment requirements in both majors.

Department Chairs collect two reports from students and submit one evaluation score to the committee. Seven of 14 (50%) submitted complete information for all of their graduates. This rate is slightly lower than for the previous year. Those departments submitting incomplete information generally had only a few pieces of missing information. Missing documents included 4 creative product evaluations (over 95% complete), and 6 service project reports (about 93% complete). Only 2 students did not complete an ethics evaluation form (over 98% complete), and only 2 students did not take the CBASE test (over 98% complete). Figure 2 shows compliance rates for student data. All of these compliance rates reflect improvements on already good rates we had in 2004.

Figure 2. Compliance rates for student data



Departmental completion rates for all student data were very high. One department (the one with 2 graduates who were double majors) had a completion percentage (average of completion rates for each data point) below 50%. One other department had an 80% completion rate. All other departments had rates higher than 90%. These completion rates, in the context of requirements for students that we have chosen not to enforce until next year, continue to reflect the “culture of assessment” that is growing at Sterling College.

Institutional Data

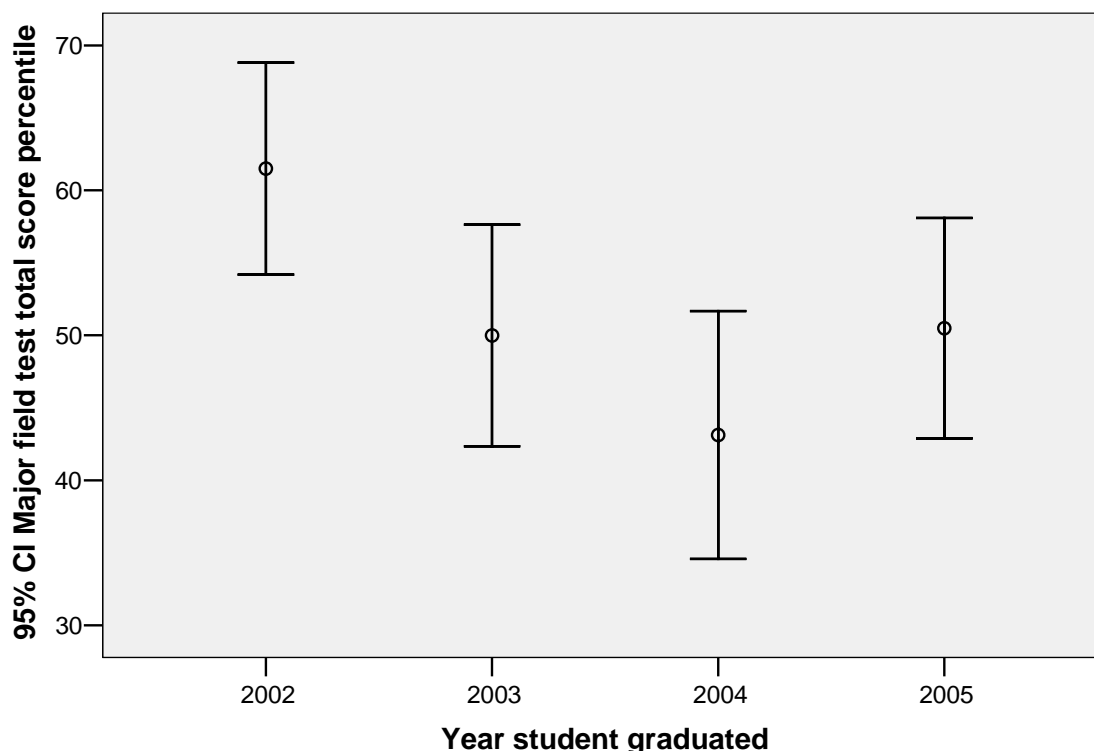
Majors

Knowledge

Nationally standardized major field test scores for 2005 are available for only 7 departments. Scores for 2 additional departments will arrive in September and thus are not reflected in the data presented below.

Figure 3 shows mean percentiles and 95% confidence intervals for major field test scores earned by Sterling College students for the last 4 years.

Figure 3. Means and confidence intervals for major field test scores.



Last year's report noted the downward trend in scores over a 3-year period and suggested reasons to not be unduly concerned. The scores for 2005 confirm that, even in percentile scores, there is not a general downward trend. Our students continue to score around the national average on these tests

For scores from all years to date, averages for departments range from the 25th to the 70th percentile. Aggregating scores across years eliminates extreme scores that arise from very low sample sizes for a single year. The minimum number of students tested in the departments was 12. Compared to last year, the lowest percentile has increased considerably.

The increase in scores for 2005 occurred because we had more students score high and fewer students score low than in 2004. Nine students scored at or above the 90th percentile (15%) and 7 scored at or below the 10th percentile (12%).

Sub scores are available for 4 departments for 2005 graduates. Sub score variation can help a department identify weak and strong areas of their curriculum. If the range of sub scores is high and persists across several years, the department can assume that its low scores are targets for curriculum improvements. For 2005 data, sub score variation ranged from a low (indicating balanced instructional emphasis across areas of a discipline) of 6 percentile points to a high (indicating less balance) of 28 percentile points. This range of variation is reduced when data from all years of testing to date are included. With data aggregated across years, sub scores varied from a low of 2 to a high of 11 percentile points. These data suggest balanced instruction for these departments,

though the quality of the instruction may still vary as some of these departments have low and some have higher average percentiles. Each department that has sub score reports should examine its range of sub scores carefully, considering the following:

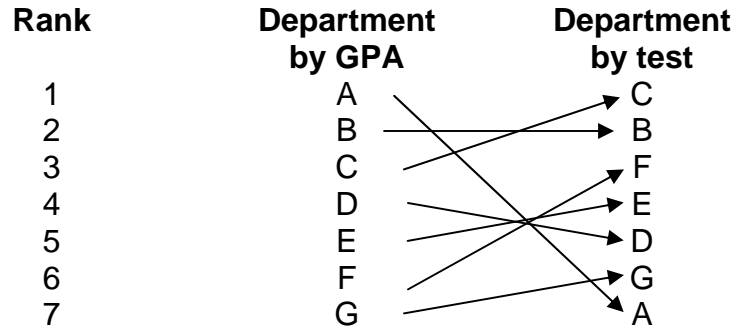
- ◆ Large sub-score variations indicate that students are not learning some of the discipline's content knowledge. Intentionally or inadvertently, the department may have left this content weak in its curriculum.
- ◆ Small sub score variation, if all the sub scores are high, indicates balanced curricular offerings encompassing the range of content in the discipline.
- ◆ Small sub score variation, if all the sub scores are low, indicates general weakness either in the students or in the curriculum design.
- ◆ Scores aggregated across all years of testing provide a more reliable indicator of program balance.

