The establishment of the UMKC University College is a result of the University’s 2010-2020 strategic planning process that, in part, assessed student retention and graduation data as indicators of student success. This assessment revealed the following:

Even with ongoing focus toward improving student retention and graduation rates over the previous four years, University-wide performance had not significantly changed. Further evaluation identified a particular population of students experiencing significant challenges, students unsure of their academic plans, identified as General Studies - Undeclared students. The year-two retention rates of this population averaged 55% (as compared to an overall 74%) over the last three years (Fall 2008, Fall 2009 and Fall 2010).

Similarly, the year-two retention rates of undecided-transfer students averaged 63% (as compared 76%) over the last three years (Fall 2008, Fall 2009 and Fall 2010). These performance levels are significantly below both current University-wide performance and even further below the University-wide retention goals of 80% by 2020.

Persistence concerns remain for this population of students beyond the enrollment in their second year. For retained undeclared or pre-professional students, prolonged major decisions and/or inability to gain full professional school admission resulted in a significant population of students not fully engaged with an academic plan with sophomore-, junior-, and even senior-level standing.

Students in this situation were less likely to continue as evidenced by graduation rates as low as 18 percent. The University’s strategic planning resulted in the establishment of the UMKC University

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Photo Courtesy of Success Center

From Nathan’s Desk: Assessment Wizardry?

Perhaps like many of you, one movie that I remember vividly from my childhood is The Wizard of Oz. The wizard poses as a mysterious, fear-inducing character who maintains his persona behind the cloak of a curtain. As it turns out, the wizard is a pretty nice person who is willing to help others.

Too often, I think we approach assessment like the Wizard as we measure our students in ways that are confusing or un-

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Photo Courtesy of Success Center

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From Nathan’s Desk (Continued from page 1)

clear to them. Assessment should be done with the students, and not to the students. The first step in effective assessment is to outline the learning outcomes for our students, but we also need to explain how the activities and assignments in the course are related to the learning outcomes. If we are using rubrics, we should share the rubric ahead of time with students so that they understand our expectations. After the students have completed their work, a rubric can be used for both grading and assessment, and students should have opportunities to improve their work based upon our feedback.

Greater transparency can also be demonstrated at the academic degree or program level. This fall, we are encouraging all academic degrees to post their learning outcomes online for students to review. Departments can determine where on their website is the most appropriate place for this list. Learning outcomes could also be incorporated into departmental recruiting materials, newsletters, or in outreach to alumni.

Excellent things are happening with assessment across our campus, and our accrediting bodies should not be the only people who are aware of our students’ strong competencies and learning outcomes. We have much to celebrate related to our students’ outstanding work, and we need to broadcast our successes more effectively.

I commend you for your terrific work in assessment. Assessment is one of the best ways we can measure the difference we are making in our students’ learning. It is making a difference!

~Nathan Lindsay

University College Assessment (Cont. from page 1)

College in the Fall 2012 term to provide focused support for this underserved population.

University College, sometimes referred to as UCollege, incorporates documented best practices directed at improving key indicators linked to student retention and improved graduation rates. The best practices and their subsequent effects on student progress have been well documented. The National Resource Center (NRC) for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina http://sc.edu/fye/index.html and the Association of Deans and Directors of University Colleges and Undergraduate Studies (http://adandd.org/) are key resources for proven models.

The University College creates one portal of entry with relevant support services for exploratory (previously referred to as undeclared) students and students in transition (transfer students and students changing majors). The UCollege mission is to offer every exploratory student the opportunity for success through the engagement with faculty and staff, the development of educational plans, the clarification of career and life goals, and the appreciation of the values of a 21st-century liberal education.

Three over-arching goals with related student learning outcomes have been established for University College. These goals are to: foster academic success; facilitate students’ discovery of and connections with The University of Missouri – Kansas City; and prepare students for responsible lives during their academic careers and beyond.

The effectiveness of the University College will be annually assessed utilizing the following measures to assess short-term impacts (with further assessment after six years):

Improved Academic Skills Development as indicated by: 1) an increased number of students enrolled and successfully completing foundational courses in written communication, foreign languages, and mathematics, 2) an increased number of students participating in academic support services throughout the term, and 3) an increased number of students performing above their predicted Grade Point Average (GPA) (based on high school GPA and ACT/SAT score).

Demonstrated first-time, exploratory student retention rates at or exceeding 70% within two years and at or exceeding 80% by 2020 (University-wide).

Demonstrated transfer, exploratory student retention rates at or exceeding 70% within two years and at or exceeding 80% by 2020.

Improved decision making and timely selection of an academic major as indicated by a decrease in the percentage of junior- and senior-level students remaining as exploratory after their initial semester at UMKC.

Improved student engagement and satisfaction as indicated by National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) benchmark scales: Supportive Campus Environment; Academic Challenge; Active and Collaborative Learning; Supportive Campus Environment; and Enriching Educational Experiences.

