20 Years of Assessment in UNST

Over the next few months we will feature excerpts from an interview with Dr. Rowanna Carpenter, Assessment Coordinator for University Studies (UNST) at PSU.

As a member of the UNST team, congratulations on 20 years of success! Will you share with us some of the accomplishments of UNST you are particularly proud of?

Dr. Carpenter: Reaching 20 years is indeed an accomplishment, as many general education programs like ours last only seven years or less. I think the signature part of our program is our capstone sense. Being able to have our students out in the community with more than 200 courses a year, 4000 students consistently serving the community is in itself an ongoing accomplishment. We have won two national awards based on our assessment practices. This confirms that we are demonstrating and developing strong best practices, and that we are using the data. We have evolved our practices over time using student work as a basis for our assessment practices; not just relying on only secondary assessment. We look at what our students are doing; we learn from their experiences and from the feedback of our faculty.

What were some of the challenges you/your team faced in constructing an assessment plan?

Dr. Carpenter: University Studies was designed as a 4 year program but most of our students transfer so they won’t experience 4 years experiential learning. So, we look at freshman portfolios and senior portfolios and make a book-end assessment project. Some freshmen leave and when we capture transfer students as seniors, we can’t backtrack to map their individual goals to program level goals or outcomes. Middle of our program, junior level, it’s more difficult to standardize practices. We don’t have a single entry point where we could do a collective assessment work and look at it at senior level.

(Next column)

Meet Our Members …

Jeremy Parra – STEM Collaborator

Dr. Jeremy Parra, Assistant Professor of Physics and Environmental Science, and an advisory member of the STEM provost’s council, is committed to the idea of “creating collaboration between the classroom and community partners in developing authentic learning experiences as well as third part assessable learning objectives.” Be sure to read his interview in December’s IAC News, discussing a study conducted by the STEM Council Research Team.

What advice would you give to a university wishing to begin an initiative similar to UNST’s?

Dr. Carpenter: Assessment was originally written into the founding documents. A fresh-man portfolio was part of the vision for the freshman year. There were also specific guidelines of how a capstone might be set up and for setting assessment standards. This written plan was, however, less defined in the middle of the program and as a result didn’t feel as if it was an essential part of the program. My advice is to write assessment objectives and initiatives from the beginning and for all levels. Faculty participation is also important and the system should be ready to make changes to practices, based on faculty feedback.

(to be continued in upcoming issues)
E-portfolio Update - #169 Reframing Challenge
Under the direction and vision of Dr. Yves Labissiere, the E-Portfolio team has now begun the final stages of evaluating and selecting a campus-wide e-portfolio solution.

Embracing the challenge to select “a solution that focuses on students and learning with a secondary focus on assessment”, the provost challenge teams (including several IAC members and other campus partners who work in assessment) researched and compiled criteria line items to be used as part of an open RFQ. Reviewers then rated services of competing products and vendors who responded to the RFQ.

In the next few weeks, the finalists will visit PSU to present their products and answer questions. The times of these sessions will be posted on the PSU calendar.


Poster Presentations as Authentic Assessments
Poster presentations can be incorporated into a variety of academic programs to demonstrate student learning outcomes. The following resource page from Michigan State University provides many examples on how poster assignments can be designed/assessed. http://fod.msu.edu/or/poster-presentations

October ACS Poster Symposium
The first annual Portland American Chemical Society (ACS) Undergraduate Poster Symposium and Career Fair was held on October 5, 2014, at the SRTC Building at PSU. This event brought together community partners, as well as chemistry post-secondary departments from surrounding colleges, for the purpose of showcasing student summer research and encouraging student work experiences in research labs.

How Poster Sessions Inform and Illustrate
In August of 2014, the Association of Research Libraries hosted poster abstracts and presentations at their Library Assessment Conference, held in Seattle Washington. Poster topics represented one of the following categories of: Teaching and Learning, Data and Collection, Organizational Performance, Facilities/Spaces, and Methods/Surveys.

A poster format provided a graphic way for viewers to quickly and visually grasp what often can be a complex situation, process, methodology, or chain of events to describe. When accompanying abstracts, posters provided illustrative talking points which further reinforced these writings. Using line item criteria from the categories of content and aesthetics, experts on each of the topics rated and judged posters, selecting award winners.

The detailed format of the posters and abstracts - now online – provides resources for distance viewers to also learn from and reflect on the work.

To read the abstracts, visit: http://libraryassessment.org/bm~doc/2014-poster-abstracts-theme.pdf To also view the accompanying posters, please visit: http://libraryassessment.org/schedule/2014-posters.shtml