



# Assessment Essentials

A Newsletter of the Gen Ed Assessment Committee

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## General Education Assessment Committee Progress Report

### Inside this issue:

Progress Report 1

Call for Papers 2

Gen Ed Website 2

Article by Prof. Gastón 2

AAHE Conference Highlights 4

In fall 2002, Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) convened a General Education Assessment Committee comprised of faculty and staff representatives and chaired by the Dean for Academic Programs and Instruction. Its overall charge was to determine desired student learning outcomes and objectives for the general education curriculum; discover what measurements could be used to assess those outcomes; and develop an assessment plan for formal implementation by the college.

With the support of each of the academic departments through appointed departmental liaisons, the committee developed over the course of the 2002-03 and 2003-04 academic years a template of desired general education learning outcome goals and objectives. On May 26, 2004, a document consisting of 9 Learn-

ing Outcome Goals and Objectives for General Education at BMCC was submitted and approved by the college's Faculty Council.



You may review the Learning Outcome Goals and Objectives for General Education and other helpful information on the college's general education assessment efforts at a newly launched website: <http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/genedassess/>.

For the 2004-05 academic

year, the committee will seek to improve the college's knowledge and participation in general education assessment through the following initiatives:

- developing an informational brochure for faculty to serve as an introduction to general education assessment concepts and processes.
- developing and finalizing a formal assessment plan for approval and implementation.
- presenting a series of faculty-development workshops that will focus on developing assessment tools for specific general education objectives.
- administering a survey for "Assessment of Student Learning" and forwarding the results to NCS for the generation of survey report results.

## Call for Papers

The BMCC General Education Assessment Committee is inviting submission to the *AE Assessment Essentials Newsletter*.

Articles could consider questions such as: What do you assess in the classroom? How do you go about assessing it? What have you done as a result of the data? How has it affected your per-

formance in the classroom? Has it made you a better teacher? Has it changed the way you put your courses together? Has it forced you to re-evaluate what you are doing in the classroom? Has it improved student learning?

Articles should be 500-800 words long. Bibliography and note should follow the APA style.

Please send the article with an abstract to [mprudlo@bmcc.cuny.edu](mailto:mprudlo@bmcc.cuny.edu) and [cstein@bmcc.cuny.edu](mailto:cstein@bmcc.cuny.edu)



## General Education Assessment at BMCC

The General Education Assessment Resource Center provides information on all aspects of BMCC's general education assessment efforts and serves as a forum where the college community can share their ideas and experiences. Visit us at <http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/GenEdAssess/>.

Stay in touch  
with what's  
going on in  
assessment at  
BMCC

## An Analysis of a Special Peer-led Team Learning Mathematics

By Dr. June L. Gastón

### About Peer-Led Team Learning

There are several characteristics that distinguish Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) from other tutoring projects. Videoconferencing is used to offer education courses to both two-year and four-year college peer leaders. PLTL faculty liaisons are also instructors, counselors and mentors to leaders. Peer leaders are trained to conduct special small-group workshops of six to eight students. Additional project efforts facilitate the transfer of two-year college leaders to the four-year institution. PLTL workshops are an integral part of the course which all students are expected to attend.

### A Special PLTL Project

In 1999, BMCC was invited to join an NSF-funded CUNY Science and Mathematics Teacher Recruitment/PLTL Project.

The mathematics course selected for the project was Fundamentals of Mathematics I, a four-credit terminal course with a high enrollment of Liberal Arts students, some of which are currently teachers or prospective teachers. From Spring 2000 to Spring 2004 I taught thirteen non-PLTL MAT 100 sections (n=339) using computers, three PLTL MAT 100 sections (n=67) using computers, and eight PLTL MAT 100 sections (n=202) using a lecture approach. Note that the lecture-based instruction was implemented because of the loss of two labs of Macintosh computers that supported the course software, and the failure of Macintosh emulators to function as suitable replacements.

### Leader Recruitment

Because of difficulties recruiting prospective teachers, I enlisted two groups of peer leaders majoring in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) areas. One

“All of the MAT 100 grade analyses indicate that students in PLTL sections were more likely to achieve higher grades, but also more likely to withdraw than students in non-PLTL sections.”



continued

group had teaching goals and the other did not, so leader interaction was encouraged. More leaders thus began to consider teaching careers.

Prior to the beginning of each semester, I identified leader candidates who completed Precalculus (MAT 206) or Fundamentals of Mathematics (MAT 100) with A/B grades. The recruitment process included PLTL advertisements in a BMCC newsletter for prospective teachers, as well as letters and phone calls to prospective leaders.

#### Leader Training and Development

At the beginning of each semester, I conducted a five-hour orientation session introducing all prospective leaders to general PLTL methods and group management. Peer leaders planning teaching careers were also enrolled in a videoconferenced one-credit CCNY Educational Leadership (EDUC 31507) course which has a special two-day PLTL orientation each semester.

