Moving Our Assessment Culture Forward to the Future: Our Focus Now is Using the Data We Have Collected

Mary E. Yakimowski, Ph.D.
Director of Assessment

Let us have a campaign now on using data for improvement.

In our last Spotlight on Assessment News Brief, we examined pertinent assessment data, that we have at the Neag School of Education. Now, we are focusing on the use of data and how its proper use helps with school (or department, program, class) improvement. This is the real value of data—to be used to identify strengths and areas for improvement. So, we are starting with this News Brief.

We are pleased that leaders from each department and from teacher education have shared their perception of data use in this newsletter. More specifically, each has responded to the following question:

What is the most important role of student assessment; as a leader, and what do assessment results tell you about students in your department?

Also in this edition, we have information regarding CAT that can be used within your class in order to gain data on what students have learned. What is CAT? It refers to Classroom Assessment Techniques that can be used beyond quizzes, tests, and reports.

Also, you will find information about the upcoming colloquia this spring, newly purchased software, and other items of interest. If you have any thoughts regarding future editions, please contact me. Comments are welcomed and appreciated.

Checkbox Initiated at the Neag School of Education

Mary Yakimowski

Checkbox is a web-based survey application software that was recently purchased by the Neag School of Education. The software was purchased with the intention of converting to online paper-based surveys from the past, new surveys, and forms to an online version. Some surveys already placed online are the employer and alumni surveys for the school psychology program, the IB/M and TCPCG student teaching evaluation forms, and all TNE surveys. There are many different features of the new software application. The enhanced confidentiality for participants and their answers may be the most exciting element, which was very important to the Neag School of Education. The application also offers multiple question formats, including rating scales, checkbox questions, and open-ended questions. Additionally, this software features an automatic formulation of reports with graphs. If you wish to know more about Checkbox, please contact Mary Yakimowski.
What Is the most important role of student assessment; as a leader, what do assessment results tell you about students in your department?

Student assessment data derived from our electronic portfolio have driven several programmatic decisions within the Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates. The data have highlighted areas in which our students have been successful.

For example, student assessment data contained within our electronic portfolio environment have allowed us to evaluate teacher candidates’ ability to carry out the entire instructional cycle within their chosen area of teaching concentration. In the electronic portfolio environment we can assess a candidate’s lesson plan, watch them implement it via digital video footage, read their reflections on its implementation, view pupils work that was generated as part of the lesson, and read how the candidate used the pupil work to assess the success of the lesson and to plan for future instruction.

In addition to being able to assess our students’ strengths, we have been able to use the electronic portfolio-based student assessment data to indentify areas that we, as a program, have needed to improve upon.

Data driven examples have included improving our candidates’ ability, via more focused instruction within and across our program course sequence, to reflect on their own work, improve their lesson writing and assessment practices, and to better differentiate instruction for their own students. Moreover, our electronic portfolio-based student assessment data, when coupled with other data sources, have informed decisions related to improving our curricular scope and sequence. Examples have included introducing a six hour module in school-wide positive behavioral support and the revision of the educational technology component of the curriculum.

Assessment data help us make programmatic decisions in a number of ways. We can use data to help us understand strengths and weaknesses within the program from multiple points of view and help us institute program improvements to address weaknesses. Once we have implemented a program improvement, we can look to the data to see if perceptions have changed. In general, data about how our students are doing are data that tell us how we are doing. As teacher certification in the state shifts from a course-based system (i.e., Did we teach it?) to a competency-based system (i.e., Can they do it?), data that documents student proficiencies will become even more important. We will have to develop new ways to document competent performance and preserve documentation as data.

Fun times ahead!
Mary Anne Doyle, Ph.D.
Department of Curriculum & Instruction

The Department of Curriculum & Instruction faculty members who work with our pre-service, teacher education candidates at all levels have established multiple assessments to document the content knowledge as well as the professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions of their students. These assessments are aligned with the program objectives and mission of producing outstanding professionals prepared for the challenges of teaching in K-12 classrooms.

Most recent results reveal that graduating candidates demonstrate broad and rich knowledge of their disciplines (e.g., English, mathematics, social studies). In several content specialty areas, our students have outperformed their state and national peers on the state-required Praxis II assessment (e.g., social studies and elementary education majors). These results confirm that Neag School teacher candidates are well prepared in their respective subject matter areas.