~Kim McNeley
WEAVE Deadline:

October 1, 2012

Departments should be finalizing their data analysis, outlining their action steps, and writing their assessment narrative prior to the October 1st deadline. Don’t delay—time is slipping away!!

2012-2013 Proposed Assessment Sessions for FaCET

October 2012 - Workshop on Using Clickers for Assessment
November 2012 - Workshop on Department/Unit Assessment Teams
January 2013 - Workshop on Major Field Tests
/ETS-Proficiency Profile/RooWriter
February 2013 - Workshop on Departmental Satisfaction/ Learning Outcomes Surveys
March 2013 - Workshop on Curriculum Maps
Mentoring, Assessment, and Refreshment

Editor’s Note: Drew Bergerson has served for several years as an incredible Assessment Mentor at UMKC. We are grateful for his many hours of invaluable service and wish him luck in his future endeavors.

Read sardonically: “You really seem to like this stuff...” I have received this response, expressed in these or similar terms, on many occasions during my tenure as FACET Faculty Fellow for Assessment in AY 2011-12 and before then as part of UMKC’s Assessment Academy team from 2006-10.

To be sure, I drank the Kool-Aid that flows from assessment’s cup. Although I was a skeptic at first, I saw enough in the field that was based on best principles and practices of academic rigor, faculty governance, and student-centered pedagogy that I felt obliged to take it more seriously. I have since observed how assessment of learning can provide faculty with an evidence-driven foundation for more meaningful and rewarding conversations with their colleagues about pedagogy, sometimes for the first time in their professional careers. I have also observed how assessment for learning can provide students with a more transparent understanding of their learning objectives, which translates into more student success. And I have seen how assessment can provide academics with better “ammunition” to explain the benefits of their programs to crucial stakeholders—from parents and alumni to administrators and politicians.

Building on the principles of our Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching, the task of the Faculty Mentor was to help change the learning culture at UMKC through direct peer encounters between faculty. At its most basic conceptualization, my task was to mentor my colleagues and peers about strategies for developing assessment plans tailored to fit their programs. For the most part, this task involved translating the terms and principles of assessment into the language of our everyday life. Most came into my mentoring sessions uninformed and were genuinely thankful for the support and advice of a peer; while others were openly hostile and dismissive. Here it mattered that this message was coming from a peer rather than from an administrator or a staff member, for I could remind them to act professionally—or not waste my time.

More to the point, I wanted to demonstrate to my colleagues how assessment can help them to realize a number of longstanding aspirations for their professional life as an academic. Instead of the anecdotal gripe sessions about students during finals week, we can use assessment to spark evidence-driven conversations about pedagogy with our colleagues. I saw it also as my task to show my colleagues that—though it does have a steep learning curve at first—assessment does not have to become an undue burden. Above all, I strove to demonstrate easy ways to collect data on our student performances by using existing assignments, embedding assessment in coursework, using assessment technologies, and not reinventing the wheel. Instead, I pointed them toward adopting and adapting assessment plans from our professional organizations and other universities. If assessment became too much of a burden, it became less likely to happen. I saw my job as explaining the concept in such a way as to make it simple. In turn, this would help my colleagues to keep assessment simple as well.

So my answer to this sardonic statement—that I really liked mentoring assessment—has always been: “for the most part, yes.” The reasons have been simple. I have always welcomed a serious interdisciplinary dialogue, for I learned from my colleagues about the unique priorities, language, and epistemologies of the many programs that I mentored. I also have enjoyed the surprising rigor of assessment, which provides a structured way of holding a series of meaningful conversations about something that is so very difficult to hold onto—program goals and student learning—while also leaving the control over the content in the hands of the faculty. But even more, I loved the “aha” moment when my colleagues realized that assessment was something different—that it really did provide them with a tool that could help them help themselves and their students. To be sure, we all know that we implement something tantamount to an assessment revolution at UMKC in response to the threat of disaccreditation. But for many of us, assessment has begun to offer an opportunity to work toward realizing longstanding aspirations for our programs, for our institution, and for ourselves as instructors. In addition, like all mentors, I learned as much from my mentees in this regard as I was able to teach them. That alone is a refreshing thought to take from the experience.

~ Andrew Bergerson
New Assessment Mentor Ready to Go

Finishing the very simple statement, “When students complete their degree (or this course) they will be able to...” is the cornerstone of assessment. While, over the past 28 years, I have designed my courses and reviewed and revised degree programs with assessment in mind, during the past few years I’ve come to realize it’s been too much part of the background rather than foreground of my focus. At the risk of sounding overdramatic, finishing this very simple straightforward statement has been transformative for the way I think about and approach my work as an educator.

