

**Creating a Culture of Inquiry:
Assessment at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University**

An Evaluation of Student Outcomes Assessment from 1998 to 2007

By

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Introduction

The evaluation of student outcomes assessment at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University (CSBSJU) began for several reasons. First, as the institutions prepare for the October 2008 accreditation site visit by The Higher Learning Commission (<http://www.ncahlc.org/>), CSBSJU must address the assessment concerns described in the 1998 North Central Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation report. In that report, the site teams determined that (a) there was a lack of faculty understanding of and appreciation for assessment's potential contribution to institutional effectiveness, (b) assessment was being unevenly designed and implemented (and in many cases, not conducted at all) across academic departments and the core curriculum, and (c) there was a serious deficiency of systemic program evaluation for the purposes of demonstrating program quality. Second, there have been several recent and significant personnel changes in academic areas responsible for assessment leadership. Third, the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University are considering adopting a new accreditation processes and procedures (<http://aqip.org/>). The new accreditation process is based upon an institutional effectiveness model of continuous quality improvement. Quality assurance and quality improvement require assessment that is systemic, rigorous, and powerfully useful-we want to make sure the institutions and their many stakeholders are ready to switch institutional gears.

My thanks to Ryan Kutter and Erin Truhler for their incredible hard work, careful insight, and enthusiasm to think about "big picture" problem solving.

Dr. Philip Kramer
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Preface

The evaluation is meant to be formative; that is, the main purpose of this evaluation is to identify strengths and weaknesses in student outcomes assessment at CSBSJU and to recommend improvements in assessment policies, procedures, and processes. However, this evaluation, by necessity is also summative; that is, it is intended to pass overall judgment on the assessment program at CSBSJU.

Methodology

Multiple methods were used to collect and analyze the data for this evaluation. Data was acquired from two primary sources. First, we examined results from surveys, questionnaires, standardized, norm-referenced, and criterion referenced examinations, homegrown faculty-designed, faculty-led, faculty implemented assessment instruments, and focus group meetings. Second, we examined the minutes of numerous committees (e.g., Joint Faculty Assembly, academic departments, Core Curriculum) and the minutes of other institutional bodies (e.g., Board of Trustees, Board of Regents, Academic Policies, Standards, and Assessment Committee, Curriculum Committee). Additionally, we had several personal conversations with individuals who offered their anecdotal memories about assessment and its impact at CSBSJU.

Background and Context

Assessment Origins

Assessment has been formally pursued at CSBSJU since the early 1980s, though informal or uncoordinated assessment was conducted before that time as a matter of course. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the College of Saint Benedict had implemented an outcomes based exploration of the liberal arts that was part of the general education curriculum. This effort was not shared by Saint John's University. "An Annotated Summary of Proposed Assessment Plans," prepared by Dave Leitzman, Education Department, summarizes assessment plans and efforts from 1985-1991. In 1985, the two colleges began merging their respective general education curriculum, resulting in the establishment of the joint Core Curriculum in 1988. During the years initially after the Core Curriculum had been established, assessment of the First Year Seminar began, including the administration of value-added pre-test and post-test analysis of student essays.

By 1991, there were a series of "loosely connected" assessment studies on both campuses. However, it is not clear how the studies or assessment to that point had affected curriculum. Key points in the Leitzman report show that the CSB began to seriously address assessment in anticipation of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) site visit in 1988. There was "administrative concern for getting on with some kind of assessment" yet limited faculty or institutional financial commitment. A Bush Foundation grant in 1990 allowed for a greater focus on assessment, including participation in assessment conferences, faculty training, and the establishment of the Learning Enhancement Services office to help faculty improve their teaching and student learning. The time period between the 1988 and 1998 site visits saw a strongly increased emphasis by NCA on assessment as a key criteria in accreditation and significant effort by faculty to develop and implement a comprehensive general education assessment plan. However, rewards or compensation for faculty work in assessment were extremely limited. Furthermore, most faculty saw assessment work as onerous and externally driven by NCA. Nevertheless, some of the effort at assessing the Core Curriculum apparently had a positive influence on some academic departments who began limited assessment activities

in their departments. Yet, most assessment activities in both the Core Curriculum and in academic departments could not be sustained. Assessment work waxed and waned in these years, seemingly a factor of either individual faculty interest in or responsibility for assessment.

