Assessment Workshop
Summary Report
26 & 27 October 2007

In the Hewlett and Writing Program sponsored Assessment Workshop, we explored direct and indirect assessment measures of intended student learning outcomes. Our focus in scenarios was on current Writing Program assessment initiatives, including course evaluations (indirect) and pre / post diagnostic exams (direct). Our broader goal is to sustain these and new assessment initiatives, so that we can demonstrate student success rates, calibrate curriculum, and develop academic-support initiatives. All assessment evidence will enable us to better assist individual students and faculty, and to plan more effectively for the entire Writing Program.

During the first day of the workshop, we reviewed assessment vocabulary and discussed its diverse purposes, particularly with its implications for faculty development, student learning and institutional knowledge (list appended below as Appendix A). In small groups, teams of WP faculty discussed the learning outcome of "collaboration and teamwork" and then developed a list related to "Pedagogy" (teaching methods) and "Curriculum" (the content or how the students will engage with the objectives). From this activity, we noticed that all of us had a rich vocabulary for curriculum content, but had difficulty articulating abstract / theoretical connections to the curriculum. We found that by breaking down the outcome – "collaboration" – helped with considering ways to theorize it with phrases like active learning, team building, etc. In essence we looked at the curriculum and considered what it would specifically teach about collaboration. We then concluded that these specific lists help us focus on important goals and realistic ways to achieve them.

In the afternoon session, we discussed rubrics and survey design. Rubrics are another way to articulate goals and standards. Surveys can then indirectly measure the extent to which students understand these objectives. With SNAP technology, we were able to develop several needs-assessment surveys related to a capstone portfolio project in WRI 116.

Day two of the workshop was dedicated to direct assessment, particularly diagnostic writing exams. Our initial discussion focused on the importance of context for any assessment measure to be reliable and valid. Because exams often become over-determined as a measurement of student skill levels, we also explored parallel direct measures that complement our pedagogy. Participants agreed that a focused but robust assessment initiative in portfolio evaluation would be desirable. The key would be to triangulate results from diagnostic, survey and portfolio data to confirm what we hope to demonstrate as a program. Currently, the broad focus is on value-added components of WRI 1 and WRI 10 instruction. Another important consideration will be to balance faculty workload with these initiatives to create focused but accurate assessment without imposing too much on faculty time.

The late morning and afternoon included role playing as table leaders during an in-person reading of diagnostics as well as coaches in an on-line reading context (archived on MWP Discussion Board). We found that our goals as table leaders – authority, compassion, and availability -- were difficult to maintain with the clerical task of redistributing copies and

tracking data. It become evident that for coaches to be involved in answering questions and checking readings, we will need clerical support.

These workshop days concluded with a discussion of how our experiences could translate into some initiatives. The following are some recommendations for future discussions with WP faculty and staff:

- An archive of needs assessment SNAP surveys for faculty use during the semester (to supplement course and / or instructor evaluations)
- A program-wide portfolio assessment initiative beginning Spring 2008. To maintain reasonable workload, the portfolios could be selected based on the random students evaluated for the pre and post-test readings. Also, we would ask that faculty have one ground rule in common with their portfolio assignments – students choose to revise one assignment thoroughly. This common approach would allow for faculty creativity with curriculum while maintaining a common measurement.
- WP faculty as table leaders for diagnostic reading project with some clerical support, perhaps from a student employee. These table leaders, as a committee, would be responsible for selecting readings for exams and choosing the range finders for exam reading sessions.

Appendix A

"Potential Purposes for Assessment"

- Develops pedagogy
- Improves curriculum
- Gives students voice
- Reveals attitudes about learning
- Clarifies objectives and intended outcomes
- Identifies gaps / learning strengths & weakness
- Pace curriculum
- Communication among faculty
- Transparency, accountability
- Impacts teaching, learning, scholarship
- Models academic process