Major field tests and grade point averages independently assess content knowledge in a discipline. Faculty should expect the measures to be correlated, especially if the major field test content coverage corresponds with the department's curriculum design. For 2005 data, that correlation was significant ($r = +.38$, $p < .05$), though lower than that for last year. This correlation is relatively weak, accounting for only 14% of the variation between test and GPA scores. For 2 departments, that correlation was negative (those with the higher GPAs received the lower test scores). For 5 departments the correlation was positive, and for 4 of those 5, the correlation exceeded $+.50$.

Once again, aggregating data across all years of testing provides more reliable estimates of the real relationships between GPA and test scores. For all graduates ($N = 218$), the relationship between GPA and knowledge test scores was significant and positive ($r = +.43$) and accounted for 18.5% of the variation between GPA and test scores. All departments had positive correlations for these data and they ranged from $r = +.1$ (very little relationship) to $r = +.67$ (fairly strong relationship). Four departments had significant relationships ($p < .05$) that were higher than $r = +.4$.

We can examine inter-institutional consistency of grading practices by comparing average departmental GPAs and average departmental major field test percentiles. If all departments have similar grading standards, and grading depends on knowledge of discipline content, we should see that the rank order of grades corresponds with the rank order of major field test score percentiles. We present these ranks for 7 departments for which these data are available in Figure 4. Non-horizontal arrows indicate changes in rank from one measure to the next. Rising arrows indicate departments in which students earn lower grades but score higher on the major field tests. Descending arrows indicate departments in which students earn higher grades, but score lower on the major field tests. Readers should remember that average GPA will reflect more than just content knowledge.

Figure 4. Comparing ranks for average departmental GPAs and standardized knowledge test percentiles.*



*Each letter represents a given department. Data represent departments for which major field test scores are available through 2005.

Skills

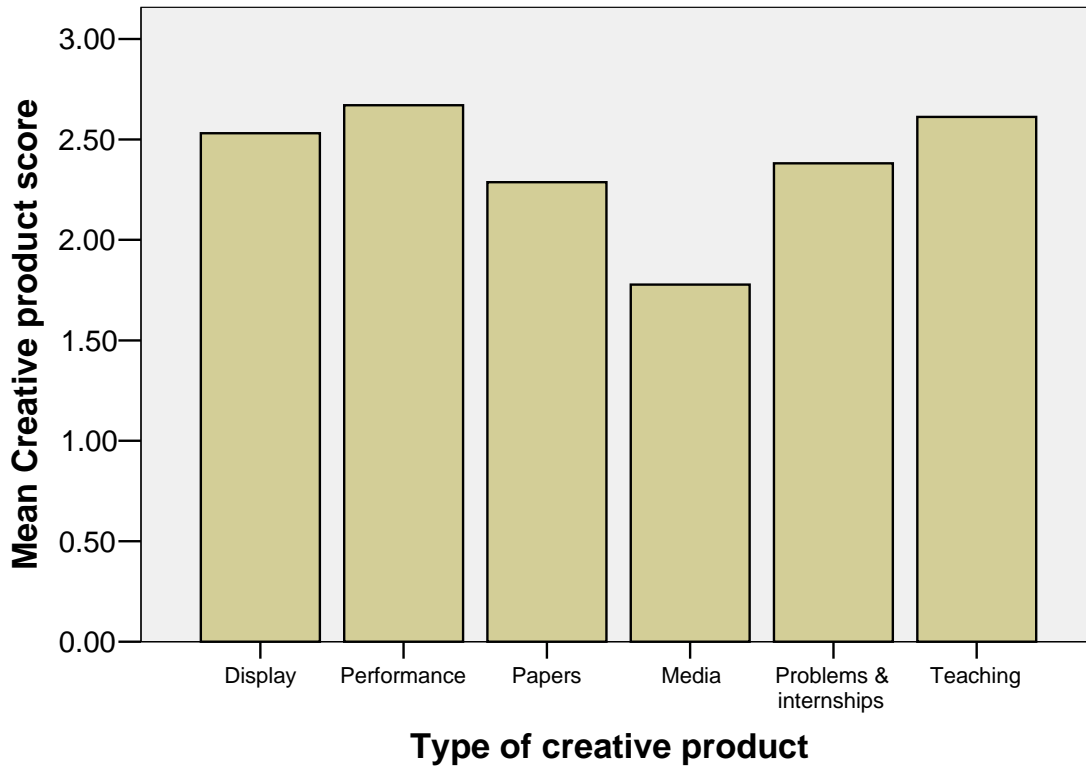
Sterling College assesses skills in the major by asking faculty and students to rate creative products that students complete late in their academic programs. All raters assign numerical scores to the products on the following 4-point scale:

- 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 again rated products slightly lower (Mean = 2.34) than did students (Mean = 2.59). These scores represent the same score by faculty as in 2004 and a slightly higher score for students compared with 2004.

Students complete different kinds of creative products. The Assessment Committee has collected 368 creative product scores for 6 categories of products in the last 5 years. Figure 5 shows the average creative product score by type of product.

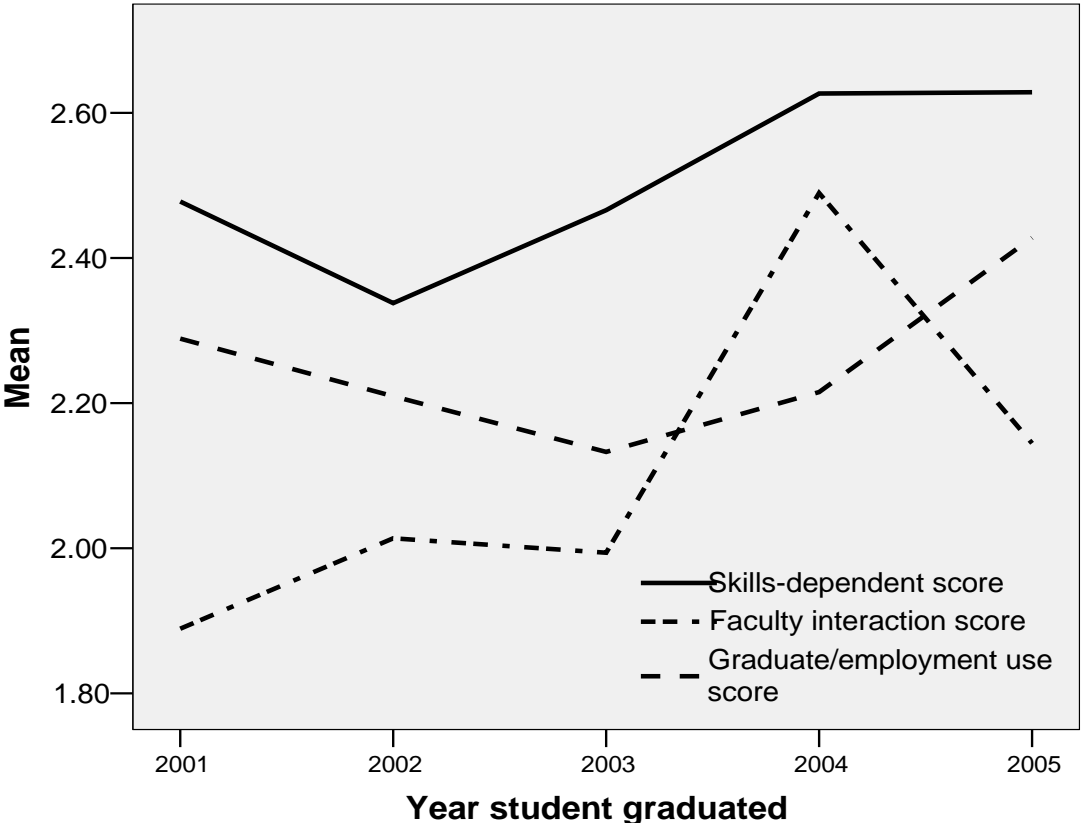
Figure 5. Creative product score by type of product