Likewise, data resulting from multiple assessments of pedagogical knowledge and performance confirm that Neag School teacher candidates demonstrate the professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be effective teachers. There are specific areas for continued focus and enhancement that our faculty members are continuing to address; however, the assessment results tell us that new teachers graduating from the Neag School possess both a high degree of content expertise and pedagogical expertise and will potentially impact their student’s learning positively and successfully. They are becoming teachers of K-12 students who will make a difference for children, families, schools, and society.

Carl Maresh, Ph.D.
Department of Kinesology

As is true of all programs within the Neag School of Education, programs in Kinesiology assessment results reveal we are extremely selective and competitive. Our students are highly motivated with specific career aspirations, and they demand the best of what our faculty have to offer. We are also constantly reminded that we do our jobs in an era of transparency and right-of-information. Student assessment requires a standard of evaluation that eliminates bias and puts into place transparent and objective means of defining the effectiveness of how well we prepare our students for the future.
Point of View

Barry Sheckley, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Leadership

In an ideal world, student assessments would give a department head an idea about the effectiveness of a department’s instructional programs. The world is not ideal, however.

Although our department has access to an abundance of assessment information, this information does not always help us assess the effectiveness of our programs. For example, we know that students enter our programs with solid GPAs, maintain high GPAs, and graduate with high GPAs. We know that they score well on professional examinations before they arrive, while they are working with us, and after they leave. We also know that they come from high-status professional positions and continue work in high-status positions when they leave. We have ample budget information about how much each aspect of our program costs. In most cases, this information does not help us answer the question: Do our programs enhance student growth and development effectively?

We are now searching for different forms of assessment data. In a way, our task is similar to that faced by many major league sports teams. Baseball teams, for example, are finding that an assessment such as “number of home runs” is not as good an indicator of a player’s effectiveness as “batting average with runners in scoring position.”

Similarly, in basketball, “points scored” is not as good an indicator of a player’s effectiveness as a “plus/minus” measure – does the team score more or fewer points than the opponent when the player is on the floor?

As sports teams are inundated with statistics about individual players, we educators have an abundance of information about our students. Most of this information does not give us a good understanding of whether our instruction actually enhances students’ learning or accelerates their development. To understand these issues we need a different type of assessment data.

Right now we are working to create these measures. For example, we want to know whether students learn to think more complexly as they move through our programs. To gather such information we will ask students to construct concept maps in each course. If we can track the changes in these maps over a program of study, we may be able to assess whether their thinking has become more complex.

In another attempt to improve our assessments, we are asking them at the entry point of their programs to frame a problem of practice they are trying to resolve. If our instructional programs are effective, we anticipate that students will develop richer frames for these problems. Based on their learning in our courses, we hope that they would develop a deeper understanding of the root causes and systemic features of a problem. If we track changes in how they frame and reframe these problems, we may gain a better insight into the effectiveness of our programs.

So this is the assessment task we face: How to devise measures that assess the effectiveness of our instructional programs. If we can set the best measures in place, we will be positioned to continue the efforts that are proving to be effective and refine those that are in need of improvement.

Spring Spotlight on Assessment Colloquia

*Recent Colloquia/PowerPoint Now on our Website:*
http://www.education.uconn.edu/assessment/0809archive.cfm

*Initial Concepts of the College Readiness Indicator System: Some Preliminary Results and a Vision for the Future of Aggregate Reporting*

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Spotlight on Assessment Colloquia

Value Added Assessment: Promise, Pitfalls, and the Louisiana Assessment of Teacher Preparation

Visible Learning - Visible Teaching - Visible Assessment.

Putting the Value Back in Evaluation: Using Standard Setting to Determine the Success in Health Initiatives

Upcoming Colloquia

Assessment for Learning, As Opposed to Assessment of Learning
Katie Moirs, Ph.D.; CSDE, Bureau of Educator Preparation, Certification, Support and Assessment
Friday, March 20, 2009 (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM)

It’s Not Just What We Know, But How We Know and Why We Believe It?
Arthur Eisenkraft, Ph.D.; Distinguished Professor of Science Education at UMass Boston
Thursday, April 2, 2009 (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM)

Exploring Assessment in New Ways Using Husky CT
Ms. Janet Jordan, UConn’s Instructional Resource Center
Friday, April 24, 2009 (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM)

"Big Rocks" of Effective Instruction: How to Think Like a Great Teacher
Ms. Samantha Kennedy, Achievement First
Friday, May 1, 2009 (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM)

