

## Strengths and Weaknesses of CLA and Alternate Approaches

Attendees discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the CLA assessment in relation to administration, testing, and provided feedback. Attendees also participated in discussions of alternate systems led by Roger Sell (Missouri State) and John Spencer (Missouri-Columbia).

### CLA Administration

- Assessment may over-presume students' computer abilities in some cases; entering and navigating the system can be unforgiving
- Administration process has improved – some positive feedback regarding administration
- Some flexibility in administration has been positive (i.e. the testing window)
- Technical support has been helpful and relatively accessible
- Administering different tests to different students has caused conflict and lack of effort / focus; students should be tested either individually or at least in smaller groups

### CLA Testing

- Assessment format (constructed response) is conceptually desirable
- Faculty who have taken all or part of the test support its structure
- Some attendees stated that CLA does measure critical thinking; others had questions as to what exactly is being measured
- Attendees believe there is a high correlation with ACT score, but questioned what other measures CLA might/should correlate with
- Reduction in assessment length to 90 min. has improved student focus
- Analytic writing exercise seems familiar to students, but performance assessment seems more artificial
- Performance assessment forced integration of different skills
- Unresolved motivational difficulties with non-embedded testing
- 90 min. still makes course embedding difficult
- Assessment may not be as valued as a classroom task even if embedded
- CLA does provide a motivational self-assessment for students(?) that may aid in evaluating scores
- Concerns as to whether embedding would improve motivation – continuing issues with sample structures
- CLA continues to rely on ACT crosswalk; extra effort is required to get COMPASS information from CAE
- CLA does serve as a common test, but impacts institutional flexibility; in contrast, how can a range of disparate instruments demonstrate comparability?

### CLA Feedback

- Continuing lack of specificity in feedback; not enough info on scoring process
- Lack of detail on student performance ranges
- Institution, not student, is unit of analysis
- Clarity of reports / issues with usefulness of reports beyond communities of economists, statisticians, or assessment professionals
- Difficulties in explaining logic of design relative to predictivity?
- Why can't a national list of CLA institutions be released (privacy / confidentiality)?
- CAE only reports results for seniors; juniors who tested were not reflected in institutional reports
- Does CLA really provide any actionable data for institutions / programs? What changes could be made to support improvement as well as accountability?
- What are the benchmarks used to determine whether institutions are at or below expectations?
- What information could CAE provide on individual student performance?
- Some problems with scrambled data in regards to ACT crosswalk information; issues required additional phone contact with CAE to resolve
- Is there any point to CAE's password-protecting spreadsheets?
- Can some student work be returned for institutional analysis?
- Should the Consortium define a smaller representative subgroup for purposes of communicating with CLA?

### Alternative Assessment Approaches – Missouri State University

- Dr. Sell distributed a color flowchart and handouts which described the structure of MSU's assessment programs, and the ways in which data could be collected and distributed. Dr. Sell stated that the material was available online through the M.S.U. website
- Assessment program is mission-based
- Creates information which can be sorted / recombined for different stakeholders
- Includes local and standardized assessments in major and general education
- Provides longitudinal data which can be compared to national benchmarks
- Reflects three qualities of assessment: 1) non-prescriptive, 2) promotes inquiry into learning and sharing about learning (engages faculty), 3) publicly available for critique / review / comment / improvement
- Currently 19 projects involving faculty; projects selected for focus on examining student learning and/or motivation; studies designed to measure improvement
- Promotes on collaboration within and across departments
- Projects include peer review equal to credible peer review in disciplines and for professional advancement
- Approved studies / projects are low cost - \$1,200 per faculty sponsor
- M.S.U. beginning to collaborate with other universities to develop model further
- Academic Development Center provides faculty networking / creates learning community
- Process of organizing / distributing data created by sponsored projects is evolving
- Results should be beginning to be linked to strategy to create ongoing knowledge base
- Reflect belief that institutions can create environments that promote learning, which is where accountability should be focused
- Projects can / should track students' interdisciplinary transfer / use of skills
- Attendees discussed processes through which assessment decisions are / should be made on campus
- Attendees discussed promotion of intrinsic motivation for faculty, students and administrators regarding assessment behavior

### Alternative Assessment Approaches – University of Missouri - Columbia

- Decision-making in assessment lies with faculty – working at program level to create agreement
- Climate in some departments is more conducive to forging agreements on common competencies
- Forging common competencies must be respectful of different demands on faculty time
- Departments have been encouraged to work toward written agreement on learning outcomes
- Faculty have developed core learning outcomes related to general education – discipline non-specific, performance-focused
- General education too often viewed as fragmented / disconnected from major study
- Core objectives used as springboard to move to departmental agreement – here, content becomes incorporated along with performance
- Assessment is at the end of the chain rather than the beginning
- Competency-based products / performances can then be developed in formative and summative / capstone environments
- Accumulation of competency-based assessments allows accountability to become an administrative requirement, not something that should fall on individual faculty
- Good-faith work by faculty on competencies / assessments will naturally allow administration to promote accountability
- Use of rubrics promotes transparency / accountability
- Assessment should focus on tracking gains / learning strategies within the major, as well as correlations to departmental learning objectives
- assessment development must balance use of extrinsic motivation
- How is perception of relevance connected to motivation / performance on student assessments?
- How is quality of feedback connected to motivation / performance?
- What strategies / motivations may be employed to get faculty together, focused on sharing / communication?
  - Employ financial motivations

- Assert the inevitability of assessment
- Enhance professional rewards / evaluation criteria (especially for general education criteria)
- Re-evaluate issues / actions which do and don't require coordination
- Replicate writing-across-curriculum as a model for other disciplines to de-compartmentalize
- Assign ownership to cross-disciplinary coordination on campus
- Define responsibility for objectives / competencies
- Periodically discuss weaknesses in assessment processes
- Assessment / competency development processes must respect natural inclination of students and faculty to ration their time and effort as resources
- Assessments should have inherent extrinsic stakes / consequences
- Reporting requirements (i.e. CBHE) do improve value / importance of feedback
- Students should see feedback as relevant / informational
- Institutions should be aware of connection between usable public assessment data and broader fiscal environment
- Assessments should focus on performance / skills as opposed to objective testing
- Assessments should focus on skills students need to adapt in changing economy
- Variance in student motivation on assessments is a major issue in comparability of data