Departments vary in the scores they give for creative products. The average score for all departments for all years to date is 2.41. The average score by department ranges from a low of 1.78 to 2.72.

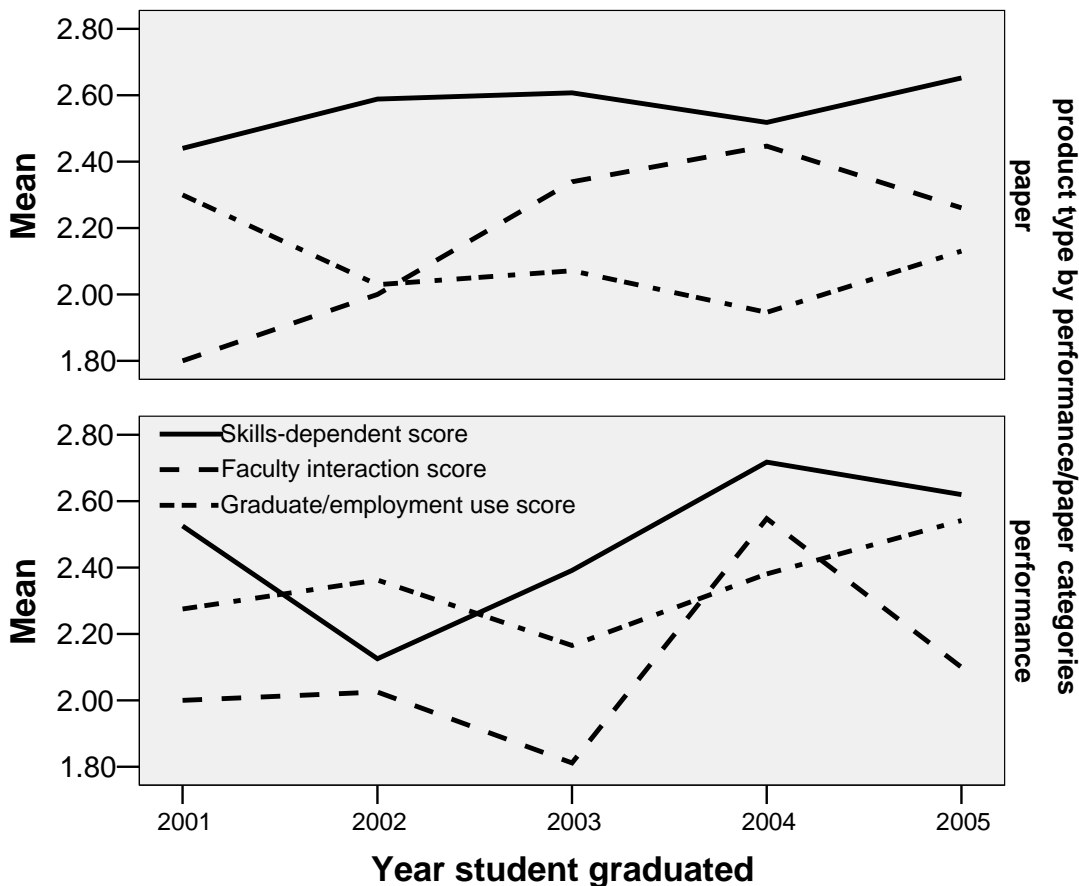
Students answered several questions about their creative products, including whether the products reflected skills they had learned in their major, how much they had interacted with faculty in developing the product, and how likely they would be to show the product in an interview for employment or graduate school. Figure 6 shows average responses to these questions for each year. The general trend for all questions is an increase in scores over the years. These data reflect improvements in student perceptions of the quality of their creative products and provide indirect support for the value of assessment in improving student learning experiences.

Figure 6. Student ratings of creative product aspects by year



There is an obvious change in faculty interaction score from 2004 to 2005. Figure 7 shows scores from Figure 6 separated into 2 categories of products. These data show a steeper drop for “performance” product scores for faculty interaction than for “paper” products.

Figure 7. Student ratings of creative product aspects by year and product type



Values

Service

The college catalog claims that every major requires its students to complete a service project. This year, several departments advanced in implementing their service project plans. About half of the departments have service requirements that are evident in catalog copy. Some additional departments have submitted catalog copy that will make this requirement evident in future catalogs. Other departments have service project requirements embedded in courses, though not articulated in the catalog. A few departments have not implemented such projects as regular requirements for their major. Prior annual assessment reports have reported these omissions and encouraged the departments to develop their service projects. The departments' failure to implement service projects creates an integrity problem for the college and must be corrected. Academic Policy Committee should address this issue.

