WCU
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

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Teaching, Learning, & Assessment Center
Connection Newsletter

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Special Edition:

General Education Assessment at WCU

Last summer 27 faculty members participated in a pilot project to assess the general education goals of Diversity and Communication (Written and Oral). If you do not teach a general education course many of us require writing or speaking assignments within our courses/programs so these findings should be of interest and relate to improving the teaching, learning, and assessment process.

Oral Communication

Historically, assessment of oral communication focused on a lower level course (SPK 208). To gain insight into how our students are doing at the end of their academic career seven instructors of 400 level courses from various disciplines participated. Following training and norming sessions forty artifacts (recorded presentations) were randomly assigned and independently evaluated using the AAC&U VALUE rubric for oral communication. Four coders were assigned to each artifact. At the conclusion of the project further revision was made to the dimensions of the rubric. The revised rubric and full summary of results can be found on the general education website.

Written Communication

Eleven writing emphasis instructors of various levels and disciplines submitted student artifacts to be assessed using the AAC&U VALUE rubric for Written Communication. Following training and norming sessions 129 artifacts were independently evaluated. Two coders were assigned to each artifact, one as primary and one as secondary. When two scores for an artifact were more than a point apart, they were scored by the facilitator as a tiebreaker. Similarly to the oral communication group revisions were made to the dimensions of the rubric at the end of the project. The revised rubric and full summary of results can be found on the general education website.

Diversity

Nine instructors of various levels and disciplines of Diverse Communities ("J") courses submitted artifacts. The group chose to use the existing WCU Goal 5 rubric for "J" courses (rather than the VALUE Rubric). Following training and norming sessions, some assignments were determined to be not applicable so the final set of artifacts was 208. Coders were assigned similar to written communication. The revised rubric and full summary of results can be found on the general education website.

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Participant Perceptions about the Pilot Project:
Participants were asked to complete a short survey at the conclusion of this project. The next page contains the partcipants responses using a 5 pt. Likert scale and open ended questions. Twenty-one individuals completed the survey.

Q - I now look at the general education course and goal I teach more critically than prior to my participation in this project.
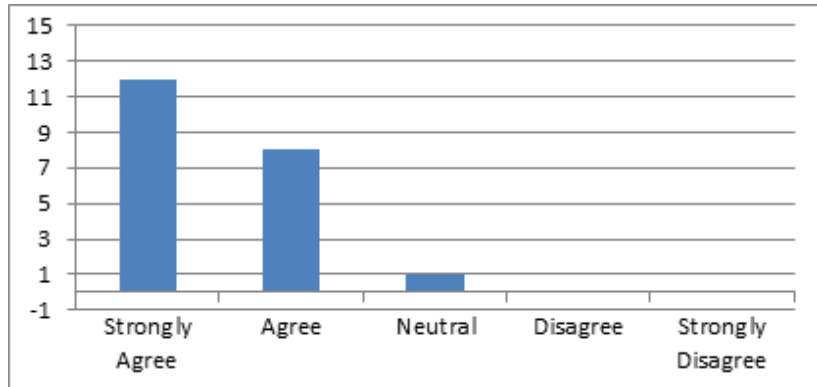
"Provided me concrete examples of what success and failure look like which will enable me to ensure I have class discussions with students to ensure they understand what is expected of them."

"Assignments need to be designed better to align with the respective goals and the rubrics used to assess the goal."

Q - How has this process changed/altered the way you view general education? Will you do anything different in your course?

"Need to be more clear and provide better directions for the students."

"Consider the organization of the assignment. For example I allowed students to choose the flow for a presentation that best suited them but from an audience perspective, this does not work."

"Provide the students with additional support around the goal."

"Being able to be with colleagues from a variety of disciplines and have conversations about how similar goals are presented across the disciplines."

"Helped to clarify the assessment process and offer solutions to common problems by discussions with faculty."

Q - What were the strengths of this project?

"It became very clear what makes a good assignment. Certain assignments do a great job of guiding students to think critically about diversity and structural inequalities while others are too open-ended and vague."

"The bottom up approach of this project."

"Writing emphasis instructors need to have more support and education on the expectations of teaching a "W" course."

"Oral communication assignments should be given in various classes during a program in order for students to be successful in speaking comfortably and appropriately in front of people and this has to be more than just an introductory public speaking course."

Q - What are some "key" points the wider university should know about teaching and assessing the goal you worked on?

"Show students examples/models of good and poor work for them to be successful."

"Instructors of "J" courses should be made clear the expectations of this type of course."

"Distribute the rubrics widely so all faculty who assess this goal in their course so they may use it."

Action Steps:

•Continue with the assessment of oral and written communication using the revised VALUE rubrics during the summer of 2015 to confirm pilot findings from 2014 regarding adoption of VALUE rubric.
•Promote the adoption of the rubrics by faculty across the institution who teach courses centered on the goals of oral and written communication as well as diversity for atleast one assignment.
•Provide professional development for faculty teaching "W" courses.
　　- This was done in August 2014 by offering Pedagogical Practices for Writing Transfer: A Workshop for "W" Faculty. Additionally, the TLA Center and CELT continue to provide W on Wednesday workshops in which English faculty members provide expertise and support around writing pedagogy.
•Provide professional development for faculty teaching "J" courses.
　　- A call for faculty to participate in this opportunity will occur during Spring 2015