During Spring and Fall 2002, I held weekly two-hour PLTL leader training workshops. One-hour problem-solving workshops for students were scheduled days, evenings and Saturdays. All leaders were required to give me PLTL journals describing their student workshop experiences.

From Spring 2003 to Spring 2004, the training schedule was adjusted. Because of challenges peer leaders experienced as mathematics lab employees, I recruited volunteers. To accommodate their schedules, I held bi-weekly one-hour PLTL leader training workshops. With groups of enthusiastic volunteers, the training sessions often ran beyond the scheduled hour. The trained leaders conducted one-hour student workshops on alternate weeks. All leaders were required to give me completed PLTL Workshop Leader Session Logs describing their experiences.

Mathematics peer leaders with teaching goals enrolled in EDUC 31507, and completed research projects incorporating coursework and workshop experiences. Each semester, a PLTL Preliminary Pres-

entation Day was scheduled to provide these leaders with a special opportunity to practice their presentations and obtain feedback from other peer leaders and BMCC Mathematics Department Faculty before leaders presented via videoconferencing or at the CUNY PLTL Student Conference at CCNY.

Because of the collaborative role of PLTL faculty in training peer leaders, other CUNY faculty shared the training of those BMCC leaders with teaching goals. BMCC faculty and staff welcomed all leaders to a variety of presentations, such as those given in the Teaching Center and on Technology Day. Leaders were also invited to local and national PLTL conferences.

#### Results

To judge the effectiveness of PLTL methodology in MAT 100, the performance of both peer leaders and workshop students must be analyzed. All tables are on page 6.

Of 28 mathematics peer leaders recruited, 18 (64.3%) participated in the Teacher Preparation Program. Five mathematics leaders served as volunteers over two or more semesters. Five leaders received BMCC Mathematics Department (CSEM) scholarships. Four mathematics peer leaders transferred to CCNY. Two leaders participated in a national PLTL conference in Montana; seven leaders presented at local student PLTL conferences at CCNY and another five leaders gave videoconferenced presentations. All leaders attended one or more BMCC presentations. Nine leaders worked as mathematics lab employees either during or after their PLTL leadership training.

Student performance and retention in PLTL courses is analyzed in terms of ABC grades and withdrawals. For all MAT 100 sections I taught from Spring 2000-Spring 2004:

- Students in all non-PLTL sections were slightly less likely to earn ABC grades (62.2%) than those in all PLTL sections (63.5%).

continued

- Students in the non-PLTL sections were slightly less likely to withdraw from the course than students in the PLTL sections (10.3% vs. 11.5%).

Less than 40% of students in the Saturday PLTL MAT 100 sections were likely to earn ABC grades. These students were required to finish approximately four hours of the scheduled class before meeting for the hourly PLTL workshop. Although many of these Saturday students found the course requirements overwhelming, the withdrawal rates remained less than 14%.

For all MAT 100 sections that did not meet on Saturdays:

- Students in the non-PLTL sections were less likely to earn ABC grades than those in the PLTL sections (64.5% vs. 69.1%).
- Students in the non-PLTL sections were less likely to withdraw from the course than the students in the PLTL sections (7.0% vs. 11.2%).

For non-Saturday sections of students who actually completed the course:

- Students in the non-PLTL computer sections were less likely to earn ABC grades than those in the PLTL computer section (69.4% vs. 76.2%).
- Students in the PLTL computer section were nearly as likely to earn ABC grades as students in the PLTL lecture sections (76.2% vs. 78.1%).
- Students in the non-PLTL sections were less likely to earn ABC grades than those in the PLTL sections (69.4% vs. 77.9%).

### Summary

All of the MAT 100 grade analyses indicate that students in PLTL sections were more likely to achieve higher grades, but also more likely to withdraw than students in non-PLTL sections. Of MAT 100 students who completed the course, those in non-Saturday PLTL computer-based sections and lecture-based sections were nearly as likely to earn higher grades.

### Plans to Continue

I will continue this PLTL project with a new phase of research that will study the effects of peer-led team learning in pilot Precalculus (MAT 206) sections taught using computers.

**Note:** Complete text with graphics can be found on the *General Education Assessment Resource Center* page: <http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/GenEdAssess/PDF%20Files/GastonPLTL.pdf>

American  
Association of  
Higher Education  
National  
Conference,  
Denver 2004

## AAHE Conference Highlights

In June 2004 a number of General Education Assessment Committee members attended the conference of the American Association for Higher Education. Here are short reports of some sessions that were attended.