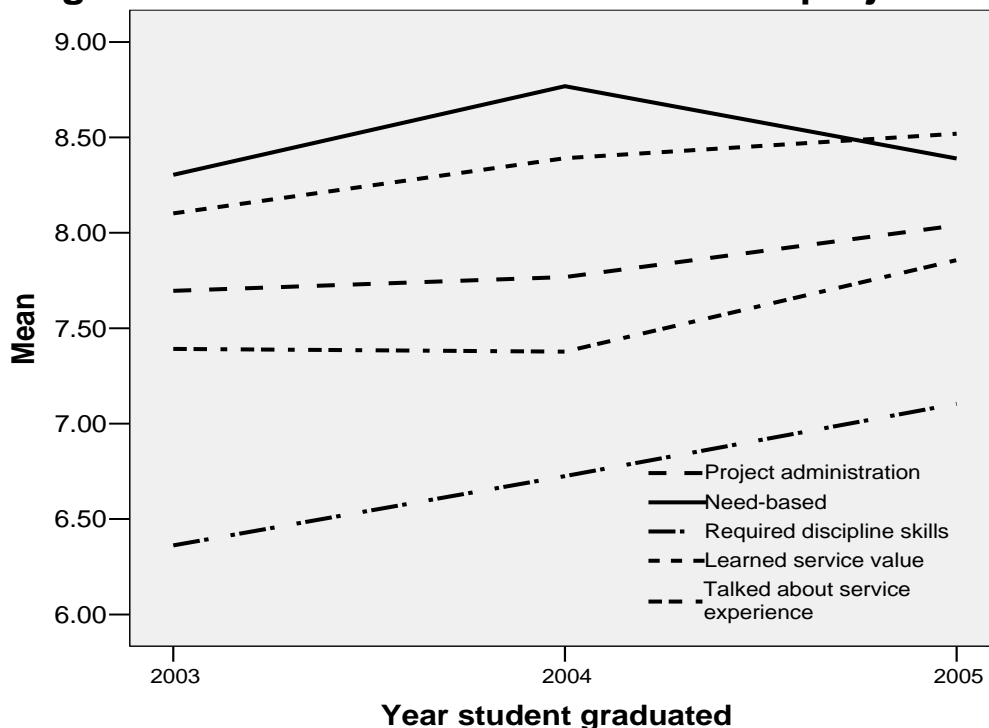
Student reports from departments that do have service projects indicate quality improvements for the last 3 years. Students rated their service projects indicating their level of agreement on 10 questions. A "1" represents strong disagreement and a "5"

indicates strong agreement. We summed scores for sets of questions to produce 5 scales, each with a maximum of 10 points. The scale scores are:

- ◆ Project administration—combines scores from questions about clarity of project description and faculty direction of the project.
- ◆ Need-based—combines scores from questions about whether the project was based on some community need and whether people in the community recognized this need.
- ◆ Required discipline skills—combines scores for questions about whether students used and/or learned skills related to their disciplines.
- ◆ Learned service value—combines scores for questions about learning the value of service and likelihood of volunteering in the future.
- ◆ Talked about service experience—combines scores for questions about talking with faculty and/or other students about their service experience.

Figure 8 shows student ratings by year for 3 years. The only declining score for 2005 was the highest-rated scale about whether the project met a need in the community.

Figure 8. Student evaluations of service projects



The improved scores may be related to fuller implementation of quality service projects in several departments. Quality improvements involved greater attention to discipline skills in service projects, fuller implementation of requirements that departments had developed in recent years, and enhanced requirements for reflecting about projects. These data again highlight the value of assessment for identifying weaknesses and generating alternative curriculum designs to produce desired outcomes.

We have collected evaluations of service projects from about 240 students over the last 3 years. These aggregated data continue to tell a story of values change related to the quality of departmental service projects. Some projects clearly require students to use

their specialized disciplinary skills; others do not. We calculated an indicator of value change by subtracting initial willingness to volunteer scores from likelihood of volunteering in the future because they had completed the service project. The average change for students completing projects that did not require discipline-specific skills was negative (Mean = -.09) while the average change for those completing projects that required their disciplinary skills was positive (Mean = +.24). This difference was statistically significant, $t(238) = 2.74, p < .05$.

This difference in value change was even more striking for 2005 graduates than for the aggregated data. For 2005, the percent of students completing projects requiring disciplinary skills (63%) was higher than for the aggregated data (55%) and those completing projects that did not require disciplinary skills had even more negative change scores (-.31) than the aggregated group (-.09). These data support the importance of creating projects that require students to use their discipline-specific skills in service.

Ethics instruction

Students completed ethics instruction evaluations for the second year. Two initial questions addressed the extent to which students received ethics instruction:

- ◆ Did you receive ethics instruction in your major?
- ◆ Are you aware of a professional ethics code in your discipline?

Scores on these questions remained unchanged from last year. Ninety-seven percent of the students reported receiving ethics instruction, and 73% reported awareness of a professional ethics code. Departments are clearly providing ethics instruction to their students. That 27% of students are not aware of a professional ethics code related to their discipline remains of some concern. Our instruction should prepare students for professional responsibilities after graduation. Ethics codes exist for virtually every profession. Our students should be aware that such codes exist and that they will be held accountable to such codes. Faculty should not be satisfied with any scores indicating lack of awareness of ethics codes. Departmental reports indicate the percent of students in each department who report awareness of professional ethics codes. That percentage ranges from 0% to 100%.

Students also rated their level of agreement ($1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree$) with the following statements about ethics instruction in the department:

- ◆ The department conveyed to me the importance of ethical behavior for professional.
- ◆ The department required me to demonstrate that I understood ethical issues.
- ◆ Because of my exposure to ethical issues in this department, I am aware of concerns I would not otherwise have known about.
- ◆ My future professional behavior will be different because I have learned ethical principles in my courses.
- ◆ How much do you agree that the activities the department chair identified represent the ethics instruction that you experienced? (Department chairs had provided a list of instructional experiences with their 2004 report. Most of these were not updated for 2005).

Table 1 shows average student responses to each question and the range of averages for all departments. These averages were almost the same as for 2004.

Table 1. Students' responses to questions about ethics instruction.

Question	College Mean	Range across Departments
The department conveyed . . .	4.43	2.0 – 5.0
The department required . . .	3.99	2.0 – 4.8
Because of my exposure . . .	3.93	2.0 – 4.6
My future professional . . .	4.00	2.0 – 4.4
How much do you agree . . .	4.30	2.0 – 4.8

While the means reflect general agreement with each statement, the range of scores extending to the “disagree” side of the rating scale suggests room for improvement in the nature and quality of ethics instruction.

General Education

Knowledge

Students complete the CBASE test during their senior year to provide information about their general education knowledge base. The CBASE test provides scores in 4 subject areas—English, Math, Science, and Social Sciences. We randomly assign students to one of these subject tests. All students also complete a writing sample. Each year we add scores from about 20 students to each of the 4 subject areas. For 2005, 80 students completed the CBASE test.

Because we randomly assign students to subject areas, for any year we have too few students for reliable conclusions. We aggregate data across years to evaluate general education outcomes. Table 2 shows the number of students for which we have CBASE records in each subject area. The number of scores in each subject now gives us some confidence in the conclusions we can draw.

