Last summer I responded to an (AAHE), American Association of Higher Education call for proposals for assessment teams to participate in workshops to design plans for programs, divisions, or colleges. Our early September workshop was rescheduled because of the events of 9/11. Since the AAHE is based in Washington, DC, and the Director of Assessment Peggy Mackie commutes from Boston, there was sufficient uncertainty among the attending colleges to warrant a postponement. We finally had our working sessions in Scottsdale, Arizona, in October.

Our six-member team comprised Brian Rogerson (NAMS), Assistant Professor of Chemistry; Anne Pomeroy (ARHU), Assistant Professor of Philosophy; Christine Tartaro (SOBL), Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice; Marilyn Vito (PROS), Professor of Business Studies; Bonnie Buzza, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and me. The team’s composition reflected my desire to have each division represented (we all represented general studies) and the AAHE requirement that a senior administrator be included. The deans chose their divisional representatives. The Vice President for Academic Affairs approved of and supported our initiative.

We decided as a team to start our planning at the program level. We decided to look at assessment from a program perspective (not from a course perspective) and consider the student (not the course) as the focal point of the analysis. Members of the participating programs would meet and discuss what they wanted their students to learn after one, two, three, or four years of study in the particular programs. The program members would then decide on the best ways to assess these outcomes. We all agreed that it would be best to start small, and although assessment plans may be multifaceted, begin with just one or two aspects of the plan. Our proposed plan is posted on the ISCT Web site at www.isct.stockton.edu. This proposal has not yet been approved by anyone. I did present it to the VPAA on our return, but at this point it is just a proposal.

I am aware that several programs are already fully engaged in this process. The NAMS assessment group has been active and productive for four years, The History program is using Classroom Assessment Techniques (Angelo & Cross, 1993) to develop their assessment plan, and some programs, Psychology included, have tried external examinations to assess a sample of students on their grasp of important concepts in the discipline.

The assessment of student learning is an appropriate role for all faculty members. We are responsible for deciding what we want our students to learn and for teaching and providing feedback. We should be the designers of assessment plans that are appropriate for students in our programs at each level of progress through the pro-
ASSUMING OWNERSHIP FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

program. The process will provide us with important opportunities to ask questions about the value and effectiveness of our programs and to use the data that we gather to strengthen the decisions that we make about curricula and instructional techniques. We should seize the opportunity to shape this project in a way that will support our teaching.

What about the 2000-pound assessment gorilla? Can assessment results be used against faculty members and programs? It is essential that faculty have ownership and control of this gorilla. Instead of fearing her, we can use her to develop more expertise in assessment among our faculty, get administrative support for program planning, and to help our students improve their overall learning.

CHANGING INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

From October 17-19 I had the pleasure of being one member of the “team” sent from Richard Stockton College to attend the American Association of Higher Education conference on Changing Institutional Priorities. Honesty forces me to admit that, as a critical theorist, I was somewhat skeptical regarding how worthwhile this trip would prove to be. I did not consider myself to be much of a “believer” when it came to the possibility of assessing with any precision or efficacy how well students are learning in a given field. There are so many different proficiencies that we would like our students to attain, there is so much information that we require knowledge of, there are such diverse learning practices between programs and among various educators, and then, there are the “intangibles”. We all know about the intangibles. They are the elements by which we hope our students will learn about how to conduct themselves in the world in a responsible and intelligent and caring fashion. How could these elements all be measured and were they even measurable? How could we gear an assessment tool to individualize between students? How could we take into account the desires of the individual educators? I had many questions.

Well, I am quite pleased to report that I did not have all my questions answered nor all my fears allayed. In fact, from what I could gather from very savvy individuals who have been involved in assessment practices for a long time, assessment is not something that is established at an institution once and for all, it is rather more an organic process. It begins with individual educators and individual programs trying to articulate what they want their students to learn and then hashing out how those desired learning outcomes manifest themselves in instances of success. What would we see if our students knew how to X or that Y or exhibited skill Z? And, I heard, that there is so much information for our students to learn and in that articulated vision could distinguish precisely the way in which Stockton is a unique and valuable institution of higher learning. That is, we could articulate that vision at that time. I say, “at that time” because the real beauty of well-wrought assessment practice is, I believe, its organic nature. It need never be writ in stone. If it is done properly, to my mind, it is founded on dialogue and it is done properly, to my mind, it is founded on dialogue and interaction continues, moving and growing and transforming with the institution. We continue to talk about how to have our students learn better. And in that, we continue to improve our own skills of education and hence continue to improve the
lives and learning of our students.

So, with that said, I am pleased to inform the college community that the program in philosophy and religion has begun a dialogue. We are new to this; we are asking more questions than we are getting answers and our speech is often halted, but we, who have to my mind a genuine challenge facing us in terms of assessment of student learning, have begun to talk. It is my sincere hope that we can talk to you too, soon.