Because of attendance at several NCA conferences connecting assessment and accreditation, CSBSJU submitted “A Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning” to NCA in 1995. This was a significant step forward in assessment coordination between the colleges. In the process of developing this plan, an assessment subcommittee was established within the Faculty Council on Academic Affairs. An ad hoc task force team was charged with initiating formal assessment at the colleges. This group conducted faculty training and then oversaw implementing departmental assessment plans that included mission, goals, and assessment strategies. Notable achievements from the 1995 assessment plan included the connection of learning goals and assessment with institutional mission statements, a Regents and Trustees resolution in support of assessment, the implementation of multiple and varied methods of assessment (though these were not clarified in the plan), an emphasis on departmental assessment, and oversight through the assessment committee and Divisional Deans. The plan also called for creating a position of Director of the Office of Institutional Assessment and Research. Some budgetary allowances for assessment were expected to come from budgets already in place, with additional assessment funds allocated to Academic Affairs in the long term.

Recent Assessment Developments

In early 2000, the Academic Assessment Committee approved an assessment plan that superseded the 1995 assessment plan, in part a response to assessment weaknesses identified in the 1998 NCA site visit. The revisions were designed to place less emphasis on approval of departmental assessment plans and more emphasis on describing how evidence about student learning was used in designing curricular changes. The 2000 plan attempted to clarify performance criteria for the intended learning that was inferred--but not articulated--in the Core Curriculum. Articulating expectations had certainly not been done in the original 1987 Exploring the Human Condition document nor was this directly addressed in the 1995 assessment plan. The 2000 plan offered more guidelines and suggestions for departmental assessment and clarified a reporting structure.

When NCA teams visited the campuses in November 1998, the institutions appeared to have failed to develop a credible program of assessment. The CSB site visit team required a progress report on the “implementation of assessment plans in all academic programs and general education including how the data are being used to improve the effectiveness of the College” (p. 37). The report was required because the college had not made sufficient progress toward implementing the NCA approved assessment plan. The SJU site visit team required a progress report on student outcomes assessment by January 2001.

Late in 2000, Richard Wielkiewicz, a professor in the Psychology Department and an Academic Assessment Committee member, outlined reactions to the assessment issues raised in the 1998 site visit. He identified successful assessment activity that had not been noted in the site visit. Data on the Core Curriculum consisted mostly of broad surveys or tests of students abilities, and aside from a few components (mathematics and writing), there were few detailed measurements of specific core components (particularly divisional requirements). Wielkiewicz reported that

“public opposition to assessment has declined drastically” and that assessment data were presented and discussed in faculty meetings to enhance decision-making. In 2000, the Academic Assessment Committee began to focus on assisting departments in collecting and using data, rather than simply approving or rejecting assessment plans. The Wielkiewicz report clearly identified dynamics that had led to weaknesses or perceived weaknesses in assessment.

A series of faculty votes in the early 2000s eliminated some elements from the Core, including the writing and discussion flags. These decisions were based not so much on evidence but rather on a “sense of the faculty” that the goals (e.g., writing across the curriculum) had been achieved. In 2004, the Joint Faculty Assembly voted to overhaul the entire Core Curriculum. This decision launched efforts to assess the existing curriculum and to create a new general education. An assessment plan for the entire Core Curriculum was created by a faculty team in the summer of 2004 and implemented by the divisions the following academic year. The results from that assessment project, along with data collected from previous efforts to assess the First Year Symposium, were used by the New Core Task Force to design the new Common Curriculum.