Table 2. Number of students in subject areas across all testing years.

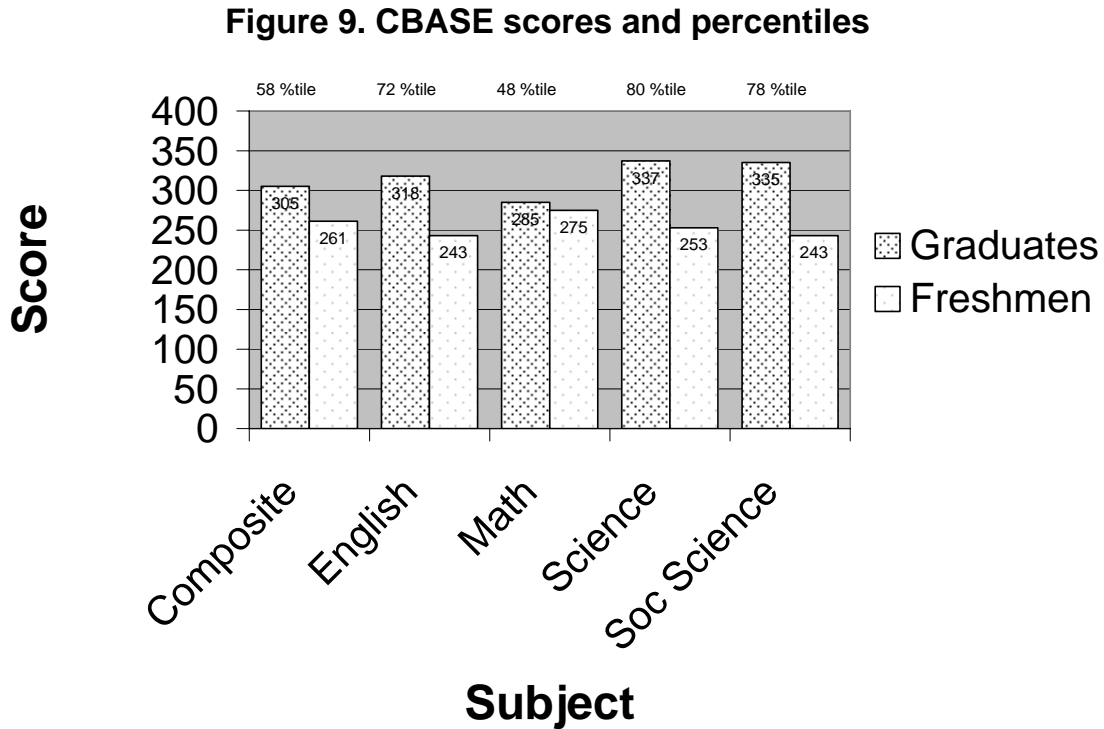
Subject	Number
English	77
Math	80
Science	72
Social Studies	77
Total	306

Prior annual assessment reports presented CBASE scores in arithmetic means. This summer, we discovered that CBASE norms are based on median instead of mean scores. The median score is the middle score in a group of scores and is less affected by extremes on either the low or the high end. Proper comparisons with norms require that we use the same score as the norm base. Therefore, the comparisons presented below are based on Sterling College median scores with aggregated data across the past 4 years.

This year we asked a randomly selected sample of 40 freshmen to take the CBASE test. These students were also randomly assigned to 1 subject area, giving us 10

scores for each subject area. The number of scores is low, but these data begin to provide a baseline for comparing graduates with entering students.

Figure 9 presents median CBASE scores and corresponding percentiles for graduates and freshmen. These data reflect general education performance



levels about which the college can generally be pleased. CBASE interpreters suggest that any differences greater than 17 raw score points are “meaningful.” All scores for graduates, except for Math, are above the 50th percentile. The Math score is close to the 50th percentile. Furthermore, all scores, except for Math, are considerably higher for graduates than for freshmen. The English, Science, and Social Science scores above the 70th percentile are striking. These data support the following conclusions:

- ◆ Our general education program effectively presents a solid knowledge base to students in English, Sciences, and Social Sciences.
- ◆ Graduates score “meaningfully” higher in the above effective areas than do incoming freshmen.
- ◆ The difference between graduates and incoming freshmen in Math knowledge is not meaningful.
- ◆ Our graduates score above national samples on general education knowledge.
- ◆ Improving students’ knowledge of Math is the most effective way to improve general education program outcomes.

Prior annual reports have noted that the faculty have already changed the mathematics requirement for general education. The new and expanded requirement takes effect for 2006 graduates. The math requirement is not extensive, but if it

effectively addressed a weakness we recognized years ago, we expect to see a rise in the math scores on the CBASE test beginning next spring.

An additional bit of interesting information comes from comparing students who have completed all their general education courses at Sterling College with those who completed some of these courses elsewhere and transferred them to Sterling. To examine these differences, we calculated year graduated minus year entered and divided the results into those spending at least 4 years and those spending 3 or fewer years at Sterling College. Table 3 shows data for the 4 CBASE areas comparing “transfers” versus those who completed general education requirements at Sterling.

Table 3. CBASE raw scores for those attending 4 years or more or less than 4 years .

CBASE area	≥ 4 years	< 4 years	Raw score difference
English	313	294	19
Math	289	279	10
Science	334	319	15
Social Studies	328	311	17

Because the sample of transfer students is small, these differences do not reach statistical significance. However, all scores except that for Math approach or exceed what the CBASE source material calls “meaningful differences.”

CBASE provides sub scores for each subject test. Some of these scores correspond directly with Sterling College general education objectives. Table 4 presents sub scores and corresponding percentiles linked with general education objectives. These scores again indicate that our general education program covers knowledge components relevant to objectives.

Table 4. CBASE scores and percentiles related to GE knowledge objectives.

GE objective	CBASE sub score	Graduate median	%tile	Freshmen median
#4 Whole person development	English: Reading & Literature	306	64	248
#5 Natural world knowledge	Science: Concepts	322	70	300
#6 Social world knowledge	Social Sciences: Social Studies	330	78	260
#7 Historical patterns	Social Sciences: History	313	66	244

Although the freshmen sample is small, these data indicate the largest score changes in the social science areas. In prior annual reports we have pointed out that the social sciences have a general education curriculum structure that is common for all freshmen and that includes an interdisciplinary course (Human Social Context). These data affirm the conclusions from prior reports about the possibilities of improving general education outcomes by developing more core and interdisciplinary courses.

Skills

CBASE provides indicators for the following additional general education objectives:

- ◆ #1 Information acquisition skills are included in scores related to reading, historical analysis, scientific data collection, and social science procedures.
- ◆ #2 Thinking skills are included in scores related to quantitative and critical thinking.
- ◆ #3 Communication skills are included in scores related to written communication and a writing sample.

