Chapter XVII
Workshops and E-Portfolios as Transformational Assessment

Charlotte Brammer
Samford University, USA

Rhonda Parker
Samford University, USA

ABSTRACT

In 2002, Samford University began working on a long-term learning assessment plan designed to evaluate its undergraduates' competencies in written and oral communication as well as information and quantitative literacy (these areas were labeled Transformational Learning Abilities or TLAs). Departments were encouraged to measure student learning in ways that made sense for their particular disciplines, with an eye toward creating sustainable assessment plans that would inform program review. The Department of Communication Studies created an innovative senior capstone program that incorporates student-driven communication workshops and electronic portfolios and uses qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the TLAs and gather valuable data for departmental review. This chapter provides a description of the program and how it serves as a catalyst for student engagement, faculty development, and departmental transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Like communication, assessment is always situated, and our assessment story is no exception. The Department of Communication Studies at Samford University is a relatively young department, only eight years old (for details see Brammer & Parker, 2006). Samford is a small, private, Christian, liberal arts university, in Birmingham, Alabama, USA. The university is also home to several graduate and professional schools, including nursing, law, pharmacy, performing arts, and business. Of approximately 2600 undergraduates at Samford, some 65-70 choose to major in Communication Studies. In 2002, shortly after our department was created, the university initiated a long-term learning assessment plan to assess its undergraduates' competencies in written and oral communication as well as information and quantitative literacy (these areas were labeled Transformational Learning Abilities or TLAs). University committees were convened to define the TLAs operationally, and committees in each of the various schools were assembled to create methods by which to measure student performance across TLAs. Departments were encouraged to measure student learning in ways that made sense for their particular disciplines, with an eye toward creating sustainable assessment plans that would inform program review.

One advantage to being a young department was freedom from the perennial "we've always assessed our students this way" problem that often confronts new assessment thrusts. As a department, we embraced the value of authentic assessment of student outcomes as a way to shape and cultivate our major. In this chapter, we discuss pertinent assessment theory that helped direct our efforts, describe our two-part capstone project, and explain how it serves as a catalyst for student engagement, faculty development, and departmental transformation.

BACKGROUND

First, both speaking and writing have rich connections with critical thinking and experiential learning (see for example, Bean, 1996; Broad, 2003; Morreale, Shockley-Zalabak & Whitney, 1993). As Bean notes, "writing is both a process of doing critical thinking and a product communicating the results of critical thinking" (p. 3). While Bean focused only on writing, clearly speaking represents a similar process and product. Competence in oral and written communication skills is necessary for generating, negotiating and attributing meaning. Similarly, the ability to locate, analyze, and synthesize information and to understand and produce quantitative information are essential to critical thinking. As a department, we recognized and accepted the value of the TLAs to our students' educational goals, and thus, our challenge became how to assess our students' progress in achieving an appropriate level of competence in each of these areas.

Many scholars have theorized and proposed models for effective assessment measures. Banta (2002) presents an approach that describes our stance on assessment. Banta asserts that effective assessment plans share three phases: planning, implementing, and improving/sustaining (see Fig.1).

PLANNING PHASE

The first characteristic of effective outcome assessment is the involvement of all stakeholders in order to match needs and interests with the measurement and to encourage support from all stakeholders for the process later. Samford launched the TLA assessment effort by creating committees comprised of faculty throughout the various schools on campus; these committee members were chosen for their expertise with

7 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/workshops-portfolios-transformational-assessment/19677

Related Content

Wavelet and Unsupervised Learning Techniques for Experimental Biomedical Data Processing
Matteo Cacciola, Salvatore Calcagno, Filippo Laganà, Francesco Carlo Morabito, Diego Pellicanò, Isabella Palamara, Mario Versaciand Biagio Cammaroto (2012). *International Journal of Measurement Technologies and Instrumentation Engineering (pp. 45-59).*
www.irma-international.org/article/wavelet-unsupervised-learning-techniques-experimental/78330

'De-Coupling Groups in Space and Time': Evaluating New Forms of Social Dialogue for Learning
Kevin Burdenand Simon Atkinson (2013). *Cases on Assessment and Evaluation in Education (pp. 588-610).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/coupling-groups-space-time/69505

Online Course-Ratings and the Personnel Evaluation Standards
Susan J. Clark, Christian M. Reinerand Trav D. Johnson (2006). *Online Assessment, Measurement and Evaluation: Emerging Practices (pp. 61-75).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/online-course-ratings-personnel-evaluation/27700

A Brief History of Networked Classrooms: Effects, Cases, Pedagogy, and Implications
Louis Abrahamson (2006). *Audience Response Systems in Higher Education: Applications and Cases (pp. 1-25).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/brief-history-networked-classrooms/5385

Memory and I/O Optimized Rectilinear Steiner Minimum Tree Routing For VLSI
Latha N Rand G R. Prasad (2020). *International Journal of Electronics, Communications, and Measurement Engineering (pp. 46-59).*
www.irma-international.org/article/memory-and-io-optimized-rectilinear-steiner-minimum-tree-routing-for-vlsi/247100