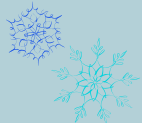


# Assessment Matters

## At Montclair State University

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Issue V, Volume V



### Higher Education: Assessing our Purpose through Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning

By Dr. Coté-Bonanno

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What is Assessment? It is an *ongoing process* of asking and answering questions that seek to align our stated intentions with documentable realities. It is the establishment of clear, measurable expected outcomes and the systematic gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well the outcomes match the expectations. Finally, assessment uses the resulting information to understand and improve student learning and institutional effectiveness outcomes. (MSCHE, 2009; Allen, 2008)

The purpose of assessment is *to improve, inform, and support* programs and services. The assessment of student learning and services is essential to university effectiveness, General Education, and program goals. This assessment is fundamental to achieving the Strategic Plan goals and fulfilling the mission of the University. (Huba and Freed, 2000)

What is our purpose? Montclair State University has a clearly and publicly stated Mission <http://www.montclair.edu/about-montclair/missionstatement/> and Strategic Plan [Connecting to Tomorrow: Strategic Plan - pdf](#). The assessment process has been initiated in every academic and administrative department/unit to assess this Mission and Strategic Plan.

In this context, it is important to differentiate between Assessment and Evaluation:

- **Assessment** focuses on the work to be done at the University: including learning outcomes and the impact on others in the University community. In higher education this centers on courses, programs, procedures and operations.

- **Evaluation** focuses on individual performance in the organization: their contributions, effectiveness, creativity, responsibility, and engagement in the sense of task performance of quality of task completion. (Allen, 2008)

Our programs are designed to develop students' ability to discover, create, evaluate, apply, and share knowledge. Students, in their curricular and co-curricular programs, cultivate abilities to think critically, act ethically, and become informed participants in our democracy. It is the ongoing, systematic assessment of specific student learning goals in General Education, academic and student services programs that inform the University on the status of accomplishing the Mission and Strategic Plan or, in other words, Institutional Effectiveness.

- **Institutional effectiveness** is demonstrated by the *results* of operational processes, policies, and procedures to support the management of the institution. (Allen, 2008; Middaugh, 2010).

- **Student learning** is demonstrated by the *results* of curricular and co-curricular activities designed to provide students with knowledge and competencies. (Allen, 2008; Middaugh, 2010)

What is next? Ongoing data collection, analysis and demonstration of how the University uses data to improve: courses, curriculum, services, and administration, are the current challenge of all academic and student services departments/units. The Provost's Office Workshop series is available to assist faculty and staff in this process. The next newsletter will highlight these support services and accomplishments of faculty and staff in this area.



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## Assessment Faculty Highlights

*Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) provides workshops and events for professional development. On September 20, 2013, the workshop “Becoming an Assessment Facilitator” was held in Philadelphia, PA. It was a one-day program for those who were familiar with assessment and wanted to learn to guide others in developing plans and tools for assessing student learning.*

*Two associates from MSU were invited and sponsored by the Provost’s Office in conjunction with their Departments: Angela Pena, the Administrator in the Computer Science Department and Heather Benton, Assistant Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance and Acting Coordinator of the BFA program at MSU. They shared their observations and learning with us.*

The workshop was a one-day program to aide in developing plans and tools for assessing student learning. The topics covered were: characteristics of a good facilitation,



*Angela Pena  
Department Administrator, Adjunct,  
Computer Science*

strategies for organizing assessment workshop activities for faculty, examples of workshop techniques and strategies for evaluating your insti-

tuition’s assessment needs.

Angela and Heather both felt that the workshop was a benefit. They learned how important assessment is for Montclair University and how to help faculty/colleagues to understand how important it is for them to participate in assessment. Angela felt that the most valuable part of the workshop was how an assessment facilitator should work in their campus to produce and develop an effective assessment. Heather said, “It was extremely beneficial working with faculty from other universities and problem solving together. As someone working on assessment in the arts, I had unique problems and questions and having others feedback from non-arts related fields was useful and refreshing. I also learned that it seems as if our assessment plan in the BFA acting program is functioning well and that if anything, there could be opportunities to collect more data in the future.”

When asked how they will use what was learned from the workshop in their college, Pena replied, “I will apply it with the faculty/staff members in order to collect data, explain the importance of assessment and the different ways how the data can be presented or collected.” Benton also stated, “Interactive exercises and problem solving with a group were the most valuable aspects of the workshop as it forced us to grapple with particular issues and tackle them together. The role playing exercises were particularly useful and spurred much conversation about how to create a culture of as-



*Heather Benton  
Assistant Professor,  
Theatre and Dance*

essment in an environment where instructors may be very resistant.”