CBASE presents these data in a different way than they present their subject scores and sub scores. For each skill we receive a statement of the percent of students who fall into each of 3 categories—high, medium, and low. A “high” score represents the top 16% of all scores. A “medium” score represents the middle 68% of scores. A “low” score represents the bottom 16% of scores. We can interpret these scores by examining whether our percentages in each category are similar to these standard percentages. Table 5 presents these percentages linked with general education skills objectives.

Table 5. CBASE scores related to GE skills objectives.

Objective #	Skill name	% low	% med	% high	Mean
1	Read accurately & critically	29	42	30	2.01
1	Read analytically	22	47	31	2.09
1	Understand writing process	18	57	25	2.06
1	Role of observing & experimenting in science	11	57	32	2.21
1	Science lab & field procedures	10	63	28	2.18
2	Use math to solve real problems	24	51	25	2.01
2	Use statistical reasoning	18	44	39	2.21
2	Evaluate algebraic expressions	31	51	18	1.86
2	Solve equations	20	66	14	1.94
2	Recognize 2-D & 3-D figures & properties	26	54	20	1.94
2	Perform calculations base on above	39	48	14	1.75
2	Interpret scientific results	3	65	32	2.29
2	Recognize social science procedures	5	48	47	2.42
3	Use standard written English	19	61	19	2
3	Use math notation to express ideas	15	74	11	1.96

Light highlighted scores are those on which Sterling students performed better than the national sample. Dark highlighted scores are those on which Sterling students performed worse than the national sample. As with content knowledge, students are strongest in social science and science skills.

On many skills, Sterling students are distributed differently than the national sample. If the first and third percentage columns are much higher than 16%, this indicates that Sterling has a larger cluster of students at either end of the skill distribution. Thus,

we have a relatively large group of students who score low on reading accurately and critically. Interestingly, we also have a large group of students who score high on this skill. The best scores are those where the “% low” is a low value and the “% high” is a high value, as for “Recognize social science procedures.” The General Education Committee could explore whether the skills on which students score low are those related to GE courses that are of the “cafeteria” or the “core” type.

The final skills score that we report is for the writing sample. All students write an essay in response to a written prompt. That essay is scored by trained readers using clearly established criteria for good writing. Scores range from 0 (Scorer could not read the writing) to 6 (an exemplary essay in organization, paragraph structure, and support for assertions, that is generally free of grammatical and mechanical errors). Most of our students score “3”, and none have ever scored “6.” Figure 10 shows the average score for Sterling’s students by year of graduation.

Figure 10. CBASE writing sample by year student graduated

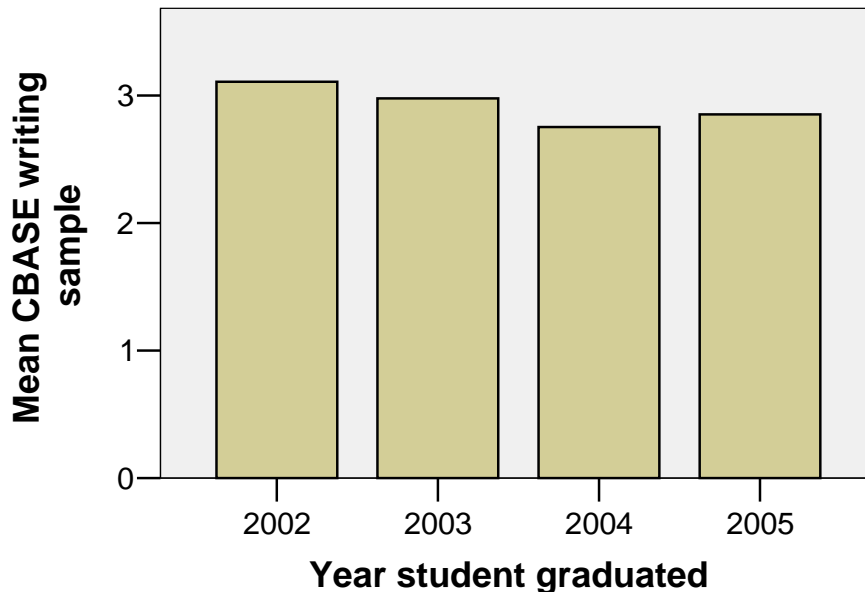
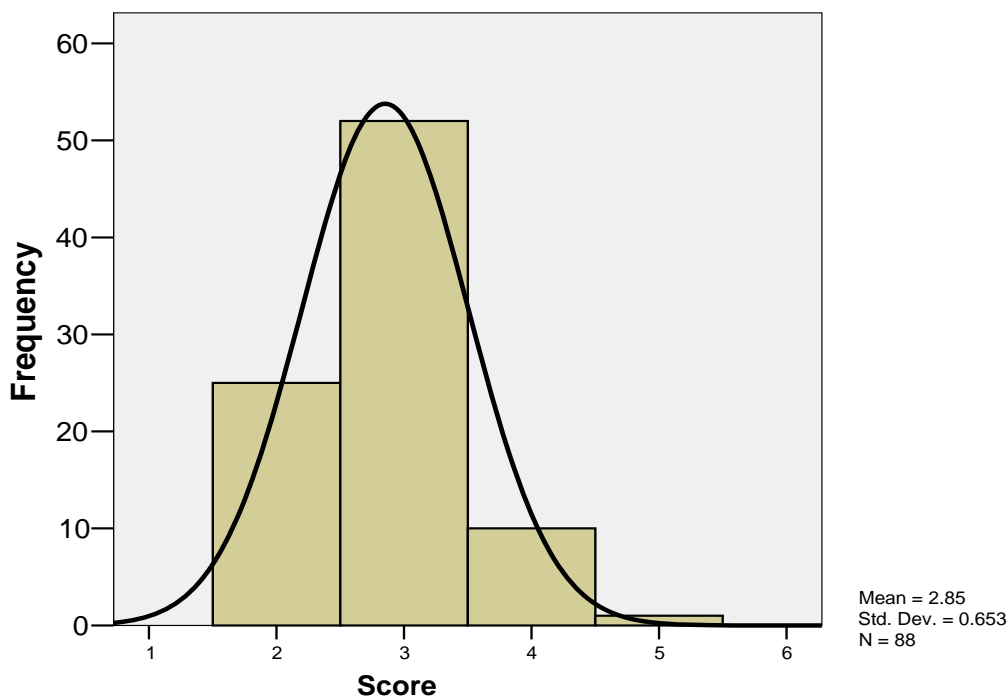


Figure 11 shows the frequency distribution for Sterling students’ scores for 2005 graduates.