Value Added Assessment: The Connecticut Story for Creating the Scale and its Uses/Misuses to Understand the Fourth Generation of the Connecticut Mastery Test
Hariharan Swaminathan, Ph.D., Department of Educational Psychology,
Thursday, May 7, 2009 (11:30-1:00)

Registration  http://www.education.uconn.edu/assessment/

There is no charge for assessment colloquia; however, participants must preregister. For more information, contact mary.yakimowski@uconn.edu.
Teachers Preparation Programs’ Fall 2008 Common Entry Survey Results

Reyhan Burcu Kaniskan
Measurement & Evaluation Program

Teachers for a New Era — UConn administers the Common Entry Survey at the start of the initial semester of the Teacher Education Program. The present analysis included 91 students. With regard to the racial/ethnic distribution of our sample, 2.20% are African-American, 94.40% are white and 3.30% identified themselves as multiple ethnicities. When asked about their parents’ education, 28.89% of the students stated that their mothers have at least some type of college degree, and this number was 34.83% for their fathers. In addition, a significant majority of the participants had reported that they had graduated from high-achieving suburban public high schools of middle socio-economic status.

The same operational definitions of goals and intentions that were utilized in the previous TNE Entry Surveys were applied in this study. Most of the students in the sample stated they were intending to focus on elementary school education with English, mathematics, and social studies being the more preferred subject specialties planned by the students. With regard to fields outside of education in which students plan to major, mathematics (e.g., statistics), other humanities (e.g., history, philosophy, religious studies), English (e.g., English literature or composition, communications or journalism) and the arts (e.g., fine arts, drama, music, design) were most preferred.

The participants’ self-efficacy of classroom teaching was measured by items scaled from 1 to 5 (1=Not at all confident, 5=Extremely confident). A few examples of some of these items involve asking participants how confident they are at effectively address classroom management issues and to adapting curriculum to accommodate individual differences. The results revealed that IB/M students, on average, are somewhat confident across all the self-efficacy measures with a mean score of 3.26 and a standard deviation 0.9.

Students were asked to rank three statements based on what their most important priority is as a teacher (1= most important priority; 3=least important priority). Motivating their students to be engaged in school was considered to be the most important. Although responses varied, most participants stated that having a positive personal relationship with their students is their most important priority.

Students were also asked to describe their future teaching plans. For the majority of their career, most students reported that they planned to teach in a suburban school (68.9 %) with a mix of both students of color and white students (78.9 %) for the majority of their career. Student responses seemed to follow a similar pattern of what schools they would like to teach in and in which schools they will actually end up teaching.
If we shall take the good we find, asking no questions, we shall have heaping measures.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mary E. Yakimowski, Ph.D.
Director of Assessment

In 2008-2009, the Teachers for a New Era — UConn assessment activities are plentiful.

First, the TNE Assessment Committee was re-named and is now called the TNE Teacher Education Assessment Committee. The renaming came in conjunction with the alignment of TNE with the Neag School's teacher preparation program.

Second, the surveys have continued. In the early fall, all analyses were completed on the 2003-2007 alumni survey and the resulting report was shared with many faculty. This was the first year these results were disaggregated by field (e.g., science) in addition to the programs (IB/M, TCPG). This fall, our 2004-2008 alumni survey was distributed. A report summarizing this year’s results will be available this spring. The TNE Entry Survey for students in the teacher education programs was administered and analyzed in the report, Fall 2008 Teachers for a New Era’s Common Entry Survey Results for the Teacher Education Program. The TNE Exit Survey will be administered and analyzed this spring.

The key project this year, called Educational Expansion, is research on assessment. This series of studies, explores pupil performance from teachers who graduated from the Neag School. The purpose of these studies is designed to provide evidence on the value of teacher preparation in promoting pupil learning and relates to all tenants of the TNE initiative.

The general research question addressed by the Educational Expansions project is important for various constituents including local and state policy makers. We are developing and testing statistical models. We are investigating what significant differences might occur on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) in reading, mathematics, and writing between pupils instructed by Neag-prepared teachers and those by non-Neag graduates. Much time was spent cleaning the data from three years, so that all data from participating districts could be merged. Variables include, for example, the dependent variables from pupil performance at grades 3-8 on the new 4th generation CMT in reading, mathematics, and writing from the Neag graduates and all others teachers. Also included are independent variables collected, such as gender, race/ethnicity, special education, and English language program status. Advice on analysis is being provided by our assessment committee and by a special consultant, Dr. George Noell, who has worked on similar projects in Louisiana.