The primary lesson learned from this process was that good assessment must be planned from the beginning and embedded into the curriculum. Consequently, the new Common Curriculum, approved in the 2006-2007 academic year, began with articulated learning goals and assessable objectives linked to each requirement. While many faculty decisions about the need to replace the old Core Curriculum with the new Common Curriculum were based on anecdotal evidence, faculty had the insight to realize that the new Common Curriculum would have to be systemically assessed and would need not only an assessment structure but formal oversight to ensure assessment occurred.

Descriptions and Definitions

Academic Assessment Plan: Each department is expected to have a formalized assessment plan approved by APSAC and the Office of Academic Assessment. Descriptions of expectations for assessment plans are included in the 2000 Academic Assessment Plan.

Academic Assessment Summary Report (AASR): AASRs are assessment reports filed by individual academic departments. The reports summarize assessment evidence collection, assessment evidence analysis, faculty conversations, and any actions taken about improving the teaching and learning process in respective departments. While the APSAC has been responsible for soliciting and reviewing these reports on an annual basis, approximately half of departments are in compliance and submit annual assessment reports. Assessment plans and reports generally date from the 1999-2000 academic year when assessment policies and processes were being formalized.

Academic Policies, Standards and Assessment Committee (APSAC): Prior to the 2006-2007 academic year, this committee was called the Academic Assessment Committee (AAC). APSAC oversees assessment activities within Academic Affairs. A full description of the committee’s responsibilities can be found online at <http://www.csbsju.edu/academicaffairs/FHBAUG2006.pdf>, page 201. Minutes of the committee can be found online at <http://www.csbsju.edu/assessment/AcademicAssessmentCommittee.htm>.

Accountability: Individual higher education institutions are liable to account for the work of their respective students, faculty, and institutions. Postsecondary education organizations are accountable for what is taught and what those organizations expect and publicly state their students will learn. Accountability is one of the twin purposes of assessment (the other is the pedagogical and curricular improvement of teaching and learning). The assessment process is used to demonstrate accountability. More specifically, accountability is the notion that individuals (e.g., students, faculty, staff) and organizations (e.g., colleges and universities, academic departments, academic divisions) are expected or required to justify or demonstrate what college students learn. Accountability is typically an expectation by many different collegiate internal and external stakeholders for colleges and universities to provide evidence of student learning. Demonstration of student learning may be at the individual curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular course, activity, and program level or in a more summative way, i.e., a demonstration of the contribution the entire collegiate career made on students through the measurement of content knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Annual Academic Assessment Report (AAAR): AAAR reports summarize departmental AASRs, common curriculum assessment, and other assessment projects within Academic Affairs. The report is drafted by the Academic Assessment Office, approved by APSAC, and given a final audience with the Office of the Provost, the CSB Board of Trustees, and the SJU Board of Regents.

Annual Core/Common Curriculum Report: These reports are available from the 2004-2005 academic year to the present. These reports summarize assessment work within each component of the core/common curriculum.

Assessment: Organizations use various methods to gather quantitative and qualitative information about students to describe and to make judgments about the inputs (resources), the processes (educational encounters), or the outcomes of college or university curriculum for the purposes of pedagogical and curricular improvement of the teaching and learning process, accountability, or both. Judgments can be made about individual students, various groups of students, individual faculty members, academic departments, and specific institutions.

Faculty reward and compensation: This is a system or structure at a college or a university where faculty are rewarded or otherwise compensated for their important and often unique accomplishments in teaching, scholarship, and service.

Methodological issues: Methodological issues are defined as those design limitations and problems, measurement difficulties, and statistical challenges that should be addressed before conducting student assessment and considered during the analysis of assessment evidence.

Organizational and implementational issues: Organizational and implementational issues are defined as those hazards that should be addressed when defining the purposes and objectives of an assessment, planning and conducting assessment after purposes and objective have already been established, analyzing assessment results, making changes to pedagogy and curriculum, and assessing the assessment process itself. Organizational and implementational issues include the need to mobilize support of concerned and influential individuals and organizations, the need to

coordinate and involve a wide variety of individuals and sub-organizations, and the decisions that need to be made regarding how much money and time will be spent on assessment.

