

# CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT UPDATE

Volume 1  
Winter, 2008 Edition

## Inside this issue:

Update & NSSE Results	1
NSSE Results Continued	2
Student Evaluation of Instruction	3
Assessment Plan & Report	3
Cool Tools: Critical Thinking	4

## WINTER 2008 UPDATE

Welcome to this first edition of the CWU Academic Assessment Update. Although the creation and dissemination of another campus newsletter may be met with some trepidation, it is hoped that this form of communication will provide important information on the "assessment happenings" around campus. Also, as assessment plays an increasingly important role in shaping and informing CWU academic policy and priorities, a newsletter seems to be a perfect medium to periodically report data and practices that may be of interest and have relevance to the entire academic campus community. It should be noted that assessment activities are

occurring all across the campus and in every college. Assessment plans and processes have been developed and are being implemented in a variety of forms and through several initiatives. This newsletter and subsequent editions will showcase some of these "Best Practices" and provide a means for follow-up with those individuals and/or programs highlighted. This newsletter will also inform readers as to institutional deadlines and dates of importance as related to assessment. Finally, this newsletter will provide information related to institutional goal progress and

attainment. Knowing what CWU does well and what it needs to improve as related to teaching and student learning is at the heart of academic continuous improvement efforts and will be an essential element within this publication. As always, you—the reader is the most important person to this publication effort. Thus, be sure to forward any story ideas, information, and/or comments you feel may be relevant to improving the newsletter or assessment in general to the Academic Assessment Committee co-chairs, Dr. Ian Quitadamo (iq@cwu.edu) or Dr. Tracy Pellett (tracy.pellett@cwu.edu).

## NSSE RESULTS ARE ENGAGING

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is an important assessment tool that is used across the nation and has been administered to CWU students for the last several years. This survey has been viewed as an informative institutional instrument as it assesses first year and senior students' effort and time dedicated to educationally meaningful activities and the extent to which institutions emphasize effective educational practices. CWU 2007 survey highlights can be categorized in eight categories relating to: institutional environment, course emphasis and educational programs, community service and volunteerism, arts, wellness and spirituality, time on task, educational and per-

sonal growth, reflective learning and student satisfaction.

The institutional environment deals with the degree to which students perceive that campuses support their academic and social needs. The following were highlights of this area for CWU:

- Approximately three-fourths of first-year students and seniors think CWU emphasizes spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work.\*

(Continued on page 2—See NSSE Results)

### Did You Know That Most CWU Faculty Believe...

- Assessment is an important part of their role as a teacher.
- Participating in programmatic assessment activities is important.
- Using assessment data to change or affect instructional planning is important.
- It is important to use a variety of assessment methods.
- Faculty play an active role in their department's assessment process.

\*Results obtained from online faculty survey administered fall, 2007.

## NSSE RESULTS CONTINUED -

- Approximately half of first-year students and almost half of seniors reported spending 10 hours or less a week preparing for classes.
- More than half of first year students and seniors think CWU provides the support they need to succeed academically. However, fewer than that believe that CWU provides the support they need to thrive socially.\*

Course emphasis and educational programs deal with the type and kinds of educational intellectual and mental activities that CWU emphasizes and the types of educational programs in which students take part that complement and enrich their collegiate experience. The following were highlights of this area for CWU:

- 81% of seniors reported that their classes emphasized applying theories or concepts to practical problems, although two-thirds (66%) reported their classes emphasizing the memorizing of facts.
- One quarter (26%) of all seniors plan to or have reported working on research with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements.

Community service and volunteerism deals with student participation in those areas on and off-campus. The following were highlights of this area for CWU:

- Almost two-thirds of seniors (65%) have completed some sort of community service or volunteer work or plan to before they graduate. Approximately three-quarters (72%) of first year students either have completed or expect to complete some sort of community service or volunteer work before graduation.

Arts, Wellness, and Spirituality deals with student engagement in activities that develop these areas. The following were highlights of this area for CWU:

- Approximately three quarters of first year students (82%) and almost two thirds (69%) of seniors attended at least sometimes an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theatre performance.

- Over half of the first year (65%) and senior (62%) students reported regularly (often or very often) exercising or participating in physical fitness activities.

Time on task refers to the way students are engaged in their educational activities and pursuits. The idea is that students get out what they put into their education as far as time and effort. The following were highlights of this area for CWU:

- Less than one in ten (5%) of first year students and 12% of seniors spend more than 25 hours a week preparing for class, the approximate number that surveyed faculty members (FSSE, 2007) say is needed to do well in college. More than half (58%) of first year students and 43% of seniors spend 10 or less a week.
- Approximately one-tenth of first year and senior students (8%) reported spending more than 25 hours per week relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.).

