Dear Colleagues,

As you are probably fully aware, we are down to a week before the October 1st deadline! I commend you for your work to complete your assessment report, assessment narrative, and curriculum map before this time. Please let me know how I can be helpful as you finish any last minute reports.

It has been exciting for me to watch and hear about the implementation of UMKC’s revised General Education curriculum this past month, which is shown in the graphic below. So many of you have devoted hours of preparation and collaboration to make this a success, and we’ve heard some very positive feedback from the students.

Assessment has played a major role in our General Education revision efforts. As you assess your Gen Ed courses this semester or next semester, please note that there is a General Education Course Assessment Report template that you should be prepared to use in your reporting. It is located under Information and Resources at the following website: http://info.umkc.edu/GECC/information-resources. Since you have already outlined your learning outcomes, measurements, and achievement targets in your course proposals, this information can be copied from the proposals, and then you should report your Gen Ed findings and action plans.

For the findings, we encourage you to be detailed, using specific numbers or percentages when possible. Do not use course grades or overall scores on a test or essay. The most useful data indicates where students’ performance was stronger and where it was weaker. Feel free to attach charts and tables if desired. For the action plans, you might highlight how the course could be improved, and what changes in the course content or pedagogy you plan to make, based upon on the findings.

These 2-3 page reports for each course are to be submitted to the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC) by October 1st, 2014. Then, the following will occur:

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UMKC is demonstrating its commitment to helping students improve their reading and writing skills by introducing an innovative new online writing assessment this month.

The RooWriter Writing Assessment asks undergraduate students to write analytical essays on important issues, and then two trained evaluators will provide assessments of their essays. Students can use this information to determine which aspects of their writing to focus on as they continue their college studies. Advisors, faculty members, and administrators can use the evaluations to enhance their guidance, teaching, and curriculum.

Students may take the RooWriter more than once during their undergraduate studies, and it is required for undergraduate graduation and as a prerequisite for some classes. The first time that students use the RooWriter, a one-time usage charge of $5 will be billed to their student accounts.

Everything that students need to know and do for the RooWriter is located at https://www.umkc.edu/roowriter/. The RooWriter web site also offers information for advisors, faculty members, and administrators.

The RooWriter replaces the Written English Proficiency Test (WEPT) for all undergraduates at UMKC. Unlike the WEPT, the RooWriter is not a pass/fail test on one topic that must be written in person in three hours, offered at two designated times during the semester. In contrast, the RooWriter allows students to write a 750-1,500 word essay on their choice of six topics in a 72-hour-period anytime and anywhere they have access to a computer and the Internet. The RooWriter provides reading packets of scholarly and popular articles on issues ranging from distracted driving to digital piracy to homelessness in Kansas City.

Nathan Lindsay, Assistant Vice Provost for Assessment, observes, “From an assessment perspective, the RooWriter is much, much stronger than the WEPT, and provides numerous benefits for both students and faculty.” He also notes, “It has been amazing to watch the extensive efforts of many faculty and technology staff in designing and implementing the RooWriter. They should be highly commended for this student-centered project.”

The RooWriter is a unique system that was developed through the collaboration of the University Writing and Reading Board (UWRB) and the Division of Internal Applications of the UMKC Department of Information Access. During the last four years, the UWRB solicited advice from and listened to the needs of the UMKC teaching community. The UWRB focused on creating an online writing assessment that was easy for students to navigate. The RooWriter affords a double-blind assessment by two independent evaluators who provide objective writing analysis.

“Years of discussion, and hundreds of hours of work have been dedicated by a group of thoughtful faculty and staff toward designing the RooWriter to be both a user-friendly and immediately useful 21st century writing assessment. We hope that soon students will start appearing at the offices of their instructors or advisors with their RooWriter report in hand asking what it means for them, thereby starting a personal dialog about their own ability to read critically and write well,” says Richard Delaware, an Associate Teaching Professor of Mathematics and member of the UWRB board who has been instrumental in developing the RooWriter.

The RooWriter also is designed to collect data that will be useful to UMKC faculty members and administrators as they work to encourage the teaching of critical reading and writing across the entire campus. As the UMKC Coordinator of Writing Assessment, I will share preliminary findings of the RooWriter Writing Assessment on March 11, 2014, at FaCET.

The RooWriter Writing Assessment depends on Reading Packets on a wide variety of topics. Faculty in all programs, departments, and schools are invited to submit Reading Packets, and guidelines are posted in the Instructor/Advisor Information section of the RooWriter web site. For more information on producing Reading Packets or any aspect of the RooWriter, please send an email to roowriter@umkc.edu.