Pedagogical and curricular improvement of teaching and learning: From feedback derived from the assessment of student learning, faculty members, staff, and administrators refine and improve how and what they teach and how and what students learn. One of the twin purposes of assessment (the other is accountability), the assessment process is used to obtain evidence that, in turn, is used to improve pedagogy and the curriculum. More specifically, assessment evidence is collected and analyzed, reflected upon, and then used to improve how faculty and staff teach (at individual, divisional, and collegiate levels), how students learn, and how curriculum may be improved. This is a spiraling process where, once improvements have been made to pedagogy and curriculum, the assessment process is next evaluated, and changed as necessary. Then, the process begins anew when new assessment evidence is collected, analyzed, and reflected upon to improve teaching and learning.

Student outcomes: Student outcomes may be defined as the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, or behavioral changes that can be attributed to what students learn after successfully completing a college or university course, program, or degree. Outcomes are often measured as the difference between what is known at the beginning of a teaching and learning process and what is known at the end of that teaching and learning process (see value-added assessment below).

Value-added assessment: Value-added assessment measures the improvement in a student's abilities, skills, or knowledge that are a result or consequence of their college or university education. Measuring the value of formal education requires that students be assessed at the beginning and at the end of a period of instruction. A period of instruction could be the time between the beginning and end of a single course or the beginning and end of a student's entire academic experience, for example. The value that is added is determined by measuring the difference between what a student has attained at the end of some instructional period and what that same student attained or knew prior to the beginning of the instructional period, while removing confounding variables such as student maturation.

Stakeholders

There are several assessment stakeholders at CSBSJU. We have dichotomized our assessment stakeholders into internal and external groups.

Assessment should be everyone's concern at CSBSJU, from the presidents of the institutions to the campus bus drivers. We believe all internal campus stakeholders must share at least some responsibility for the assessment of student learning, whether it occurs in or out of the classroom. Our internal student outcomes assessment stakeholders include:

- Faculty
- Staff
- Students
- Administrators
- Board members
- Members of the monastic communities

Our external student outcomes assessment stakeholders include:

- Employers
- Alumni
- Parents
- General public (defined as members of our local, regional, state, national, and global communities)
- Secondary institutions who matriculate to CSBSJU
- Higher education institutions

Resources

Fiscal

Beginning in 1998, small amounts of monies were allocated to individual departments for the assessment of disciplinary majors, minors, and other programs. Departments received \$300.00 per year plus an additional amount that reflected the number of major and minor affiliations of respective departments. Departments that offered a minor but not a major received \$200.00 per year. Departments that offered neither a major nor a minor received \$50.00 per year. The amount awarded to different departments ranged considerably. For example, on the low end, Astronomy and Geography received \$50.00 per year. Mid-range allocations included Environmental Studies and Physical Education who received \$250.00 per year. At the high end, Psychology received \$700.00 per year, Education received \$800.00 per year, and Management received \$900.00 per year. Unspent monies in any given fiscal year carried over to the next fiscal year.

In the 2006-2007 academic year--the same year a new Director of Academic Assessment had been hired following a one-year leadership absence—budgets were reallocated giving nearly every department \$500.00 per year and every Division Head \$1000.00 per year for assessment activities. Because departments had accumulated significant amounts of unspent monies carried over from several years, a decision was made to give the Office of Academic Assessment some monies for discretionary assessment expenditures. The following illustrates the assessment budgets from 1998 to 2008.

