

ASFAC Annual Report, 2014-2015

Committee Members:

Julie Reynolds, Biology (chair)
Jennifer Ahern-Dodson, Thompson Writing Program
Lee Baker, Academic Affairs (ex officio)
Molly Goldwasser, Academic Affairs
Anita Layton, Mathematics
Marcia Rego, Thompson Writing Program
Thomas Robisheaux, History (ex officio)
Cheri Ross, International Comparative Studies (resigned)
Matt Serra, Office of Assessment
Kristen Stephens, Education
Ingeborg Walther, Germanic Languages & Literature
Keith Whitfield, Academic Affairs (ex officio)
Lee Willard, Academic Planning, Arts & Sciences

To promote culture change around assessment and help move departments forward with their ongoing assessment efforts, the committee engaged in the following activities:

1. **Assessment Liaison Networking breakfasts/lunches:** We co-hosted (with Laurie Patton) a fall and spring meetings with department assessment liaisons. The fall (December) meeting, consisting of a series of three breakfasts/lunches, was organized by divisions (Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences), although individuals who could not attend their own session could attend another. The spring meeting brought all the liaisons together for roundtable discussions of assessment in four strategic areas: assessment of introductory courses, assessment of capstone courses, assessment of research, and assessment of writing.

Date and time	Focus
December 4, 12:00pm	Humanities (showcasing Medieval and Renaissance Studies, presented by Michael Cornett)
December 12, 8:30AM	Social Sciences (showcasing Psychology, presented by Christina Grimes)
December 12, 11:30AM	Natural Sciences (showcasing Math, presented by Jack Bookman)
April 17, 11:30AM	Assessment of introductory courses Assessment of capstone courses Assessment of research Assessment of writing

The goals for the fall meetings were:

- a. Continue to develop the faculty assessment community

b. Showcase best practices

After a welcome from Laurie and the presentation of a “best practice” example from the division, liaisons were asked to discuss the answers to these questions with their neighbor. Groups reported out the similarities and differences at the end of the discussion. The questions (and answers) were:

What is your department doing well?

- More regular assessment
- Better data collection
- Thinking about and active discussion of action plans
- Admin-level commitment
- Student feedback outside of course evaluations
- Research methodology assessment
- Assessment of language learning
- Common rubrics for theses/capstones
- Increasing openness towards TBL
- Assessment of new initiatives
- Assessment of gateways and lab courses to inform action plans and improvements
- Exit interviews

What is the biggest challenge your department faces?

- Need to include more people
- Increase return rate on course evaluations
- Internal fragmentation/broad departmental goals and multiple majors within department
- Lack of agreement on curricular goals
- Faculty turnover and personnel shortages
- Using assessment info to plan and set priorities
- Rubrics are time consuming, especially in smaller departments
- Shifting from thinking of assessment as “something we have to do” to an “intellectual enterprise”
- Student participation
- Need to assess our honors program
- Assessment of “cultural competence”
- Need for “intentional time” to have meaningful reflection/conversation about use of data in future planning

What does your department need to be successful?

- Time for conversation; time in general
- Clear communication over time
- Articulation of a coherent vision
- Regular funding for small projects
- Making assessment more visible
- Bottom-up buy-in; faculty buy-in in general
- Group investment and sustainment over time
- More people
- Examples from successful departments
- One-on-one consults with Matt or Julie or other assessment professionals
- Resources to enhance pedagogical research and support

After the lunch, liaisons were asked to continue the conversation about assessment with faculty in their departments.

