When Odette, the Black Swan, performs her 32 fouettés in Swan Lake, how do we assess how well she has done them? We can count them. Certainly, if she has only made it to number 24 or 28, that is not as good as 32. We can note the virtuosity. Did she throw in a double or triple pirouette in the middle? We can also assess the technical aspect of line. Does her leg fully stretch on the leg opening? Is her foot fully pointed throughout, without the floppy foot syndrome we work on constantly with our students? Is her port de bras (movement of the arms) natural and appropriately timed with the legs? Is she spotting (snapping of the head around to the same spot to prevent dizziness) appropriately? Does her posture remain lifted in the courtly carriage dancers have been sporting since the court of Louis XIV? Are we somehow influenced more positively if the dancer is a “left turner”? In just 16 measures, the dance professor has just assessed all of these items and we have not even talked about artistry yet. Is the dancer’s movement expressive? Is she moving seamlessly and organically (as organically as one can move when they are spinning in rapid succession on the tip of their toe)? Is the audience moved? For the dancer, these assessments are just as critical. I would like to point out that as an integral part of training dancers in higher education, dance professors are naturally assessing all of the time. Formative assessment is inherent in our discipline and has been since its beginning. Our greater challenge is learning to more effectively articulate our assessment practices to those outside of our discipline and finding more ways to incorporate quantitative assessment in our evaluation process. This is a challenge for all of us in artistic fields. The fundamentals of artistic evaluation are different from those in the sciences and humanities. In other fields, it is possible to assess the parts or aspects of a student’s knowledge of information as an indicator of potential success of a bigger picture concept. For instance, the student’s understanding of certain mathematical concepts may lead us to believe they will be successful in physics. In the arts, dance in particular, assessing the parts without the whole picture does not give you an accurate assessment of the dancer’s ability. For example, we are constantly conducting and evaluating a postural analysis of our stu-
Assessing Swans (Continued from Page 1)

dents during the class period, since improper postural alignment can greatly affect the dancer’s ability to perform certain movements. However, if we end our assessment with evaluating the dancer’s alignment in isolation, without regard to other crucial components for successful movement (core strength, range of motion, musicality/timing, artistry, stamina, etc.) we are leaving out extremely important assessment points that tell us how successful this dancer will be. Proper alignment alone, although a very important factor such as math for physics, is not an indicator of technical or artistic success.

Another aspect of assessment that is absent in other fields is the intent of the artist (dancer, teacher or choreographer) as part of the evaluation. Samuel Hope, the former Executive Director of the National Office of Arts Accreditation states, “The nature of successful evaluation in artistic matters depends on understanding the goal of the creator in great depth, and then being able to evaluate the creator’s success at reaching that goal. Since there is a virtually infinite number of goals, and since decisions about them are made by individuals, effective assessment requires deep knowledge and sophistication. It is for all these reasons, and for other reasons we have yet to describe, that the arts rely primarily on individual evaluation rather than standardized assessment.”

This statement is especially salient in regard to the assessment of modern dance (non-codified techniques in particular), as the movement vocabulary is constantly evolving and sometimes developing in the moment. The “creator’s” intent is an important element to consider when evaluating the dancer. Classical ballet however, was codified several hundred years ago and its intent and assessment are more easily explained to someone outside of the field. The technique behind classical ballet has evolved much more slowly over time.

So what is technique and how do we assess it? Dance technique is a foundational ability to take control of one’s body in an aesthetic and stylistic mode of action. We assess this ability with various approaches and depths depending on the level of the dancer. In a beginning dancer, assessment of accuracy, which is more quantifiable, is stressed. Is the dancer’s leg in the proper place? Did they jump high enough to do two revolutions before landing in a proper fifth position? Did they do 32 fouettés? In other words, what is the intent of the movement, did the dancer accomplish it and to what degree? Once the dancer is at more of an intermediate level, assessment of artistry, which is more qualitative, begins to play a role. At an advanced or pre-professional level, the assessment evaluation includes the “marrying” of both technical accuracy and artistry for an overall “mastery” of a professional aesthetic. Accuracy on its own is not a true measure of mastery.