Assessment Budgets from 1998-2008

Assessment
Budgets,
Academic
Affairs

Department	Budget	Budget	Budget	Budget	Budget	Accumulation	Budget	Budget
	FY98	FY99	FY00-04	FY05	FY06	Thru FY06	FY07	FY08
Accounting		\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$4,354	\$500	\$500
Art		\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$3,601	\$500	\$500
Asian Studies		\$250	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$(1)	\$200	\$200
Astronomy		\$50	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$750		
Biology		\$600	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$2,992	\$500	\$500
Chemistry		\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$3,189	\$500	\$500
Communication		\$600	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$3,282	\$500	\$500
Computer Science		\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$5,441	\$500	\$500
Core			\$13,200					

Curriculum								
FYS				\$8,800	\$8,800	\$37,444		
Sr Sem				\$4,400	\$4,400	\$21,534		
Economics	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$6,840	\$500	\$500
Education	\$800	\$1,600	\$1,600	\$1,600	\$1,600	\$3,461	\$500	\$500
English	\$600	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$4,075	\$500	\$500
Environment al St	\$250	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$888	\$500	\$500
Gender/Wo men's St	\$250	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$1,890	\$500	\$500
Geology	\$50	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$750		
Political Science	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$4,703	\$500	\$500
Hispanic Studies								\$500
History	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,703	\$500	\$500
Management	\$900	\$1,800	\$1,800	\$1,800	\$1,800	\$6,741	\$500	\$500
Mathematics	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,020	\$500	\$500
Military Science	\$50	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$495		
Mod/Classic al Languages	\$600	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,158	\$500	\$500
Music	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$4,192	\$500	\$500
Nursing	\$600	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$3,600	\$500	\$500
Nutrition	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,426	\$500	\$500
Peace Studies	\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$5,631	\$500	\$500
Philosophy	\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$508	\$500	\$500
Physical Education	\$250	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$1,438	\$500	\$500
Psychology	\$700	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$5,999	\$500	\$500
Physics	\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$376	\$500	\$500
Social Work	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$3	\$500	\$500
Sociology	\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$2,498	\$500	\$500
Theater	\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$4,091	\$500	\$500
Theology	\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$(663)	\$500	\$500
Natural Science	\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$5,309		
CSB Dean		\$13,318						
General	\$1,800		\$6,018	\$2,018	\$2,018	\$15,334		
Geography	\$50		\$100	\$100	\$100	\$613		
Social Science	\$400					\$6,000		
Faculty Developmen t			\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$13,222		
SJU Dean		\$12,918						
General	\$1,800		\$4,918	\$918	\$918	\$232		
Fac Dev			\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$22,740		
Humanities	\$250					\$1,871		
Medical Technology	\$100							
Academic Advising	\$400	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$800	\$5,258		
ESL	\$50	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$502		
Humanities Division Head			\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$2,229	\$1,000	\$1,000
Fine Arts Division Head			\$700	\$700	\$700	\$1,350	\$1,000	\$1,000
Natural Science Div			\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$2,637	\$1,000	\$1,000

Head								
Social Science Div Head				\$1,500	\$1,500	\$3,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
Program Review/Assmt Fac							\$23,436	\$22,936
Inst Research Assessment	\$19,500							
Totals	\$19,500	\$19,500	\$69,636	\$69,636	\$61,636	\$226,706	\$41,636	\$41,636

Assessment Personnel

Prior to July 1998, the faculty member who was the director of the Core Curriculum also had the added responsibility for conducting assessment in the general education. In July 1998, an Assistant to the Deans was hired to lead assessment efforts at CSBSJU, including assessment of the Core Curriculum. This person was a member of the staff. She continued in the 1999-2000 year as an Assistant to the Deans and with the new job title of Assessment and Program Review Facilitator. Her title remained the same until it was changed to the Director of Academic Assessment and Research in January 2002. She continued in this role until April 1, 2005 when she left the employ of the institutions.

In June 2006, a new Director of Academic Assessment was hired. This individual is also an untenured Assistant Professor in the Education Department. From conversations with the outgoing director and with others, it was an important shift for the institutions to hire a faculty member as the new director. Administrators and faculty members (particularly on the assessment committee) believed it was important to have a director who understood the issues of the faculty. The director remains employed in this role with a 5/6th release for administrative duties.

The first Office Assistant for the assessment office was hired in February 2004 and worked only until June 2004 when she left the employ of the institutions. The new Coordinator for the Office of Academic Assessment and Program Review was hired in December 2005. He remains employed in this role.