~ Henrietta Rix Wood
Fall Faculty Symposium Fosters “Wicked” Conversations

The 2013 Fall Faculty Symposium turned out to be a rousing success with the help of a memorable lecture offered by Herb Childress, a nationally recognized assessment specialist and former Dean of Research and Assessment at the Boston Architecture College. Childress had also served as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the University Writing Program at Duke University. During his tenure there, he aided in the development of the first year writing program that included leading a pair of assessment programs intended to improve the school’s writing curriculum.

To support the focus on general education, Childress’s lecture generally centered around his concept of “Wicked” problems. Among his main points were that such problems held definitional characteristics that 1) could not be fully defined, 2) could be stated as symptoms of other problematic issues, 3) might include a diagnosis that depends on a problem’s stated definition, and 4) likely will change as quickly. Further, he stated that operational characteristics such as the lack of a fixed modus operandi, uniqueness of issues, and limitations with regard to division and practice, feed these troubling issues.

Another interesting concept that the former dean offered was his perspective on leadership. In his words, it is “the characteristic of naming oneself as implicated and responsible for resolving a problem, even while knowing our own capacity and unworthiness.” This idea of humility and leadership working hand in hand seemed to suggest a servant-leader approach to problem resolution. His underlying suggestion as to where these leaders actually surface was that such people were “prepared to say yes when the opportunity arises.”

Three core words were further developed during the presentation. They included citizenship, leadership, and collaboration. As he noted above, he suggested that leadership consists of taking responsibility for necessary action plans even though there is realization that one might be less worthy to make such decisions. Then there is collaboration, which is “a way of organizing work that acknowledges collective responsibility for a singular condition.”

In the end, Childress’s underlying position was that no one could individually solve the issues that ‘wicked’ problems produce. But he then pointed out, with forceful resolve to the attentive audience that “as one among many . . .” there might just be enough leadership in us, as well as our students, to turn such issues on their heads. In other words, through an interdisciplinary approach, without the constraints of expertise and specialization, educators, together, can help society finds its way clear to more focused and effective resolutions.

A recording of the presentation can be found on the FaCET website at http://www.umkc.edu/provost/facet/.

~ Dan Stroud

General Education: The Next Steps (Continued from Page 1)

- Based on the individual course reports, summary reports for each of the 8 General Education Learning Outcomes will be written by two-person GECC faculty teams. These short reports will synthesize the overall findings and trends for each Gen Ed outcome.

- The University Assessment Committee will review the GECC reports, and I will upload the 8 finalized reports in WEAVE each year.

- The GECC and I will provide feedback to individual course instructors, giving recommendations on how to improve the assessment process for the coming semester or year.

The GECC has approved this process, and I think that this approach to General Education assessment and reporting helps the process to be faculty-driven and incorporates the benefits of peer feedback.

If you have questions about your General Education assessments, please feel free to contact me. In addition, I hope that you will attend the FaCET workshop on General Education assessment that I’ll provide on October 8th from 2:00-3:30pm. Thank you!

~ Nathan Lindsay
Learning to Make a Difference
Outcomes Assessment in the Department of Public Affairs

The Department of Public Affairs in the Henry W. Bloch School of Management is home to the Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree program, the graduate degree program that prepares students for careers of significance and service as leaders and managers in a wide range of public service settings, including in government, nonprofit and community organizations. The MPA program’s mission is to prepare entrepreneurial and innovative public service leaders and executives to effectively and ethically lead and manage dynamic public service organizations in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

During the past two years, our faculty and staff have engaged in a relatively intensive effort to take our process of program assessment and refinement to a new level. This work was spurred by both UMKC’s outcome assessment expectations and our accreditor’s recently-adopted requirements that all MPA programs develop and implement program assessment systems by which to assess and ensure our performance on both accreditor-mandated “universal” competencies and a set of our own program-specific competencies. To address these requirements, we initiated a transition from a course-based outcomes assessment approach (supplemented by an indirect pre-post assessment process) to a program-wide outcomes assessment process. From our perspective, the most important value of this work is not to execute an assessment process, per se, it is to secure the information we need to ensure that we sustain and continuously improve the quality of the education we offer our MPA students.

We have implemented our initiative through a series of work sessions that involve every member of our regular faculty and staff in each step of the process. This has taken a fair amount of time and occasionally caused challenges (including simply finding the time for us to come together at one time), but we have gained several important benefits by employing this level of full engagement. As a small department, all faculty members have had a relatively clear understanding of the role and focus of each of the core courses in our program. Nonetheless, these working sessions helped us collectively gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the core content of each course and where and how this content contributes (or how we expect it to contribute) to the outcomes we seek.