With a background in program evaluation, I used to pride myself on how systematic and detail-oriented I was in spelling out course goals and objectives on each of my syllabi. A big oversight, however, was not mentioning specific student learning outcomes, i.e., statements of what students were to know and be able to do at the completion of the course. Learning outcomes were in the back of my mind, but I treated them as implicit from my so very well-articulated course goals and objectives (tongue firmly placed in cheek). Naively, I was confident students would know and be able to do what they are supposed to, simply as a result of completing my course. However, when prompted by the university’s big assessment push to start thinking about and stating learning outcomes for programs and courses, I quickly found that how questions about student learning and teaching are framed makes a big difference.

Through my involvement with assessment work at UMKC and with colleagues at other universities, I’ve come to see that my course goals and objectives were very much “teacher-centered” statements of discipline specific knowledge and skills that I and my colleagues believed we needed to teach students. Such statements, however, did not necessarily automatically or neatly translate into what I expected students were to take away from the course or, more explicitly, what they were to know or be able to do at the end of the course.

For me to translate my course objectives into “student-centered” statements that explicitly articulated specific knowledge and skills students are to have acquired was a significant mental exercise for me. If this was such a challenging process for me—the instructor—how could I expect my students to know what they are to take away from the course, or to be able to explain to potential employers the distinct knowledge and skills they have to bring to the workplace as a result of their studies.

While at first a bit skeptical about and somewhat dreading the idea of assessment, I’ve come to value its academic benefit and workplace advantages. As odd as it may sound to some, I actually now enjoy engaging in assessment-related mental activities and the dialogues it has facilitated with colleagues, especially since I see its value for improving the quality of teaching and student learning.

As Fa CET Mentor in Course Evaluation Methods, I welcome the opportunity to share what I have learned in the area of assessment and to continue to learn from you, my colleagues, as we strive to enhance student learning and success.

For the FY2012-13, I will be holding assessment mentoring sessions at the Fa CET Office (Miller Nichols Library) on Wednesdays, 1-4pm. To schedule an appointment, contact Katie Willis at 235-5362 or (klk7b9@umkc.edu). Also, if these hours don’t fit your schedule, please feel free to contact me directly (gensheimerl@umkc.edu) to find an alternative time.

~ Leah Gensheimer

Standardized Testing Under the Microscope

Summer Study Sheds New Light on Student Learning

As the hazy days of summer moved along, the measurement of student learning outcomes continued in Academic Affairs. One extensive initiative was to determine the pros and cons of testing practices with the Education Testing Service (ETS). UMKC has used the services presented by ETS with regard to undergraduate performance for many years.

Two types of tests are utilized at UMKC; the ETS Proficiency Profile Test, and department-specific forms of the ETS Major Field Test. Students are required to take both tests before graduation. The Proficiency Profile Test is a standardized assessment from ETS that focuses on student learning outcomes for undergraduates as they enter major field course work. It is an instrument designed to provide evidence regarding the institution’s effectiveness in helping students acquire General Education learning outcomes. In turn, the Major Field Test is a standardized assessment from ETS that focuses on student learning outcomes as they near graduation in the fields such as Biology, Business, Chemistry, Computer

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Assessment Down Under

1. A form of direct assessment used in many classes at the end of a semester
2. When a person shares information or best practices he or she ________ it.
3. These come in pre and post formats.
4. UMKC’s Asst. Vice Provost for Assessment (Name)
5. Updates to this website are due by October 1, 2012.
7. A form of indirect assessment often conducted online.
8. FaCET’s New Mentor for Course Evaluation Methods (Name)
9. Acronym for company that helps us produce General Standardized tests
10. (down) When the population is too large to study it is better to rely on _____.
11. ________ assessment is typically captured by faculty’s evaluation of students’ learning, instead of their own perception.
12. Are the crux of assessment to be listed in every syllabus.

~ Dan Stroud

Summer Study (Cont. from page 5)

Science, Physics, Political Science, and Psychology.

Two sets of analyses were run on the UMKC data from both the Proficiency Profile and the Major Field Tests. These data included the Custom Comparative Data Report and the Item Analysis Report. The Custom Comparative Data Report indicates how UMKC’s students’ skills and knowledge compare with the skills and knowledge of students at similar institutions. The Item Analysis Report gives specific findings for every item on the test, which can be compared to the national average.

The comparative report generates descriptive statistics (over a three year period) based on a reference group of 10 or more comparable institutions or programs of interest that were selected (based on similar data pulled). The data, which was analyzed and spread over 89 pages of reports and tables, has been disseminated to the corresponding departments (at least those who had data available to be reviewed) as well as to the Provost’s Office.

In reviewing the results, we discovered that the findings for reading and critical thinking were especially impressive, with all questions and or indicators tracking above the national average. The writing and mathematics domains proved nearly as proficient with only one indicator that fell below the national average in each area. We will continue to track how these scores change over time.

~ Dan Stroud