The Office of Institutional Planning and research hired an Associate Director in the summer of 2006 with expertise in academic assessment. This person coordinates with the Office of Academic Assessment to collect and analyze assessment data.

Outcomes

At the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University (CSBSJU), the use of student outcomes assessment as a method of demonstrating accountability and improving teaching and learning has been a challenging endeavor. Although assessing student outcomes at CSBSJU began several years ago, the process was irregular, often seen as an "add-on" responsibility demanded of the faculty, vigorously resisted at times by some, and supported by comparatively limited institutional resources. Until recently, assessment has mostly been seen as a decades long imposition by our regional accrediting organization as a way to comply with poorly articulated external stakeholder demands for postsecondary accountability.

However, high level administration hires and significant organization changes have been instrumental in shifting the purposes, processes, participation, and the results of assessment from

a place where assessment was episodic, not terribly informative or useful, and mostly resisted to a place where assessment is now constant, nearly systemic, mostly accepted (even embraced), and used increasingly for data-driven decision making. These changes include the following:

- In the last three years, we have hired a
 - President who worked at a regional accrediting organization and brings a wealth of assessment and accountability experience
 - Provost and an academic dean who are deeply committed to using assessment for the purpose of continuously improving the teaching and learning process
 - Director of academic assessment who brings scholarly and practical experience and leadership in the areas of assessment, program review, and accreditation
 - Highly respected faculty member, deeply committed to the scholarship of teaching and learning, as the new director of the Common Curriculum.
- The presidents of both institutions are committed to embedding student outcomes assessment in all courses, programs, and activities at CSBSJU. Both presidents see student outcomes assessment as a valuable tool needed to increase institutional effectiveness. In addition, the presidents are setting expectations of evidence-based decision-making throughout all administrative areas.
- Various ad hoc faculty committees (e.g., Core Task Force, 2000-2002; New Core Task Force, 2003-2005; Whatever Replaces FYS Task Force, Summer 2006; Summer Assessment Task Force, Summer 2006) met over several years to improve the Core Curriculum and to embed assessment to improve teaching and learning. This lengthy process successfully concluded in Spring 2007 with the approval of the new Common Curriculum. Assessment will be frequently evaluated to ensure it is providing the faculty with the appropriate evidence to improve pedagogy and curriculum.
- At the direction of the faculty, widespread assessment of the Core Curriculum began in 2004. Although unintended, the assessment process effectively became a two-year pilot assessment project for what would later become the Common Curriculum because it allowed the faculty to cogently link assessment to the improvement of teaching and learning; it was also a way to preliminarily scale-up assessment. This unintended pilot scale-up has allowed us to address a number of organizational, implementational, methodological, and reporting issues surrounding the assessment of the Core Curriculum. It proved to be the perfect opportunity for the faculty to appropriately use assessment evidence to fine-tune the goals and objectives of the new curriculum and to use assessment in a new, more rigorous, and systemic way, thereby improving the teaching and learning process.
- The new Common Curriculum has well-defined, operationalized, and measurable goals for students. For example, goals include requiring students to have the knowledge, ability, or skill to:
 - Advance their mastery of critical reading, thinking, and oral and written communication skills