Now the question becomes, what is artistry and how do we assess it? How do we measure the Swan? From my perspective, artistry in dance is expressing authentic emotion through movement. It is being able to incorporate seamless organic transition of movement to convey an idea. Most importantly, in the most accomplished dancers it includes an internal understanding of choreographic intent - the ability to “move” an audience. This type of assessment we concede is subjective. This is why juried assessment (a group of faculty) is utilized as an important part of the summative assessment practice.

In summary I would like to reiterate that assessment of dance students in higher education happens naturally and in a variety of ways. We use a combination of formative (daily evaluation and feedback), summative (juries and movement exams), direct (evaluation forms and exams) and indirect (peer and self evaluation of the capstone experience) types of assessment. More work, we feel, needs to be done in articulating and reporting our assessment practices to those outside of the field. We are continually trying to find more ways to incorporate more quantitative assessment measures as well. For now… this is how we assess a “Swan.”

For additional perspective, enjoy the clip provided below.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOdE0P7K0HM

~Sabrina Madison-Cannon
FaCET Assessment Mentoring

As the newest campus assessment mentor, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My primary goal as assessment mentor this year is to facilitate greater sharing of resources across units. I look forward to working with you and your fellow faculty members. To begin that conversation, permit me to share why I find assessment for student learning an exciting and productive endeavor. My scholarly agenda has long included legal education pedagogy and its role in the development of professionals.

Naturally, assessment has been in the backdrop in that work. I look forward to learning even more this year in my role as assessment mentor. The assessment process has itself been a powerful mentor for me: increasing my confidence in teaching, enthusiasm for grading, and understanding of my subject matter.

Like many university professors, I am a self-taught teacher, evaluating my progress based on imitation of my own teachers, comparisons to my peers, insights from educational literature, and reactions of my students. But these are all indirect and incomplete indications of good teaching, based on conformity and perception. Assessment permits me to measure my teaching by the results—whether students are learning. Most importantly, assessment gives me the kind of feedback that provides confidence that, as I measure student learning and make adjustments based on that information, my efforts to improve my teaching will pay off in greater student learning.

Assessment has allowed me to bring my scholarly skills, curiosity and excitement to one of the traditionally most unpleasant parts of my job: grading exams. (I am often heard to repeat an old saw I once heard, “I teach for free and grade for pay!”) When I approach my bluebooks with a goal beyond sorting and stamping letters but as an exercise in gathering information about my students’ learning, comparing that information to the information I had gathered from earlier assessments, I was also pleased with the quality of curriculum maps across the university. In the assessment narratives, it was great to read of how these had helped departments re-order their curricula and identify some of the gaps in students’ learning outcomes. Along with the major maps that were developed this past year, the curriculum maps provide students, advisors, and faculty with greater clarity and intentionality for enhancing students’ learning. We want our learning outcomes to be transparent to prospective and current students, employers, and other constituents, and the maps we created provide a nice overview for all of these audiences.

From Nathan’s Desk

The fall 2013 semester has been a time of significant progress in our assessment efforts at UMKC. In reviewing the assessment plans submitted in October, I have been delighted by the improvements in quality for so many of the academic degrees and student affairs departments. The findings were often more detailed and analyzed more thoroughly. I was especially impressed by the examples I saw of faculty who were “closing the loop” by collecting data, developing appropriate action steps, and then collecting data showing improved scores. Examples of this will be featured in our next newsletter.

There are two areas of emphasis for spring 2014. First, all faculty teaching General Education courses need to collect data for their courses and create action steps in preparation for their October 2014 reports. Second, we will be developing ways to assess high impact practices such as service learning, which is timely given the advent of Anchor III—Civic Engagement courses in Fall 2014.

Thank you again for your stellar work in 2013. May you have a wonderful holiday break with family and friends.

~ Nathan Lindsay

Continued on Page 6
Writing Intensive Course Guidelines

A key learning outcome being assessed across campus is students’ ability to write effectively. In addition to embedded course assignments, the RooWriter provides extensive data about students’ strengths and weaknesses in writing. With the support of the University Writing and Reading Board and staff from Information Access, Henrietta Rix Wood and Richard Delaware have spearheaded the successful implementation of the RooWriter this semester. As a formative, diagnostic assessment, the RooWriter serves as a pre-requisite for Writing Intensive (WI) courses at UMKC.