Pena said, “I would recommend the workshop to my colleagues. This way they can understand how important assessment is. It will motivate them to participate in assessment.” Benton stated, “Yes, I would recommend this workshop. It is an interactive way of learning about assessment and opening up a discussion among peers about how to discuss, problem solve, inspire and improve assessment within individual departments and areas of study.”

**“The important question is not how assessment is defined, but whether assessment information is used...”**

**--Palomba & Banta, 1999**



## New Jersey Assessment Consortium Overview

*On Friday, October 4, 2013, Burlington County Community College hosted the fall meeting of New Jersey Assessment Consortium, attended by members and guests from colleges and universities across New Jersey, among which were representatives from Montclair State University.*

The Assessment of Non-Academic Areas was the topic focused on for this meeting. The three presenters, Dawn Hatward from Gwynedd Mercy University, Kathryn Strang from Burlington County College, and Sara Weissblum from Middlesex County College all spoke on the differences between assessment of non-academic areas and academic areas.

Dawn Hayward is the Assistant Vice President for Assessment and Compliance. She focused her remarks on assessment in the area of student services. She articulated some of the barriers at the outset of creating assessment of student services.

Kathie Strang is Student Outcomes and Institutional Effectiveness Coordinator. She began with the creation of a student engagement committee for non-academic areas. The committee wrote a goal for student engagement.

**If you are interested in participating in any assessment events (workshops, consortiums, etc.) please email [korolevaai@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:korolevaai@mail.montclair.edu)**



*Burlington County Community College*

Kathie spoke of the need to have staff in the non-academic areas to write their own goals with necessary assistance provided. Post-project surveys, rubrics were developed to capture the data. Summary data results were presented, along with the assessment annual report.

Sara Weissblum is the Assessment and Research Technician, Institutional Research person who reviewed the key features of assessment and assessment database at Middlesex. She reviewed the different types of measures used for academic and non-academic areas focusing on the reality that non-academic areas often have to focus on more indirect measures of assessment. She also spoke about the need for robust action plans that lead to changes.

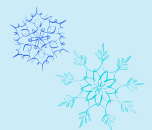
During the Q and A session, challenges were discussed. For instance, the comments were made that although non-academic units collect much information, the challenge is to make it useful. Also discussed was keeping the momentum going over the year with changes in administration, etc. It is an ongoing

thing, and they are meeting with people and making themselves visible as assessment specialists. Also mentioned was the need for Academic, Non-academic and Institutional Effectiveness to all be tied to the Mission Statement. Many colleges and universities in attendance find some of the same challenges facing their institutions.

At our next meeting, to be held in January, weather permitting, the group has requested a panel discussion be held concerning the use of standardized testing, as it is seen by Perkins and comments by Middle States regarding their use and effectiveness.

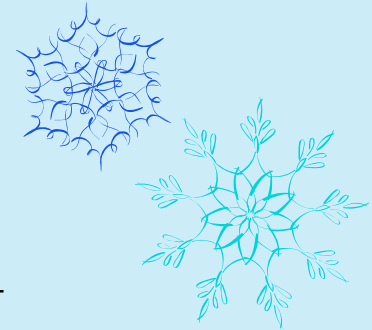
**"The most important thing about assessment is that it promotes dialogue among faculty."**

**--Senter, 1998**



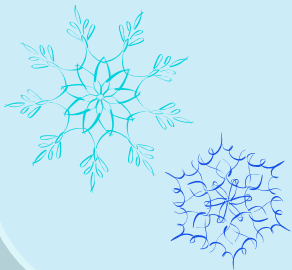
## Coordinator's Corner by Dr. Irina Koroleva

### *Continuing the Loop*



#### Use Assessment Results:

- \* To identify changes to **improve** the program. These changes could be to the content of the curriculum, level of staffing, and facilities services.
- \* Monitor implemented changes to determine whether or not the changes had the desired effect. One way of achieving this is to use the same assessment plan as used in the previous cycle and compare the actual results to the intended results. Any discrepancies should be carefully studied to determine the underlying cause. In other situations, the action might be to continue monitoring the outcome to ensure quality.
- \* Review all of the information obtained from the assessment process and determine how this will affect your next assessment plan. This provides the starting point for continuous improvement of the academic program or administrative unit.



## Save the Date - Friday, April 11, 2014 Assessment Day at Montclair State University

### Next Issue Highlights:

2013 Middle States Annual Conference

### Upcoming Middle States Events:

[http://www.msche.org/events\\_calendar.asp](http://www.msche.org/events_calendar.asp)

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