- Discover and practice sound principles of information literacy and effective use of information technology
 - Demonstrate accountability and responsibility for their own learning
 - Apply mathematical techniques to solve problems in a specific area of mathematics
 - Model problems from other disciplines or everyday life by applying mathematical techniques
 - Conduct a scientific investigation, typically as part of a lab or field work, to answer a given question
 - Make critical social science arguments supported by evidence appropriate to an introductory level
 - Demonstrate a basic understanding of the historical, the theoretical, or the applied aspect of one of the fine arts
 - Critically analyze scripture and other theological texts
 - Demonstrate awareness of a variety of cultural contexts in which the target language is spoken, and have a functional command of the basic rules of social interaction in that language
 - Engage with texts using the analytic, critical, sympathetic, and/or speculative methods of one of the Humanities disciplines
 - Articulate multiple perspectives on contested ethical issues
 - Use gender as a primary lens of analysis for examining course content
- The revisions of departmental and Common Curriculum assessment reporting promises to streamline communication between departments and programs, on the one hand, and faculty governance committees and the administration, on the other hand. These activities may prove to be major contributions in improving assessment; they allow for the standardization, yet the flexibility, of reporting. Additionally, these new reporting systems should improve any previous compliance issues regarding reporting assessment results.
 - First, the Committee on Academic, Policies, and Standards (CAPS) was integrated with the Committee on Academic Policies, and Academic Assessment Committee (AAC); then, AAC was integrated into the APSAC. These integrations have resulted in clarifying and streamlining faculty and administration expectations of accountability and the reporting of assessment results. These integrations should also improve communication between the faculty and administration about assessment expectations, results, and improvements.
 - The responsibility for assessment has been dichotomized between two individuals. The Director of Academic Assessment is responsible for providing guidance, support, and advice to individuals, departments, and programs conducting assessment of credit bearing courses, activities, internships, and programs. The Associate Director of the Office of Institutional Planning and Research is responsible for the assessment of all non-credit courses, activities, internships, and programs. He is also responsible for the analysis of all assessment data, regardless of whether it is linked to a credit bearing or non-credit bearing course, program, or activity. This decision has increased clarity about assessment

responsibility and has shortened the time departments and programs receive analyzed assessment data and feedback from administrators with assessment expertise.

- In the 2007-2008 academic year, APSAC is revising program review policy; new guidelines have been constructed to help all stakeholders in the program review process.

The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University are working on creating a culture of self-reflective inquiry framed as meaningful scholarly and teaching activities. The institutions ask all members of the campus to propose researchable, operationalizable inquiries about teaching and learning in the form of assessable, answerable questions. We want campus stakeholders to ask important questions and receive relevant, consequential, evidentiary answers. If the assessment process is done well, then we will have the needed evidence to drive decision-making and effect campus-wide change and improvement. Most campus stakeholders realize there is intrinsic (as well as extrinsic) value in systemic, institution-wide student outcomes assessment.

CSBSJU will continue to evaluate assessment, improve it, and use it to demonstrate accountability and to improve teaching and learning. We offer the following recommendations as way to continue improving assessment activities at CSBSJU. These recommendations should be considered in the whole. While individual recommendations can and should be implemented, we believe the success of each recommendation is linked to the success of all other recommendations; truly, when it comes to assessment processes, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Recommendations

Clarify Purpose

Very early assessment efforts--first at just the College of Saint Benedict and then at both schools—were focused on curricular development and refinement. Indeed, in the mid-1980s, assessment efforts concentrated on understanding what students were learning based on an analysis of general academic skills, disciplinary knowledge, and integrative learning. However, by 1998 and particularly after the 1998 NCA accreditation site visit, the vision of assessment was limited to our attempt to comply with the externally mandated requirements of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

It is ironic that the HLC sees assessment (today) as primarily a tool to be used for institutional improvement. To some extent, assessment is still seen by some as a compliance activity conducted for external (e.g., HLC, employers, parents) and internal (e.g., administrators, board members) stakeholders. Some faculty, staff, and administrators have found it difficult to understand the connection and the value of conducting assessment and improving the teaching and learning process. The conversation--particularly among faculty and administrators--about the purposes of assessment is very important. The conversation about the purposes of assessment should drive our assessment activities. We should link the conversation about assessment purposes to the mission and vision of the institutions and to individual course, departmental, and divisional goals. It is important to clarify and to find consensus about disciplinary and programmatic goals, and institutional mission and vision statements. We suspect that further

refinement of assessment purposes could go a long way toward demonstrating to the faculty that assessment yields tangible, beneficial results, and leads to consequential change.

