Assessment in the Summertime!

As announced earlier last week, I am both very happy and very sad to be moving on to the University of Montana. It is sad for me to be leaving behind so many rich friendships and important initiatives.

The last several years we have followed the list of goals outlined on the UMKC Assessment Plan Timeline (see http://www.umkc.edu/assessment/downloads/assessment-plan-timeline-3-21-12.pdf). Most of these goals have been accomplished through the hard work of many, many individuals. I can’t thank you enough for helping us establish a stronger culture of learning and assessment.

During these summer months, I hope that you have a chance to relax and catch your breath. I also hope that you have some time to reflect on the quality of teaching and learning in your courses, and to consider different approaches for assessing student learning.

For the last several years, I have tried to provide resources that can spur your creativity for assessment. These include all of the innovative approaches published in our 10 issues of the Assessable Roo (see http://www.umkc.edu/assessment/index.cfm), along with the Handbook for Learning Outcomes Assessment (http://www.umkc.edu/assessment/downloads/handbook-2011.pdf).

FaCET has been my second home at UMKC, and I thought it might be helpful to remind you of presentations I have given at FaCET on the following topics:

- Assessment for Learning
- WEAVE Overview
- Curriculum Mapping
- Focus Groups
- Developing Surveys to Measure Student Satisfaction and Learning Outcomes
- Using Clickers
- Assessment of Civic Engagement
- Using Rubrics to Make Assessment More Efficient
- The Scholarship of Assessment

The PowerPoint presentations for each of these topics can be found under “Campus Presentations” on our Assessment Tools webpage (see http://www.umkc.edu/assessment/assessment-tools.cfm). I hope that these resources can be useful to you in the future.

Assessment is one tool of many that helps us to improve our craft of teaching and supporting students. I believe that as we put students first, one by one, in all of our efforts, that our work will be more meaningful and rewarding. It’s a privilege to work in higher education, and it’s been a huge blessing for me to get to know all of you. I wish you all the very best!

~Nathan Lindsay
Students upset that quiet floors aren’t quiet enough? Are they frustrated because there aren’t enough late hours? Further, is the Wi-Fi in the building fast enough to serve the students’ needs?

These were all questions that may have been mumbled in years past throughout the halls and floors of Miller Nichols Library. But the complaints were just that, and never found their way to the people who could do anything to solve them.

So the library staff set out to find a way to tap into these problems and concerns. “We decided to put together a platform that the students could use to voice issues that were on their minds,” said Cindy Thompson, Director of Public Services at Miller Nichols Library. “It was a program we felt could build stronger relationships between the library, its staff, and the students.”

This initiative at the library is based upon similar programs developed at the University of Georgia and the University of North Carolina Wilmington. The idea is to build students’ confidence that they can communicate their grievances in a way that is likely to result in change.

Thompson said they started by placing clear suggestion boxes around the library with paper slips that could be filled out. Almost immediately, they started getting responses.

Though all suggestions are not easily fixed and some may even be unfixable, it is necessary to ensure that students know their voices are being heard. Thompson says questions are answered whether from a positive or a negative standpoint. “We knew from the outset that responding to the suggestions in a timely manner would be a key,” Thompson noted. “Whether we can or cannot satisfy a concern, every student gets some form of feedback as promptly as possible. I can’t think of a single case that we’ve taken a complaint and simply moved on. They’re all seriously assessed.”

Emphasis in the program is centered around demonstrated improvements that have been implemented based upon the questions and suggestions received from the students. Suggestions or complaints that deal with personnel issues are not included in the responses, though they are tracked on an Excel spreadsheet and monitored closely.

Suggestions have been placed in one of five categories. These include 1) explanations of alternatives that already exist; 2) passing along suggestions to other parties for possible implementation; 3) direct action to at least partly implement a suggestion; 4) direct action to fully implement a suggestion; and 5) comments or compliments.

In all cases with the exception of compliments or comments, an online blog at the library website has been set up to address the issue and then explain what can and/or cannot be done about it.

One suggestion that was passed along involved a suggestion to extend the Robot Café hours into the summer. This is an issue that falls into the vendor’s (Sodexo’s) realm of responsibility, and so it was passed on. However, this action was explained on the blog before pushing it forward.

Along with the concerns have come several compliments. Thompson notes that “this program allows the students to assess our performance. We’ve heard some very good feedback about the program (from the students).”