Our discussions, especially the discussions associated with the curriculum mapping, surfaced areas where we have made assumptions that needed to be clarified, affirmed for each of us when and how the content of our core courses aligns and contributes to the progression of learning, and helped us formalize our understanding and agreements about how each course should contribute to the complete program. We identified areas where we felt there could be gaps in the learning process and clarified how we would adapt our design to ensure better continuity. We found that this discussion also made clearer to us how our students could most productively progress through the degree program. This is useful for our own understanding and planning, but it also is very useful to know as we and other advisors explain to students the merit of various course sequence options as they plan their programs of study.

I also believe some of us gained a more complete appreciation for how the content of our individual courses actually does contribute to the aggregate learning of the program (including the degree to which course content could or should overlap).

Of course, as we continue to implement this system, we also continue to gain important insight into the degree to which our expectations for

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Testing Personal Responsibility in Student Disability Services

This past year, one of the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management divisional assessment goals was to assess student’s personal responsibility. This was a perfect opportunity for us to take a look at how well our students were doing in understanding our updated testing policy and taking personal responsibility to comply with its guidelines. This policy was developed to help clarify students’ responsibilities and to clear up potential misunderstandings. It was our hope that the policy would assist us in effectively managing this growing responsibility and help our students to understand our expectations of them.

Our office works with about 300 students with disabilities and their faculty in providing reasonable academic accommodations. The most common accommodations students receive are testing accommodations. When a faculty member is unable to provide the designated testing accommodations because of their schedule our office is there to help. This past year we proctored over 700 accommodated exams, and this number has been growing year after year.

In Fall 2012 we distributed our updated testing policy to all students requiring them to read and sign the policy before they were able to take an exam with our office. We provided additional copies of the policy in our office entrance and provided a brief “quick facts sheet” of key portions of the testing policy. Throughout the Fall and Spring semester we worked with students reminding them of the policy and clarifying any questions they had about the policy.

In Spring 2013 we did an assessment of our intervention with these students. The brief assessment looked at the students’ understanding of the testing policy, their comfort with their level of understanding, and their assessment of the benefit to having the policy in writing. While this was a “student”

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2013-2014 Proposed Assessment Sessions for FaCET

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<tr>
<td>October 2, 2013*</td>
<td>Workshop on Writing Intensive Courses</td>
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<td>October 8, 2013*</td>
<td>Workshop on General Education Assessment</td>
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<td>November 12, 2013*</td>
<td>Workshop on Conducting Focus Groups</td>
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<td>January 29th, 2014*</td>
<td>Workshop on Assessing Service Learning and Other High Impact Practices at UMKC</td>
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<td>March 11, 2014*</td>
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*All Sessions are held in FaCET in the Miller Nichols Library from 2:00PM to 3:30PM
assessment, what we were really assessing was the effectiveness of our implementation of the testing policy. We found that over 85% of the students who responded were able to correctly identify key elements of the policy, expressed comfort that they understood the policy, and that they benefited from having the policy in writing. Anecdotal evidence supported this conclusion in that there were far fewer problems over the 2012-2013 academic year that were the result of students not understanding expectations or other miscommunications.

The assessment process afforded us some additional insights that were unexpected. We found that when we look at students’ personal responsibility, we are also looking at ways that we set and communicate expectations to students. By clarifying our expectations and communicating them in a consistent and even persistent manner, we are much more likely to help students be successful at meeting the goal of personal responsibility. These elements are like two sides of the same coin.

Thanks to the assessment we are able to say that the implementation of this policy was a success.

~ Scott Laurent

Public Affairs (Continued from Page 4)

outcomes and results are realized. We have been gathering the artifacts to generate direct outcomes data for more than a year, so we now are beginning to have the direct data we need to assess the degree to which we are realizing our outcomes and where we may need to change or shore up the content of our curriculum. This will be the focus of this fall’s cycle of assessment work sessions.

Our high-involvement approach to the process of developing and implementing our outcomes assessment initiative has been demanding, and there is no question that it has required a level of time and investment that has competed with other important department program and research imperatives.

But our faculty and staff are committed to delivering a world-class MPA program, and this approach offers a very useful and engaging way for us to more fully and effectively ensure that we are doing so. It provides confidence that we are in fact preparing our students to be the entrepreneurial and innovative public service leaders they aspire to be.

~ David Renz