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BEYOND *measure*

IN THIS ISSUE: GOOD PRACTICES FOR ASSESSMENT

This month, our faculty spotlight is Jen Kramer, a professor in the Communication department. Kramer is incredibly passionate about assessing student learning, and truly realizes the importance it has on the CSBSJU campuses.

“There’s always room for improvement, always.” Kramer emphasizes.

Though assessment may seem like a boring process on paper, the real-life implications it has for students prepares them to be lifelong learners in today’s increasingly changing world.

“We should be able to stand behind what we’re doing and show that we’re open to that change. Most of us came into academics because we love to learn. We should still always be learning how to do something better.” Kramer says.

Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when the results are clear, and promotes a sense of positive change. As Kramer advises, it really is about illuminating questions which are important to the mission and vision of the institutions.

“You’ve got to start somewhere. It really isn’t a tool for administration to come down on you. We need to look it at as a way that it’s beneficial for us, to improve our own processes.”



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: Jen Kramer *Communication Department*

Assessment becomes most useful when we stop thinking about it as paperwork, and begin realizing the everyday impact it has on our students’ lives in the classroom. One way which Kramer does this is actually talking about the process of assessment to her students in relation to course assignments.

“I try to tell [students] that I like to grade on hard copy, and I always have you turn everything in on Canvas too because we need it for assessment. I think it’s important that [students] know that we’re trying to to improve.” Kramer explains. “The world changes, I even teach drastically different than I did 10 years ago. A lot of things have changed, and culture changes.”

Kramer also reminds us that grades are indeed a form of assessment. Referring to students, she gives the advice she often tells those who take her classes.

“[We give] you feedback and grades so that on the next assignment, you can do better based on what we have told you. I try to let you know if you’re learning what you said you were going to learn. If not, we’re going to try to improve. So you might reap that benefit in another class, and the students coming after you are going to reap that benefit.”

Of course, one of the most important ideals to keep in mind with assessment, is that there is no shame in discovering that a process might not be as effective as you thought.

Specifically with assignments in the classroom, “You can change a prompt such that you’re still getting at what you need for that item, as well as you can prove to outsiders that they met this objective.” Kramer suggests. In other words, if an assignment doesn’t quite get at the course learning goals, it is perfectly acceptable to tweak it, in order to better measure if students got the course objectives.

To conclude, Kramer offers a piece of insightful advice to the CSBSJU faculty. “It’s not as bad as people think it is. The process of using rubrics, yes, it takes a long time. Once you get rolling, it’s super exciting to be able to do something better and see the results.”

GOALS AND OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT, OH MY!



Following the yellow brick road of assessment can be as perplexing as a Kansas tornado. It's even more confusing to try to decipher the difference between a goal and an outcome, as they are very similar concepts. This short article should serve as a guide for anyone who may be caught up in the "tornado" of assessment.

Goals are more general statements of what programs want to accomplish. Goals should flow from the mission, and not be overly specific. In creating goals, you want to consider the hypothetical "perfect" graduate. Generally speaking, what will they know how to do, and genuinely care about? What will distinguish them from other graduates? What should this graduate leave your program knowing how to do?

In contrast, effective outcomes provide clear goals on what students should know and be able to do. Verbs are usually very helpful to use, as they provide a concrete action that students should be doing. It is also important to use verbs which are measurable and observable. Words such as "understand," "appreciate," "learn or think," "become familiar with," or "become aware of," are all internal and not something that can be easily observed.

Conclusively, goals are more general statements that flow from the mission but are not overly specific. Outcomes, however, should provide a clear goal and should use action verbs, which specifically focus on an aspect of the program that can be easily observed. Think of outcomes of being sub-goals, in the sense that outcomes should expand upon the general statement of a goal. You cannot have an outcome with a clear goal, but you can also not have a goal without clear outcomes expanding upon the general statement.

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

Between 2014 and 2018, CSBSJU Director of Libraries Kathy Parker conducted a survey about library collections and their connection to department capstone courses. She analyzed 41 different capstone syllabi and learns some insightful lessons about the high-impact practice.

Lessons Learned:

1. Library-based research is fundamental to most capstone courses. Faculty expect students to utilize library collections of breadth and depth in order to meet their goals for rigorous capstone courses. We need to continue consultation with faculty about developments in their disciplines and make sure our collections reflect current trends.
2. Librarian outreach to faculty should include an invitation to provide librarian contact information on the syllabus or Canvas site. While the faculty member may choose to provide the most guidance to students on research strategies, the librarian can assist with additional guidance on discovery tools, citation management, and locating materials.
3. A citation analysis of sample capstone papers, perhaps combined with papers from other upper-division classes, can reveal additional details about student use of print and digital collections within different disciplines.
4. The literature review/annotated bibliography is a common assignment that liaison librarians should be prepared to support with guidelines and examples. Further research on the effectiveness of this assignment in improving the quality of student research papers would also be helpful.
5. Review syllabi and/or consult with departments where no research paper is required for the capstone course to determine if other upper division courses have research components.

Capstones
and Library
Resources...
In a Nutshell



If you are interested in Kathy Parker's full research findings, please contact her.