**Understanding and Using Assessment Results: Questions to Consider**

Speaker: Linda Suskie (Towson University)

This session focused on how to understand and what to do with assessment results once you have them. It included interactive activities drawn from Suskie's book, *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (2004, Anker). The presenter highlighted important questions to bear in



mind, such as: Why are we assessing? What decisions will this assessment help us make? What are our key learning goals? Do we have a common understanding of "fuzzy" terms (such as "critical thinking" or even "writing")? Does every student have the opportunity to achieve these goals? Is there a place for them in the curriculum? Are our assessment tools clearly related to our learning goals? What level of student performance is

good enough? What are we comparing results against (a standard? Peers? Performance when they began? Past students?)? What level of performance is minimally acceptable/unacceptable/exemplary for graduation? Why? The presenter suggested guidelines for what to do with results. When they are good, publicize them. When they are disappointing, look at goals, pedagogy, assessments, and curriculum. Ask questions such as: Are there too many goals? Are they inappropriate or overly ambitious? Do they need to be clarified? Does the curriculum adequately address each learning goal? How do students learn best? Are the assessments poorly written or

misinterpreted? Do they match key learning goals? Are they too difficult for most responsible students? Goals should be prioritized.

Stephanie Oppenheim

**Institutional Assessment: Proof We Practice What We Plan**

Presenter: Kathryn Drezek

Stonehill College, a small Catholic college in greater Boston, has implemented an impressive integrated institutional planning process. The college has a 10-year long-range plan, a strategic plan that is designed to achieve the first five years of the long-range plan, and one-year operational plans that are developed and implemented by the academic departments and administrative units. Prior to developing these plans, the administration articulated the college's institutional objectives. It was decided to focus on student learning as the central objective, and the college agreed on six core learning outcomes. These are:

- enhanced content knowledge in "core" disciplines;
- demonstrated competency in skills crucial to success in all major programs;
- the ability to integrate knowledge across disciplines;
- dexterity in teamwork and collaboration;
- the ability to reason well and to apply reasoning skills to ethical questions;
- an appreciation for diversity of persons and cultures; and
- expertise in at least one academic discipline.

The college has seriously embraced student learning and the six core outcomes. All students and prospective students are informed that these goals are central to the Stonehill collegiate experience. These learning outcomes also form the basis for Stonehill's marketing efforts – the college is located in a very competitive market.

Their measurement instruments include e-portfolios, the CAAP Writing Test, the Noel-Levitz

satisfaction survey, and graduating senior exit survey.

She warned not use a "one-size fits all" approach. That is, since some learning outcomes are easier to measure than others (e.g., math ability vs. ethical reasoning), do not attempt to assess each outcome in the same manner. She also recommended not to silo student learning outcomes in the academic areas, but rather the whole college should be involved.



David Hyllegard

**Project SAILS: Facing the Challenges of Information Literacy Assessment**

Speakers: Julie Gedeon, Carolyn Radcliff, Lisa O'Connor (Kent State University)

When the University of Kent decided to assess the information literacy skills of their stu-

# AAHE Conference Highlights

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dents, they realized that there was no appropriate off the shelf tool available. Consequently, they decided to create their own standardized test, which is called Project SAILS (<http://sails.lms.kent.edu/index.php>).

The university wanted to assess information literacy skills in a reliable way. The test should be easy to administer and it should be acceptable to the university. Project SAILS's goal is to compare cohorts of students, not individuals.

It was decided to test the information literacy standards as developed by the American Association of Colleges and Research Libraries (<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm#stan>).

The test can be used by other institutions as well if the institution agrees to administering the test to at least 200 undergraduate students. The cost for the participating institution is \$1,800. Kent State University will perform the statistical evaluation and generates reports. The report covers information on how cohorts performed in different areas. At this point an automated report generation procedure is being developed. Institutions can see how they compare to the benchmark. If the institution collects demographic data, results can also be broken down by demographics.

The main problem with testing lies in motivating students to participate. Some institutions give the test as an extra credit assignment, others require students to take it.  
*Marion Prudlo*

## Low-Cost Design and Use of Electronic Portfolios to Assess Learning

Speakers: Xiaodan Huang and Davit Todt (Shawnee State University)

The presenters focused on the use of portfolios to promote learning and program assessment. The presentation was program specific; namely, teachers education. Professor Huang explained how a portfolio template was designed using the Microsoft Suite (FrontPage and Word). The template is sent to students who then document their progress in various level courses. Documentation consists of posting artifacts and writing reflections on the artifacts. Students also must post an updated resume. The portfolio is used as an assessment tool, but upon graduation it is fine tuned (various portions are eliminated) to edit it into a Professional Portfolio. Students are able to incorporate not only scanned documents, but also media and audio clippings. Server space



is purchased by the college and made available to the students. In this presentation and others, the question of privacy was raised. At Shawnee State University, privacy was addressed via a log-in system. Only students registered by the administrator would have access to the portfolio.

*Francisca Campos*

## BMCC / CUNY

The BMCC General Education Assessment  
Committee

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