The fourth major activity is the continuation of the collaboration between TNE and the Neag School of Education on the Spotlight on Assessment initiative. As part of this project, this project, we have our dedicated website (http://www.education.uconn.edu/assessment/), the assessment newsletter (called News Brief), and series of assessment colloquia. Last fall, 65-70 people attended each of our four colloquia. This spring, we are planning to offer nine additional sessions. All News Brief editions and colloquia session information may be found on our website.

For additional information, contact mary.yakimowski@uconn.edu.
Why should I use CATs?

For faculty, more frequent use of CATs can:

• Provide short-term feedback about the day-to-day learning and teaching process at a time when it is still possible to make mid-course corrections.

• Provide useful information about student learning with a much lower investment of time compared to tests, papers, and other traditional means of learning assessment.

• Help to foster good rapport with students and increase the efficacy of teaching and learning.

• Encourage the view that teaching is a formative process that evolves over time with feedback.

For students, more frequent use of CATs can:

• Help them become better monitors of their own learning.

• Help break down feelings of anonymity, especially in larger courses.

• Point out the need to alter study skills.

• Provide concrete evidence that the instructor cares about learning.

Please see this and the next page for some samples.

**What to do with the data:**

**Minute paper**

During the last few minutes of the class period, ask students to answer on a half-sheet of paper: "What is the most important point you learned today?" and "What point remains least clear to you?". The purpose is to elicit data about students' comprehension of a particular class session.

Review responses and note any useful comments. During the next class periods emphasize the issues illuminated by your students' comments.

Prep: Low

In class: Low

Analysis: Low

**Chain Notes**

Students pass around an envelope on which the teacher has written one question about the class. When the envelope reaches a student he/she spends a moment to respond to the question and then places the response in the envelope.

Go through the student responses and determine the best criteria for categorizing the data with the goal of detecting response patterns. Discussing the patterns of responses with students can lead to better teaching and learning.

Prep: Low

In class: Low

Analysis: Low
### Memory matrix
Students fill in cells of a two-dimensional diagram for which instructor has provided labels. For example, in a music course, labels might consist of periods (Baroque, Classical) by countries (Germany, France, Britain); students enter composers in cells to demonstrate their ability to remember and classify key concepts.

**What to do with the data:** Tally the numbers of correct and incorrect responses in each cell. Analyze differences both between and among the cells. Look for patterns among the incorrect responses and decide what might be the cause(s).

**Time required:** Prep: Med
**In class:** Med
**Analysis:** Med

### Directed paraphrasing
Ask students to write a layman’s “translation” of something they have just learned—geared to a specified individual or an audience—to assess their ability to comprehend and transfer concepts.

**What to do with the data:** Categorize student responses according to characteristics you feel are important. In class: Med
**Time required:** In class: Med
**Analysis:** Med

### One-sentence summary
Students summarize knowledge of a topic by constructing a single sentence that answers the questions “Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?” The purpose is to require students to select only the defining features of an idea.

**What to do with the data:** Evaluate the quality of each summary quickly and holistically. Note whether students have identified the essential concepts of the class topic and their interrelationships. Share your observations with your students.

**Time required:** Prep: Low
**In class:** Med
**Analysis:** Med

### Exam Evaluations
Select a type of test that you are likely to give more than once or that has a significant impact on student performance. Create a few questions that evaluate the quality of the test. Add these questions to the exam or administer a separate, follow-up evaluation.

**What to do with the data:** Try to distinguish student comments that address the fairness of your grading from those that address the fairness of the test as an assessment instrument. Respond to the general ideas represented by student comments.

**Time required:** Prep: Low
**In class:** Low
**Analysis:** Med

### Application cards
After teaching about an important theory, principle, or procedure, ask students to write down at least one real-world application for what they have just learned to determine how well they can transfer their learning.

**What to do with the data:** Quickly read once through the applications and categorize them according to their quality. Pick out a broad range of examples and present them to the class.

**Time required:** Prep: Low
**In class:** Low
**Analysis:** Med

### Student-generated test questions
Allow students to write test questions and model answers for specified topics, in a format consistent with course exams. This will give students the opportunity to evaluate the course topics, reflect on what they understand, and what are good test items.

**What to do with the data:** Make a rough tally of the questions your students propose and the topics that they cover. Evaluate the questions and use the good ones as prompts for discussion. You may also want to revise the questions and use them on the upcoming exam.

**Time required:** Prep: Med
**In class:** High
**Analysis:** High
(may be homework)