Increase Stakeholder Involvement

While internal stakeholder participation in assessment has increased substantially over the past 10 years, there is much room for improvement. We are not yet at the threshold where a majority of the faculty and staff not only understand the utility of assessment activities but also actively engage in them. Broad stakeholder consensus is needed to consider and agree upon the purposes of assessment (i.e., the expected outcomes we share for student learning), to aid in the design and implementation of assessment, to assist in the evaluation of assessment data, and to share the results. Usually only one or two faculty members in a department participate in assessment. We need a majority of the faculty to participate in assessment. Increasing faculty involvement in assessment will help us do the very best job in designing assessment and measuring student learning.

Improve Faculty Reward and Compensation

Faculty reward and compensation for participating in assessment have been practically non-existent at CSBSJU. The time and effort individual faculty have spent on assessment activities varies widely, based mostly on the culture and expectations of individual academic departments. Very few individual faculty members, often untenured, have participated in assessment activities throughout the years. Faculty and staff participation must be recognized, celebrated, rewarded, and compensated. Assessment should be linked to faculty development. Additionally, faculty assessment work could be (only) positively considered during promotion and tenure. Perhaps the most powerful means to counter the perceptions that assessment is externally mandated, onerous, an add-on body of work, or even a punishment, is to reward and compensate faculty for their time and effort. To do this will require the expenditure of additional financial resources. Assessment has been running on a limited budget. It may be time to consider increasing the amount of money the institutions spend on assessment.

Integrate Planning

We should think and plan more strategically when considering what effects assessment evidence can and should provide us. In other words, assessment should not only be used for demonstrating accountability and improving teaching and learning but should be linked to institutional planning and budgeting. Coordinating the many and often competing stakeholders, linking the curricular goals and assessment purposes to an appropriately selected or designed assessment instrument, dealing with funding issues, allocating resources, and mobilizing support are only some of the tasks required in the planning stage of assessment. Assessment planning is a complex undertaking. We have begun creating three-year assessment plans for all credit-bearing courses, programs, and activities. Nevertheless, much more work is needed to improve assessment planning.

Improve Methodologies

One of the weakest links in the CSBSJU assessment chain has been the dearth of faculty and staff understanding regarding what methodologies to use to evaluate student learning. Most faculty are uncomfortable with assessment precisely because they believe they do not know how to design, implement, and analyze evidence of student learning. Yet, by the very nature of their

professions, faculty know the curriculum, curricular goals, course content, and how to appropriately measure (e.g., grading) student learning better than any other stakeholder group. While we continue to meet with individual faculty and departments to explain and demonstrate how to measure student learning, additional education or training on how to create assessment measures should be provided.

The results of assessment efforts are likely to be most valid when multiple assessment measures are used. Multiple measures include homegrown multiple-choice examinations, essay examinations, portfolios, faculty-student interviews, and national standardized examinations. Using multiple measures will increase the validity and reliability, and consequently the credibility of the results. This, in turn, will increase the legitimacy of planning, designing, and conducting assessment.

Implement Systemically

Assessment at CSBSJU has increased significantly since 1998. There is widespread acceptance of assessment. Yet, the practice of assessment is not yet systemic at CSBSJU. Finally, the institutions are at a place where scaling up assessment across the institutions is within reach. However, to achieve scale-up, we must be willing to infuse assessment into more decision-making processes. For example, it is important to identify both the constraints and the opportunities of assessment, and produce actions that could remove the barriers and create the support necessary for effective assessment to take place. It is also important to understand that student outcomes assessment should not be separated from other issues that affect an institution. Outcomes assessment affects and is affected by other types of campus assessment (e.g., faculty evaluations, program evaluation).

Widely Disseminate and Use Results

We have done a poor job disseminating assessment results. Because assessment results have typically only been collected but not analyzed nor reported, few faculty ever learn how their students performed on assessment measures. Regrettably, this may have only added to faculty frustration about participating in assessment; understandably, it may have increased their resistance to assessment. Collecting assessment data and doing little or nothing with them is pointless; it emboldens those who complain that assessment is an externally driven mandate to compile data. To be effective, assessment results must be widely disseminated to and used by stakeholders.