The goal of the spring assessment liaison lunch was to engage faculty in conversations about assessment in four strategic areas (see table above), which align with the RFP for the 2015-2016 assessment mini-grants. Each of the four roundtable discussions was facilitated by at least one member of ASFAC, and the conversations were both lively and informative. The following is some feedback about the event:

- “I just wanted to join in the shout out to Julie and her team and all who organized this event! This was one of the best conversations around assessment that I have heard faculty engage in, ever! Having the smaller group discussions around particular issues was a great idea, and I think faculty really got a lot out of sharing their thoughts and actions. In the group I sat in on (on capstones) I heard faculty say things like: “gosh, I’ve never even thought before about what the purpose and goals of a capstone should be”; and even a question such as “what’s the difference between a skill and a competency” generated some helpful discussion. It also became apparent in my group how some departments have used assessment of senior capstones to discover that they needed to introduce methods of the discipline earlier on in the curriculum. So, things are happening, and these lunches are an inspired way of keeping the conversation going and the ideas flowing.” Ingeborg Walther, Germanic Languages & Literature
- “Frankly, all of us in the humanities and interpretive social sciences are still puzzled about what it would take to measure our teaching effectiveness...The one idea that seems maybe useful – to us, though not sure about the assessors – is the portfolio (of papers and exams written/taken throughout the major). Looking through these as a faculty would give us a sense of what we’re doing collectively – and of what we might do better...All to say, that our disciplines make such assessment difficult. We teach

ways of thinking about the world, but how to measure that?" Charles Piot, Cultural Anthropology

- "One topic that was talked about was how to capture a snapshot of the process of developing a good and reasonable/feasible capstone or independent study research question. Students come into the major with big ideas and unreasonable questions. How do we get a snapshot of those? Plus, [can we] capture attitudes when they can't do what they want? How do we keep them engaged when the topic changes?" Jennifer Ahern-Dodson, Thompson Writing Program

2. Assessment Mini-grants.

In 2014-2015, only six Departments accessed funds they had been competitively awarded the previous spring: Math (\$4939), Political Science (\$3,000), Public Policy (\$2,500), Chemistry (\$3,276), German (\$2,500), and History (\$1,500). Dance (\$5000), ICS (\$1,000), Theater Studies (\$7,600), P&N (\$3,000) and Romance Studies (\$4,000) did not.

Upon the recommendation of ASFAC, the RFP timeline and 2015-16 funding was changed to align with the Duke budget timeframe (July 1-June 30). In addition, funding was targeted in 4 strategic categories: assessment of introductory courses, assessment of capstone courses, assessment of research, and assessment of writing. The committee reviewed 13 grant proposals and recommended a total of \$33,514 be funded to the following departments:

- Art History & Visual Studies (\$900)
- Evolutionary Anthropology (\$1,014)
- Germanic Languages and Literature (\$3,000)
- History (\$3,500)
- Innovation and Entrepreneurship Initiative (\$5,000)
- Markets and Management Studies Program (\$1,200)
- Medieval and Renaissance Studies (\$700)
- Neuroscience (\$5,000)
- Physics (\$2,300)
- Psychology and Neuroscience (\$3,500)
- Public Policy (\$3,500)
- Thompson Writing Program (\$3,900).

N.B. The programmatic proposal from Computer Science did not fit the RFP guidelines and was not funded.

3. Timetable for assessment activity, 2015-2016. The question was raised about whether we should revise the reporting timeline for assessment activities. After some conversation, it was agreed that the major hurdles are not with the timetable, but rather with departmental buy-in. Therefore the timetable will largely remain the same, with a minor adjustment; WEAVE will now be due June 1 instead of July 1 to accommodate spring assessment reports and the Provost Office's deadline. There will no longer be a mid-year report in December.

4. Communications and presentations

- Julie and Kristen presented at the spring DUS meetings. They announced the RFP for the 2015-2016 minigrants, the strategic initiative, the dates for the assessment liaison network luncheon in the spring
- Molly added all liaisons to the roundtable assessment listserv
- Julie presented to the Arts & Sciences Council meeting on April 23 to let the council know about our strategic initiative with regard to the mini-grants.

5. Faculty Assessment Fellowship. We are partnering with Shawn Miller and Amy Kenyon (CIT) to see if we can create Faculty Assessment Fellowships where CIT organizes the infrastructure of this Faculty Learning Community, and ASFAC helps organize the content (leveraging the existing assessment roundtables and Liaison luncheons). Fellowships would be year-long, and be primarily for people who have been awarded assessment minigrants. We would like to create a model where the Fellows are agents of change and work both within and beyond their departments.