Educational and personal growth refers to the extent that college experiences have contributed to students' knowledge, skills, and personal development. The following were highlights of this area for CWU:

- 80% of first year students and 77% of seniors reported that their experience at CWU contributed to them acquiring a broad general education while half of the first year students (50%) and 74% of seniors reported that their experience at CWU contributed to them acquiring job or work related knowledge and skills.\*
- Approximately three quarters of first year students (76%) and four-fifths of seniors (81%) reported that their experience at CWU contributed to them thinking critically and analytically while 74% of first year students and seniors reported that their experience at CWU contributed to them using computing and information technology.\*

- Almost three-quarters of first year students (72%) and seniors (69%) reported that their experience at CWU contributed to them writing clearly while almost half (48%) of first year students and more than half of seniors (64%) reported that their experience at CWU contributed to them speaking clearly.\*

Reflective learning focuses on integrative or deep learning skills and attitudes. The following were highlights of this area for CWU:

- 45% of first year students and more than half of seniors (57%) reported that they frequently examined the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic of issues.\*

Most students are generally satisfied with their college experience at CWU. Specifically, 82% of all CWU students rated their college experience either good or excellent. Only about 8% reported their experience as poor. More than three-quarters of first year students (79%) and seniors (76%) would probably or definitely attend CWU if they were starting college again.

"The results certainly provide interesting and useable information for all programs on campus," stated Dr. Tracy Pellett, Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Studies. "The good news is that first year and senior level students believe they are developing broad-based as well as specific skills that will serve them through work and for life-long learning." Pellett further stated that "the key to having this survey information is in making it all more accessible and informative for faculty." "Faculty have to be able to review and discuss the results so that positive changes can emerge academically to strengthen the areas that are already perceived well and enhance the areas that are perceived less so."

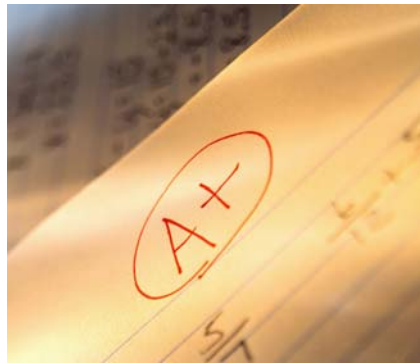
For more information about this survey –please visit <http://nsse/iub.edu/index.cfm>

\*For more information about CWU results –please contact Institutional Research.

# STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION

A good way to start a conversation at CWU or any university is to mention Student Evaluations of Instruction (SEI's). The reason for such interest and conversation is in the nature of the survey itself and the way the information is used by administrators and faculty to judge teaching effectiveness and provide professional development.

CWU is currently using five types of SEI forms that match lecture, seminar, skill acquisition, lab, and visual and performing arts types of classes. Students are asked each quarter to provide feedback to faculty with regard to various aspects of instruction like faculty use of class time, contribution, interest, and clarity among other things as



-High) to distinguish between more effective and less effective teaching behaviors.

Overall, CWU students have consistently rated all areas of instructional effectiveness towards the higher end of the five point scale (i.e., 4 or higher) for the past several years. Dr. Wayne Quirk, Provost /Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, stated that "he was not surprised by the high ratings of teaching for faculty and students."

*"CWU is known as a quality institution focused on providing effective instruction and achieving high levels of student learning."*

known as a quality institution focused on providing effective instruction and achieving high levels of student learning."

"Faculty excellence in teaching is certainly a major reason for the rating results and feel-

ing by students." well as the course as a whole. Ratings are based on a 5-point scale (1-Low to 5

ing by students."

## ASSESSMENT PLANNING & REPORTING GUIDE

Although the creation of assessment plans and yearly student learning assessment reports can feel like exercises in paperwork drudgery, it is important to recognize that these processes are simply a department and/or program's outward sign of continuous improvement processes. Well developed and implemented plans can help departments and programs understand gaps in curriculum, identify weaknesses, and understand where to target resources. The following guide should be helpful to consider as departments implement and revise plans as well as write their yearly reports:

- **Collaboration:** Assessment activities are best achieved when everyone or at least a representative group are involved. The reliance of a single person (usually the chair) is a weak model with regard to work distribution, change, or reflection. Thus, it is important that a variety of faculty are engaged in the assessment process at various levels in the program.
- **Assessment Methods:** A variety of methods should be used in assessing learning outcomes. Direct learning assessments like test and project scores as well indirect assessments like surveys can be helpful in providing a picture of student learning and perceptions.
- **Reporting Results:** Results should be presented to internal and/or external groups in specific quantitative and/or qualitative terms and should be explicitly linked to outcomes and compared to established standards of mastery.
- **Program Feedback/Improvement:** Program improvement should be noted and related to assessment results. In other words, planned pedagogical and curricular changes should be based on findings and documented.
- **Report Feedback:** Yearly assessment reports will be evaluated by the Office of Undergraduate Studies each summer and a feedback report generated and distributed to each department each fall. Feedback reports will focus on improving department assessment processes.