Since its implementation in December 2013, more than fifty suggestions have been either placed in the suggestion boxes or posted online. The online suggestion box went live on April 14 and has proven to be useful, though the boxes still receive the majority of the attention.

Thompson pointed to one other unexpected outcome of the program. “Two

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Cindy Thompson, Ph.D., Director of Public Services, UMKC Miller Nichols Library

~Dan Stroud
Information Literacy instruction is designed to be an integral part of Discourse 200 classes and proved to be so during the Spring 2014 Semester. Of the 32 sections of Discourse 200, all but one section participated in online tutorials and a full week of face-to-face information literacy instruction. By comparison, information literacy was included in only about half of English 225 classes in recent years.

Assessment Methods
Assessment of the student learning outcomes for information literacy included:

- Quizzes with each of six tutorials. Each online tutorial consists of a brief instructional video, followed by quiz questions directly tied to the video.
- Instructor assessment of information literacy student learning outcomes in students’ final papers.
- A post-semester survey of instructors regarding the incorporation of information literacy instruction into their classes.

This report includes results from the formative assessment of students’ answers to tutorial quizzes. Analysis of the instructors’ assessment of final papers is still in-progress.

Analysis of Results
Overall, students did quite well on most tutorial quizzes, and better than we had predicted. The average score for all students on all completed tutorial quizzes was 85%. Scores ranged from a high of 90.3% on Source Evaluation to a low of 71.3% on Internet Searching.

The second highest average score was 89% on Scholarly vs. Popular Sources, which is another aspect of evaluating information sources. For both of these tutorials, most students attained the Proficient or Advanced level.

That students scored well on the Source Evaluation and the Scholarly vs. Popular Sources tutorials may have two very opposite explanations. A simple explanation may be that they already have the skills and knowledge necessary to evaluate the information or at least have the background to easily develop these skills.

On the other hand, evaluating the quality of information sources can be a difficult and complex information literacy concept. Since many students have difficulty with this concept, they may have given more attention to the instructional video and consequently done better on the quiz.

High average scores were also achieved on two Search Strategy tutorials at 88.5% and 88.3%. For the information taught in these tutorials, the majority of students are at the Proficient or Advanced level of achievement. Discourse 200 students may have recognized this as a difficult task and chosen to view the instructional video carefully before taking a quiz on these topics. As a consequence, they would have performed better on the quizzes as indicated by the data.

On the lower end of the average scores were the tutorials for Internet Searching at 71.3% and Database Searching at 81.2%. With database searching, student learning varied greatly from the Developing level across the Proficient level to the Advanced level.

While a small majority of students are at the Proficient or Advanced level with Internet searching, 40% are still at the Novice level. A simple explanation is that students have limited knowledge in this area and found the information in the tutorials difficult. Alternatively, based on their prior experience, students may have assumed they do not need instruction on this topic.

Some students may have skipped watching the instructional video. Since the videos focused on foundational concepts underlying Internet and database searching, students would have missed learning new information about the Internet and databases. With the quiz questions taken from information provided in the video, students would not be expected to do well on the quizzes.

Further and finer analysis of students’ success on the tutorials, as well as review of Discourse instructors’ assessment of students’ final projects will be forthcoming.

Action Plans
The results of this assessment provide a number of steps that the library can take to improve student performance in the future:

1. In order for the instruction to be effective, students must participate fully. Steps will be taken to increase participation.
2. Incorporate assessment results into information literacy instruction. Students may be surprised to learn that their fellow students in previous semesters had the most difficulty with the tutorial on searching the Internet.
3. Change the tutorials in response to analysis of assessment data.

~Diane Hunter
UMKC’s graduate programs involve more than 3,600 graduate students and 354 graduate faculty members. The School of Graduate Studies heard from graduate students and faculty advisors that there was a need for increased graduate writing support on campus, and as a result, a Graduate Writing Advisory Group was formed in 2013. This Advisory Group involved representatives from the School of Graduate Studies, University Libraries, and the UMKC Writing Studio. The purpose of the Advisory Group was to investigate UMKC student and faculty experiences and needs relative to graduate writing, and to research effective campus-wide graduate writing supports at other institutions. This article discusses the data collection process, results from the data analysis, and a list of recommendations from the Advisory Group for expanding graduate writing support at UMKC.

