20 Years of UNST – Measures and Outcomes

This is Part II of excerpts taken from an interview earlier this fall with Dr. Rowanna Carpenter, Assessment Coordinator for University Studies (UNST) at PSU.

Do you have advice for departments in the process of devising measurement devices or guides to accurately assess portfolios and student self-reflective writings for their particular student needs?

Rowanna Carpenter: One thing I have noticed over the years is that faculty members are becoming more adept at understanding the language and purpose of program learning objectives and outcomes, and are skilled at identifying and writing really refined ones. All of this makes it easy to have conversations about assessment and learning goals with the faculty.

As the UNST program is faculty-led and interdisciplinary, we have a good representation from across academic fields and we make sure that all faculty are aware of any recent revisions in writing outcomes and rubrics.

Initial conversations with faculty about - what does it mean to ask students to do writing in an interdisciplinary program that should complement with what they are doing in their major work, or what skills are we trying to develop for students, and are we going to continuously revise all our goal outcomes and rubrics – these discussions can sometimes be challenging but are important. My advice is for faculty to have those specific conversations, and seek resources and tools that are available to assess portfolios. Treat your efforts like a pilot; do your own investigation and test how it works for your course / program. There are rubrics designed for critical thinking in particular disciplines. No one expects it to be perfect the first time; consider this as an ongoing assessment process.

Meet Our Members …

Charles Klein – Researcher/Investigator

Charles Klein, Assistant Professor in Anthropology, has dedicated much of his professional life to the research, management, review and analysis of data related to HIV prevention in minority and third-world populations, including writing content for and determining the efficacy of computer-driven evidence-based HIV prevention programs. The IAC welcomes Charles as a new member for 2014-15.
The Top 5 for 2015?
We know what you’re thinking – aren’t top five lists for the year done at the end, rather than the beginning of the year? We honor the PSU campus-wide work of 2014 and support the continuation of the assessment efforts of multiple departments. Their work exemplifies the AAHE’s Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning – briefly, here are the first five principles:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values; assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated and revealed in performance over time.

3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear and explicitly-stated purposes.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.

5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.

A New Year of “E-pportunities”
We enter the new year of 2015 at PSU looking forward to some very exciting ways assessment will be further supported at the program level. In the first few months of 2015, the university will select an e-portfolios system. This will present opportunities for students to additionally showcase their work, demonstrate skills and comprehension, as well as offer greater possibilities to target professional portfolios and make connections with employers and community mentors.

But such changes may also raise questions within departments – for instance, how does one strategically integrate an e-portfolios system to authentically support an existing program assessment plan? To find possible solutions to this and other questions, we encourage you to explore the following websites, which offer many tangible examples of how programs are accomplishing similar goals:

- The Catalyst for Learning initiative, [http://c2l.mcnrc.org/](http://c2l.mcnrc.org/) (24 campuses contributed to this body of e-portfolios case studies and resources).
- This presentation by Donna Vinton of the University of Iowa, outlines practical steps for integrating an e-portfolios system with assessment in mind.

Here are some samples of [exemplary student e-portfolios](http://www.chea.org/alliance_publications/assuring%20quality-pdf%20version.pdf).

The Power of Student Professional Chapters
A recent news post reported that the Portland State University chapter of Student Affiliates of the American Chemical Society (SAACS) will be recognized this spring at the National Meeting of the American Chemical Society (ACS) for their 2013-14 programs and activities. They were selected by the ACS Committee on Education for this honor.

Studies consistently demonstrate a correlation of participation of students in collegiate-level professional organizations to greater student retention and positive learner outcomes – such as [student success](http://www.chea.org/alliance_publications/assuring%20quality-pdf%20version.pdf) and [multicultural competence](http://www.chea.org/alliance_publications/assuring%20quality-pdf%20version.pdf).

In addition, student chapters of professional organizations provide educational programming and experiences supplementary to academic curricula. For example, the PSU Human Resource Association, or [PSU HRMA](http://www.chea.org/alliance_publications/assuring%20quality-pdf%20version.pdf), hosts meetings and events featuring guest speakers and a network of professional mentors, and facilitates opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills in [competitions](http://www.chea.org/alliance_publications/assuring%20quality-pdf%20version.pdf).