Figure 11. Writing sample distribution for 2005 graduates



These scores certainly reflect room for improvement in writing skills.

Success Stories

The academic community benefits by learning about the positive changes resulting from assessment in different programs. This year we continue the pattern we began last year, and present several departmental “success stories.” These stories are not the only successes we see from the 2004-2005 academic year.

Departmental responses to assessment reports frequently include plans for program modifications. For various reasons, program changes take time to implement effectively. If the change involves curriculum revisions, the change must first be published in a new catalog and students under different catalog requirements gradually transition to the new requirement. If the change involves modifications in a class assignment, implementing that assignment effectively may take several semesters as faculty tinker with the nature of the implementation. The success stories presented below each illustrate the value of establishing a goal based on assessment data and pursuing that goal persistently over time.

Ethics instruction in Education

Every student in every major should understand and appreciate professional ethical practices. Education students are particularly involved in public trust, having major responsibilities for socializing and preparing a citizenry educated for public life. Their professional ethics encompass issues of proper training, professional standards, fair and equal treatment, and proper types of relationships to maintain with future students.

Certainly our education students need adequate preparation for the many ethical issues they will confront in their future work.

The Education Department is the largest department at Sterling College, accounting for about 20% of all graduates in the last 5 years. In 2004, the first year for ethics assessment, we collected ethics assessment forms from 13 Education Department graduates. Those students rated ethics instruction at or above the Sterling College average on each of 4 statements about the nature of ethics instruction. Ten students responded to an open-ended question about suggestions to increase the effectiveness of ethics instructions. Seven of those responses provided suggestions, most of which involved using case studies in the classroom. Three statements indicated that the department was doing a good and consistent job with ethics instruction. All students reported that ethics instruction occurred in their program. These responses reflect an appropriate and even exemplary concern for ethics instruction by the department in the first round of data collection.

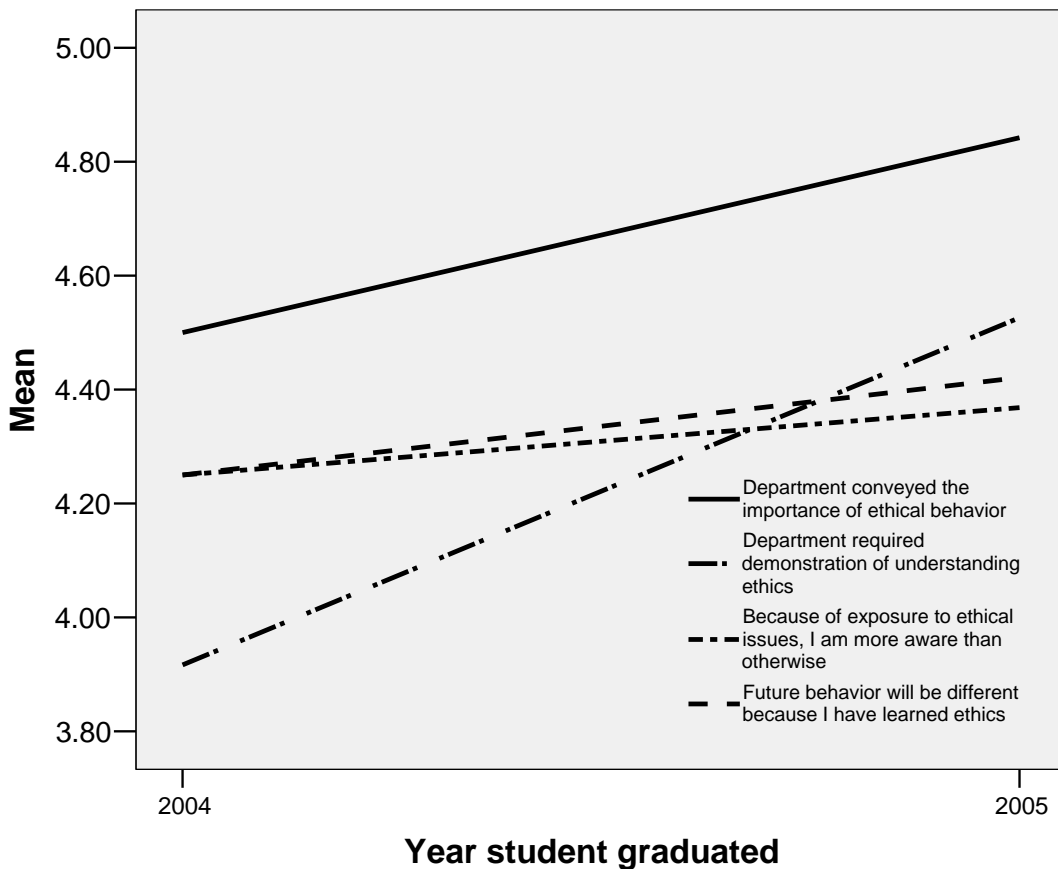
During feedback cycles, the Assessment Committee helped clarify several ethics-related issues for the department, including the importance of:

- ◆ Documenting the specific ethics assignments students received
- ◆ Showing students specific ethics codes that educators follow.

Departmental faculty reviewed the annual assessment report and together developed responses to send back to the committee. One of those responses was a promise to continue developing and collecting the ethics assignments students completed for classes. Another response involved a statement about the inadequacy for Sterling Students of existing ethics codes. This response gave the committee the opportunity to clarify the importance of exposing students to existing codes and the difference between using professional codes in instruction and adopting some external code as the Education Department's own code. The feedback cycle thus maintained departmental attention on ethics assignments.

Students reflected the value of this attention in their ethics evaluations for 2005. Seventeen students completed the evaluations. For each of the 4 statements about ethics instruction, ratings improved from the prior year. The biggest improvement occurred to the statement, "The department required demonstration of understanding ethics." This statement directly reflects attention to ethics assignments. Figure 12 shows the changes from 2004 to 2005 for each of the statements.

Figure 12. Student ratings of ethics instruction in Education



These data for the Education Department reflect the value of attending to assessment date. Although these data look very good, the department can continue to develop quality in its ethics instruction. Given the understanding they now have about using professional ethics codes in instruction, they can implement assignments using such codes. Such use could also provide a direct response to student suggestions for case studies of ethical issues in the classroom.