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**Outcomes Assessment for Changing Business Environs**

Today’s business students can expect to work in an environment decidedly different than the one their predecessors entered, one that is constantly changing. The increasing complexities of the global business environment demand a different approach to business education in order to prepare students for continuous learning and career adaptability. It is no longer enough merely to teach students the facts and formulae traditionally employed in business. Rather, our educational focus must expand to include an emphasis on *learning-to-learn* skills. According to the American Accounting Association, there are five key skills of *learning-to-learn*:

- Questioning
- Organizing
- Connecting
- Reflecting
- Adapting

This new focus in educating tomorrow’s business leaders requires a new approach to assessing teaching success. Relevant course content and appropriate instructional methods play a role in teaching effectiveness that is, however, secondary to the relevance of knowledge, skills, and professional orientation students take from a course (AAA, 1994).

The decision to implement a formal assessment program demonstrates a faculty commitment to quality education and continuous improvement that extends beyond individual courses or *faculty members*.

Ideally, faculty will engage in educational experiments designed to respond creatively to emerging demands for students’ learning outcomes. They will seek and respond to feedback from students and other stakeholders, and subsequently engage in open discussion of educational matters resulting in changes to curriculum or pedagogy as necessary for continuous improvement.

For this faculty commitment to occur, administrators must be supportive by providing resources to facilitate innovation, assessment and adjustment. Faculty must be allowed to “own” the assessment data and to negotiate with the administration any uses of the data beyond the specific requirements of internal program assessment. Moreover, administrators should reward faculty for their willingness to participate in program assessment and curricular change (AAA, 1994).

The American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) has identified the following *Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning*:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
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, 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.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.
Source: AAHE (1992) or http://www.aahe.org (may be reproduced without restriction)

While the AAHE provides general guidelines for the development of effective assessment programs, it recognizes the need for individualized approaches that speak to the specific needs of an institution and the programs engaging in assessment. The American Accounting Association (AAA) and the Accounting Education Change Commission (AECC) have developed several white papers endorsing the assessment models promulgated by the AAHE, and are but two professional organizations for business that have called for educators to respond to the call for ongoing assessment and continuous improvement in business education (Apostolou, 1999).

1 Assessment for the New Curriculum: A Guide for Professional Accounting Programs, American Accounting Association, 1994

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### ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING IN FRESHMAN CHEMISTRY

When I joined Stockton four years ago I did not imagine that I would eventually be engaged in trying to assess student learning in ways other than tests.

I was completely unaware of additional forms of assessment. Now I cannot imagine doing without such assessments. During my first term of teaching freshman chemistry, I quickly learned to dread grading quizzes and exams. A significant fraction of students (~25%) performed so poorly that they eventually withdrew from class. While attrition in freshman chemistry is common at many institutions, as a novice teacher I was concerned with my teaching effectiveness. My assumptions about what students were learning did not always match what they actually learned. It was during that first year at Stockton that I joined the NAMS Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) study group, founded by Lynn Stiles (the NAMS Dean at the time) and led by Jamie Cromartie, to figure out ways to help students learn. Our guide was Angelo and Cross’ Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers. This book was a revelation, but perhaps what was most revealing and, in a sense, reassuring, was that other teachers with a wide range of experience were struggling with the exact same problems. It was not just my inexperience.

Helping students learn is a tough problem. As a result of my interaction with this group, I developed a daily class progress assessment aimed at helping students become more reflective about their learning.

This technique works by asking students to answer brief questions, in writing, at the end of every class period concerning material that has just been discussed in class. These class assessments are not graded. My intent was to continuously survey all students for their understanding of basic ideas before formal testing was done. I had come to realize that some students were often not comprehending even the simplest of ideas. I wanted the technique to accomplish three tasks: (1) To obtain feedback from all students in the class, (2) To obtain feedback after each and every class, and (3) To give feedback to students on their answers, particularly those who gave incorrect answers. A preliminary report on this work was presented at the January 2001 Faculty Forum on the Assessment of Learning, sponsored by the ISCT and SFT. I have expanded this study to five semesters and can now show a statistically significant improvement in student performance (grades) when the class assessment strategy was in use. Presumably, the reflection and review process associated with the technique helped students. I found that this assessment tool also helped me gauge the clarity of my instruction and provided invaluable feedback for modifying my teaching. However, I will be the first to admit that this is just a first step and that much work remains to be done.

One of my hopes is that the NAMS-CAT group will grow beyond its core members. I also hope that assessment of student learning will progress to a higher level. What assumptions are we making about what students learn by the time they graduate? How would a program go about finding out whether their students are meeting these learning goals? What kinds of modifications would program members introduce to improve student learning? These are not novel questions and I hope all of us get involved in a concerted way to begin addressing them.