Overall, departments that engage in assessment understand the effectiveness of their efforts while those that do not can only assume effectiveness. Although the completion of assessment plans and yearly assessment reports may seem like one more paperwork project to complete, it does create a visible and enduring record of programmatic improvement effort and accomplishment. Records of accomplishments such as these do much to sustain the high reputation of Central Washington University academic programs success!

*Academic Assessment  
Reports are Due to College  
Dean by June 13, 2008*

## Assessment - Cool Tools

Most faculty view critical thinking as a key outcome of higher education. Although the origins of critical thinking can be traced back to the time of Socrates, the need to question and strengthen underlying reasoning skills remains essential for the personal and professional success of today's students. Despite its importance, many U.S. students graduate without having learned how to think. A recent AACU study of critical thinking showed that 93% of higher education faculty consider it essential; a close match to the 87% of students who indicate that college experiences prepare them to think. However, when their thinking skills were assessed, only 6% of students could actually demonstrate these skills prior to graduation (AACU, 2005).

In general, CWU students currently:

- demonstrate thinking skill that is consistently below peers for both first year and senior-level students (indicated by 2001-2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey data).
- lag behind other first year and senior students from peer institutions in engaging higher-order mental activities (e.g., analysis, synthesis, making judgments, application).

CWU students need to:

- raise vital questions, gather, analyze and evaluate information, test conclusions with relevant criteria, and think open-mindedly (Critical Thinking Community, 2006).
- be able to develop the habits of mind that combat bias, distortion, prejudice, and other forms of flawed thinking.

A variety of tools are available to assess critical thinking. These include standardized tests like the California Critical Thinking Skills Test and the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) as well as performance rubrics like the WSU Critical Thinking Rubric (see <http://wsuctproject.wsu.edu/ctr.htm>) (WSU, 2006), the Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric (see <http://www.insightassessment.com/HCTSR.html>) (Facione & Facione, 1994), and the CWU Critical Thinking Rubric (see <http://www.cwu.edu/~avpugrad/criticalthinking.html>).

• The CWU Critical Thinking Rubric is the result of consensus work done by the CWU Critical Thinking Committee (a sub-division of the Academic Assessment Committee) with representatives from the Colleges of Arts and Humanities, Business, Education and Professional Studies, and Sciences. In particular it emphasizes student awareness and reflection of how they think so that changes are maximally effective.

Whichever rubric is used, it should be noted that they (and others like them) may be useful in evaluating course or program-level student work including essays, portfolios, or projects. It is also important that faculty be trained to properly use rubrics so as to consistently and fairly assess and evaluate student work. Faculty are encouraged to learn more about other critical thinking assessments (e.g., standardized tests, surveys) by visiting the Association of American Colleges & Universities assessment website (see [http://www.aacu.org/issues/assessment/critical\\_thinking.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/issues/assessment/critical_thinking.cfm)).

**CWU CRITICAL THINKING RUBRIC**

Area	Absent	Introductory	Intermediate	Advanced
<b>Identify main point of the object or study</b>	Does not Identify main point.	Generally identifies but does not characterize or qualify main point	Characterizes main point (specific or universal) and identifies associated qualification(s)	Characterizes and qualifies main point (specific or universal). Evaluates levels of ambiguity and vagueness
<b>Analyze and evaluate the premise(s) and conclusion(s) of the main point.</b>	Is unable to identify premise(s) or conclusion(s) of main point	Generally identifies premise(s) and conclusion but does not establish relatedness between the two	Specifically recognizes component pieces that support or refute main point	Recognizes component pieces that support or refute main point. Evaluates levels of relatedness between premise(s) and conclusion
<b>Evaluate evidence used in support of the premise(s) of the main point</b>	Does not evaluate evidence in support of premise(s)	Vaguely recognizes evidence(s) but does not establish connection to premise(s)	Dissects evidence to determine how it structurally supports premise(s)	Judges strength of evidential support for premise(s)
<b>Evaluate the relevance, reliability, and truthfulness of assumptions that underlie the main point</b>	Does not evaluate assumption relevance, reliability, or truthfulness	Identifies assumptions but does not evaluate their relevance or truthfulness	Analyzes assumptions to determine how they are related to structure of main point (argument)	Judges suitability of assumptions in support or refute of main point. Questions relevance, reliability, and truthfulness of basis for assumptions
<b>Infer the significance (implications) of the main point</b>	Is unable to determine the significance of the main point	Generally infers significance of main point	Infers significance of main point by dissecting evidence but not evaluating it	Infers significance based on balanced weighing of evidence. Inference does not exceed scope of evidential support
<b>Reflect and revise one's own thinking process based on new experience</b>	Does not reflect on thinking process	Superficially reflects on revisions in thinking process.	Breaks thinking process into component pieces so that revision can be understood	Compares old and new thinking processes in ways that are insightful and thorough. Evaluates usefulness of changes in process