The purposes of Writing Intensive classes are to help students learn to think and write in the discourses of their disciplines, to become familiar with how ideas are presented and interpreted in particular professions and fields of study, and to further develop the analytical reading, critical thinking, and communication skills that they need to be competent citizens and workers. In an effort to promote greater consistency in the WI courses offered at UMKC, the University Writing and Reading Board has outlined the following guidelines.

Writing Intensive Student Learning Outcomes

At the end of a Writing Intensive Course at UMKC, students should be able to:

♦ Write in genres, participate in activities, and perform assignments that are appropriate to the respective discipline.

♦ Demonstrate their ability through writing to read closely and analyze critically the texts of their disciplines.

♦ Produce writing through the process of brainstorming, research, drafting, peer review, and revising.

♦ Articulate and support a coherent thesis or purpose in their writing and develop it according to the conventions of a given discipline or audience.

♦ Use research methods and documentation that meet the standards of the discipline.

♦ Articulate and discuss their work with peers or the instructor.

Writing Intensive Course Requirements

To achieve the Writing Intensive Student Learning Outcomes, the following course requirements have been outlined by the UMKC University Writing and Reading Board (UWRB):

♦ Instructors should emphasize that writing is a recursive process that entails analytical reading and re-reading; prewriting; submission of preliminary drafts for instructor response; peer response; revision of content, form, mechanics, and style; and formal presentation of a final draft.

♦ Assignments should encourage students to pose relevant questions, conduct their own research, evaluate arguments, consider purpose and audience, and offer and receive constructive criticism.

♦ Some class time should be devoted to helping students complete writing assignments through activities such as discussion of assignments and evaluation criteria; analysis and discussion of sample student papers; and instruction about how to write a particular kind of paper or solve a common writing problem.
WI Course Guidelines (cont.)

♦ Each course should require at least 5,000 words or twenty pages of writing.
♦ Writing assignments should account for at least 40 percent of the course grade.
♦ Writing assignments should be distributed throughout the semester.

Writing Intensive Best Practices

Drawing on scholarship about Writing Intensive courses, the UWRB recommends the following practices for Writing Intensive instructors:

♦ Each course should include assignments that differ in length and purpose.
♦ An essay or research paper of at least 2,000 words or eight pages should be required.
♦ Instructors should utilize the range of resources available on campus, including referring students to the library and the Writing Studio, where they can receive assistance in the processes of conducting research, writing, and enhancing their information literacy.
♦ Instructors should provide students with specific guidance about research and writing through individual conferences or small group meetings.
♦ Students should be asked to save and submit all drafts of an assignment so that instructors can gauge their progress through the writing process.
♦ Examinations should include essay questions where appropriate.
♦ Instructors should engage in conversations with other WI instructors and make use of RooWriter resources for teachers.

Assessment has deepened my understanding of my fields of expertise. The process of selecting specific, significant, and measurable learning outcomes requires that I refine my understanding of what is important and what is peripheral in my field of study. It gives me the courage to abandon some topics so I have room to delve deeply with my students into other more challenging and enduring topics. As I have challenged my students more, so too I am challenged to further my own scholarly understanding.

Please let me know how I can help you access these benefits of assessment for learning. Here’s how to reach me: email glesnerb@umkc.edu; phone 235-2380; text 816-500-5474. I will be in the FacET office Friday afternoons from 3:00 to 5:00 during the spring semester, but am always happy to arrange to meet at any time I am available.

~ Barbara Glesner-Fines

2014 Proposed Assessment Sessions for FaCET

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 17, 2014</td>
<td>FaCET Symposium on Civic Engagement (9am-3pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 29, 2014*</td>
<td>Workshop on Assessing Service Learning and Other High Impact Practices at UMKC</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 19, 2014*</td>
<td>Workshop on Departmental Satisfaction/ Learning Outcome Surveys</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 11, 2014*</td>
<td>Workshop on the RooWriter</td>
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*All Sessions are held in FaCET from 2:00pm to 3:30pm