The data collection process included online surveys and focus group sessions with UMKC graduate students and faculty. During the Fall 2013 semester, the Advisory Group invited UMKC graduate students and graduate faculty members to respond to online surveys focused on graduate student writing resources and needs at UMKC. The surveys were developed and piloted with a small group of students and faculty by the Advisory Group during the Summer 2013 semester, and changes were made based upon their input. The Advisory Group administered the surveys and received responses from 537 graduate students (14% of graduate students) and 142 faculty members (40% of graduate faculty).

Findings from the graduate student and faculty surveys were shared in the Spring 2014 issue of the UMKC School of Graduate Studies SGS Spotlight newsletter. The student survey results indicated that graduate students are most likely to utilize online writing resources and to attend brief, focused writing workshops or retreats offered on evenings or weekends that are free or inexpensive. Graduate students across diverse programs also expressed an interest in having quiet, designated writing spaces on campus with access to technology and writing resources.

Faculty respondents were interested in writing supports that focused on building strong writing skills, providing resources for graduate student writing, and providing a forum for sharing student research and writing. Faculty also communicated that approximately half of the departments (48%) currently offer support for graduate research and/or writing, while the other 52% do not offer support such as research and writing courses.

In addition to these survey results, the Advisory Group facilitated four faculty and three student focus group sessions in the Spring 2014 semester. An analysis of the transcripts from these sessions identified a high-level of interest in online writing tutorials focused on topics such as discipline-specific formatting requirements, writing a literature review, technical writing, and avoiding plagiarism. Each of the student focus groups expressed a need for designated writing spaces for graduate students on campus. Participants also communicated a desire for writing workshops and retreats that provide instruction along with time to write and receive feedback.

Based upon the findings from the surveys and focus group sessions, along with the review of successful programs at other institutions, the Graduate Writing Advisory Group developed the following recommendations for future consideration:

1. Form a Graduate Writing Advisory Committee with diverse representation to plan, implement and assess the campus-wide graduate writing support initiatives.
2. Create a “Graduate Writing” webpage on the new School of Graduate Studies website that will serve as the foundation for graduate writing resources and development opportunities.
3. Design Online Tutorials on the topics of formatting requirements, literature reviews, technical writing, avoiding plagiarism, and other topics of interest and need identified by graduate students and faculty.
4. Enter into discussions to create Designated Writing Spaces for graduate students in multiple campus locations.
5. Create and disseminate to program coordinators and graduate faculty advisors a guide that can be used for

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Civic and Community Engagement is important to our city, our university, our Student Affairs and Enrollment Management Division and to the Registration & Records and Admissions Departments here at UMKC. It is so important in fact, that the work study students in both of these offices were offered a program this past semester designed especially for them.

You might be thinking, how can two offices dealing mainly with bringing students into the University, acclimatizing them to the college and assisting them with transcripts, credits, policies, processes, systems, and degree completion, possibly help students find their passion as well?

The answer is by partnering with the Multicultural Student Affairs Office who introduced our work study students to an awareness activity entitled, “Understanding Social Justice, Understanding People.” The purpose of this activity was to encourage students to become active citizens on campus and in the community through participation in volunteerism and/or other social awareness activities. Additionally the goal was to increase the students’ awareness of contemporary social issues, problems and challenges of our urban environment and challenge them to be responsible participants in their own community.

The presenter, LaNee’ Bridewell, from the Multicultural Student Affairs Office, provided a combination of hands-on individual and group activities and discussion, personal stories and definitions and strategies for how students can “find their passion.” Finding their passion--what is important to them as individuals—was identified as the key driver for finding what social engagement activity would provide them an environ-
8. Develop **Writing Courses**, such as one-credit mini courses preparing new students for graduate writing, or courses on topics of interest such as writing for publication and grant writing.
9. Create a **GTA or GRA line for the UMKC Writing Studio** to offer workshops and individual consultation sessions to support graduate-level scientific and technical writing.

The Advisory Group is creating several online tutorials that will be available in the Fall 2014 semester. The School of Graduate Studies is currently designing the Graduate Writing web page and investigating potential spaces on campus for designated writing spaces for graduate students. If you would like to participate in any of these initiatives, please contact me in the School of Graduate Studies at friendji@umkc.edu or 816-235-1196.

~ Jennifer Friend