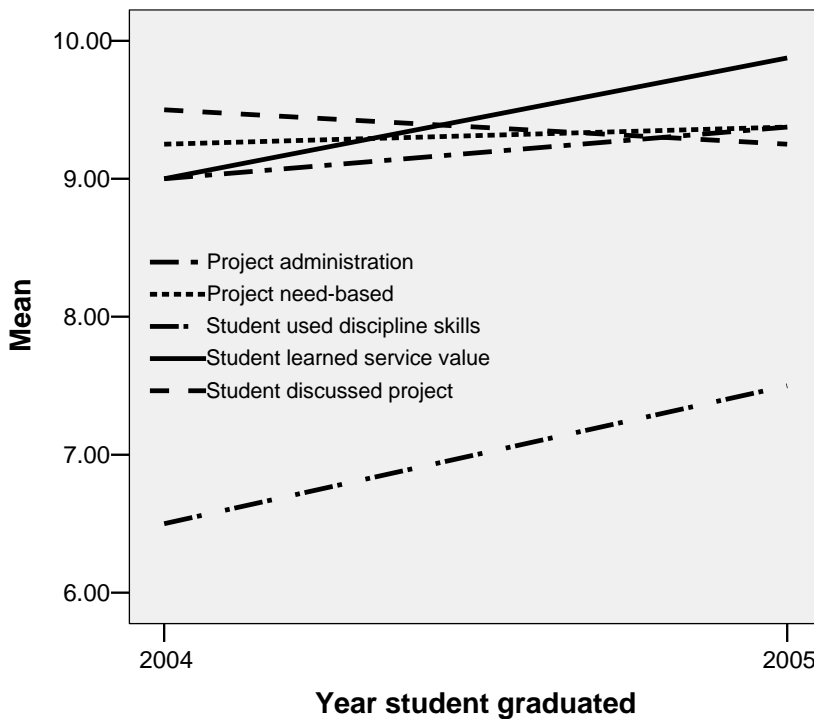
Service projects in Religion & Philosophy

The faculty adopted common objectives for all majors that included a service project that was first published in the 2001-2002 Catalog. The Religion and Philosophy Department developed a service project proposal that was first published in the 2002-2003 Catalog. The proposal involved adding a course to the curriculum that was specifically designated “Service Component.” The course required voluntary service using specific skills that departmental majors should develop.

Students resisted taking the course until the requirement had contractual “teeth” for those who first enrolled in 2002 or later. The number of students in the service component has risen in the last 2 years, and all 2005 graduates completed the service requirement.

Despite early resistance, students have rated their service project highly in the last 2 years. Furthermore, the ratings for 2005, when all students completed the project, reflect general increases in ratings in 4 of the 5 rating categories. Figure 13 shows the ratings for the last 2 years. Notable in these ratings is the improvement in

Figure 13. Student ratings of service projects in Religion & Philosophy



“used discipline skills” as this reflects student awareness of the “biblical knowledge, theological perspective, and ministerial sensitivity” that were identified in the department’s service project proposal.

The Religion & Philosophy Department’s experience demonstrates the value of careful planning and deliberate implementation of a curriculum change. They did not meet the requirements the catalog specified for all majors in 2002. The assessment feedback cycles helped the department maintain its focus on developing a relevant service project. Implementation occurred in stages as more students participated in the project. The result, when all graduates were finally included, was a project that students felt used their discipline skills and changed their attitudes about voluntary service in directions that fit the College’s objectives for its students.

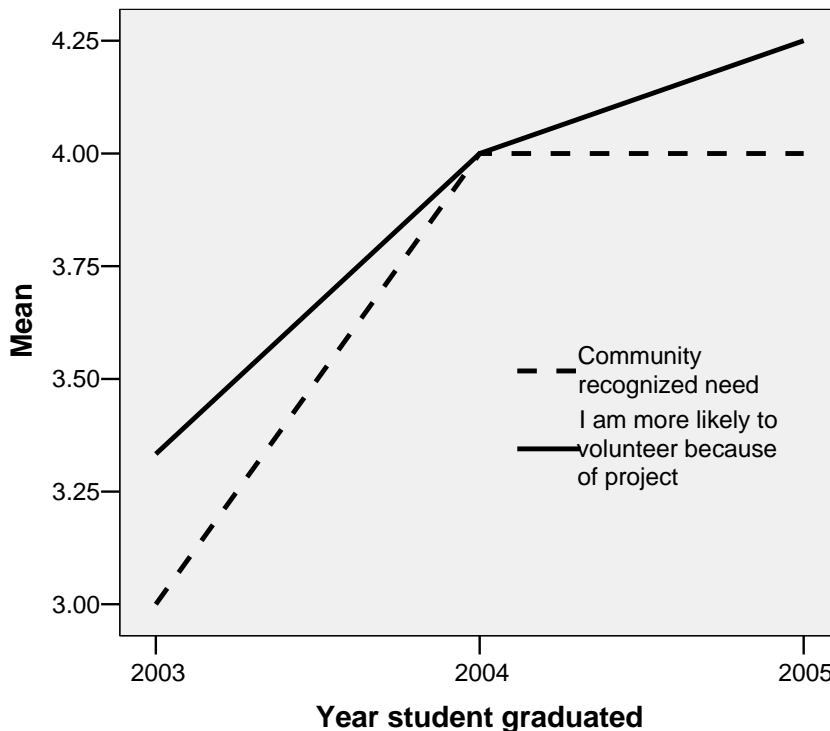
Service project in Language and Literature

In 2002, the Language and Literature Department implemented a service project for its majors. The project required Advanced Composition students to evaluate essays from Sterling College freshmen taking College Composition, helping them to develop

their writing skills. This service project clearly required skills learned in the discipline (technical and stylistic aspects of good writing), and provided a service to people who needed assistance. However, the first students to complete the project reported that the freshmen did not have much interest in receiving instruction.

During the next two years, with encouragement from the Assessment Committee, the department worked to increase the interaction between the service providers and the service recipients. The service assignment required Advanced Composition students to meet with students whose papers they read. This requirement was difficult to implement when freshmen had no interest in the meeting. However, for 2005, most of the graduates did report meeting with their student writers. Figure 14 shows the effects of gradually adjusting a good service project to reach the goal the college desires for such products.

**Figure 14. Service value changes through service project--
Language & Literature**



The dotted line shows the service providers' perceptions of the recipients' need for their editorial assistance. The solid line shows how likelihood of volunteering changed. A major difference from 2003 to 2005 was how many of the service providers actually met with service recipients.

These success stories reflect the value of assessment. As we document student responses to our attempts to provide "academic excellence," we discover the means to make that stated goal a reality. These stories also show us the importance of attention to curricular and class assignment details and of patience while faculty implement and modify plans for change generated by clear data.

Departmental data

The next pages include specific reports for each department. The Assessment Committee's file copy contains all department reports, as do the copies given to the President and the Academic Dean. Each department chair will have the departmental report for his/her department. Generally distributed copies of this annual assessment report do not contain departmental reports.