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JONESBORO CAMPUS

FALL 2009

Voluntary System of Accountability & the College Portrait



Arkansas State University-Jonesboro is participating in the **Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)**. The **VSA** supplies information to the public about the undergraduate student experience through a web reporting template known as the **College Portrait**.

The **VSA** is a voluntary initiative for 4-year public colleges and universities and was created to improve public understanding of how colleges and universities operate. The **VSA** is designed to provide greater accountability through accessible, transparent, and comparable information. The **VSA** and **College Portrait** were developed by two nonprofit organizations—the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) and the National Association of *State Universities and Land-grant Colleges (NASULGC)*.

The **College Portrait** web site provides institutional information including enrollment, degrees conferred, retention and graduation rates, cost of attendance, student engagement with the learning process, and

core educational outcomes. The information is intended to be a source of reliable data for students, families, policy-makers, campus faculty and staff, the public, and other higher education stakeholders.

The **College Portrait** provides a snapshot of student experiences and activities and their perceptions of a particular college or university by reporting the results from one of four student engagement surveys, which include the **College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSEQ)**, the **College Senior Survey (CSS)**, the **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)**, or the **University of California Undergraduate Survey (UCUES)**. The information collected from academic research using these student engagement surveys has shown to be correlated with greater student learning and development—including group learning, experiences with diverse groups of people and ideas, student satisfaction, and student interaction with faculty and staff. ASUJ will administer the **NSSE** survey in spring 2010.

Measuring student learning outcomes is an important component of the **Voluntary System of Accountability**. Participating institutions are allowed to choose the method of testing to which best suits the needs of their institution. Currently, there are three testing instruments approved for measuring student learning outcomes within the **VSA** guidelines. The testing instruments are as follows: **Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP)**, **Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)**, or **Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)**. ASUJ will administer the **MAPP** test to approximately 400 freshmen and seniors during the fall and spring 2009-2010 semesters.

For more information on the **Voluntary System of Accountability** and the **College Portrait**, go to their respective websites at these links.

VSA Link:

www.voluntarysystem.org

College Portrait Link:

www.collegeportraits.org

Rubrics

What is a rubric?

"A rubric is a scoring tool that describes the criteria being used to score or grade an assignment. Rubrics can be used for grading a large variety of assignments and tasks like research papers, book critiques, discussion participation, laboratory reports, portfolios, group work, and oral presentations." (*Suskie, 2004, Assessing Student Learning*)

"Rubrics are comprised of the following four basic parts: (1) a task description of the assignment, (2) a scale indicating levels of achievement, possibly in the form of grades, (3) the di-

mensions of the assignment (a breakdown of the skills/knowledge involved in the assignment), and (4) descriptions of what constitutes each level of performance." (*Stevens and Levi, 2005, Introduction to Rubrics*)

Rubrics can be used as a teaching tool. They can help students understand what they are or are not learning, and demonstrate what they know and can do. When students begin to understand what they are not learning, they can take more responsibility for their learning. The use of rubrics can improve communi-

cation between students and faculty, and can allow for students to evaluate themselves and their peers.

Rubrics are increasingly being used as assessment tools across K-12 and higher education, and in corporate and government settings. You can begin creating a rubric by looking for models that you can adapt to meet your needs--there is a wealth of examples that can be found on the internet.

When using rubrics developed by others, please obtain permission from the creator.

HLC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning

The Higher Learning Commission Academy for Assessment of Student Learning

<http://www.ncahlc.org/>

"The Academy for Assessment of Student Learning offers the Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) member institutions a four year sequence of events and interactions that are focused on student learning, advancing efforts to assess and improve student learning, and designed to build institution-wide commitment to the assessment of student learning. Participation in the Academy can produce evidence for Criteria and Core Components in upcoming accreditation evaluations and serve in place of mandated progress reports, monitoring reports and focused visits on assessment of student learning."

ASUJ joined the Higher Learning Commission for the Assessment of Student Learning in 2006-2007. The 2009-2010 academic year is ASUJ's fourth year of participation that will conclude Spring 2010 with a project presentation at the Academy Results Forum at the Higher Learning Commission in Chicago, Illinois.

ASUJ's HLC Academy project has been to assess student attainment of two general education goals—communicating effectively and thinking critically. To assist with this assessment, writing and critical thinking rubrics were created. Individuals involved in the project development include Andrew Sustich, John Pratte, Melodie Philhours, Deborah Traylor, Gretchen Hill, Lynita Cooksey, Barbara Doyle,

and David Harding. The project description, rubric rater results, and copies of the rubrics can be viewed or downloaded at this link.

http://www2.astate.edu/a/irp/assessment/irp_assessment_initiatives.dot

Faculty, graduate assistants, and others are encouraged to use the rubrics in their courses and programs. If you have "lessons learned" from the use of these rubrics and would like to share this information, contact Dr. Kathryn Jones, Director of the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, & Assessment by January 15th, 2010. For further information, you can call extension 3027 or send an email to kjones@astate.edu.

VALUE Project: Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education

As part of the AACU's **Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP)** initiative, the **Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE)** project seeks to contribute to the national dialogue on assessment of college student learning. The VALUE project is based on the shared understanding of faculty and academic professionals on college campuses from across the country.

VALUE assumes the following:

"To achieve a high-quality education for all students, valid assessment data are needed to guide planning, teaching, and improvement; colleges and universities seek to foster and assess numerous essential learning outcomes beyond standardized tests; learning develops over time and should become more complex as students move through their curricular and co-curricular educational pathways toward a degree; good practice in assessment requires multiple assessments, over time; and well-planned electronic portfolios provide

opportunities to collect data from multiple assessments across a broad range of learning outcomes while guiding student learning."

Metarubrics

As part of the VALUE project, AACU staff, in conjunction with teams of faculty and other academic professionals, gathered, analyzed, synthesized, and drafted rubrics for 15 of the AACU Essential Learning Outcomes in order to create metarubrics. Each metarubric contains the criteria most often found in many college rubrics and represents a summary of criteria widely considered critical to judging the quality of student work in that outcome area. The 15 metarubric learning outcomes include:

Intellectual and Practical Skills

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Written communication
- Oral communication
- Reading
- Quantitative literacy

- Information literacy
- Teamwork
- Problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibility

- Civic knowledge and engagement – local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Integrative Learning

- Integrative learning

For more information about the VALUE project, you can visit these websites.

VALUE Project Link:

<http://aacu-secure.nisgroup.com/value/metarubrics.cfm>

AACU Rubrics Link:

<http://www2.astate.edu/dotAsset/184776.pdf>

TracDat™



TracDat is an assessment management tool designed to meet the assessment, accreditation, and planning needs of an institution. The software allows for institution-wide development of assessment and strategic plans, curriculum mapping, and aids in providing uniform reporting across units.

TracDat is a process application that can be utilized to ease the burden of gathering evidence that demonstrates the continuous improvement of student

learning, teaching strategies, and changes in curriculum, programs, and services throughout academic and non-academic areas of higher education institutions.

Dr. Dan Howard, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, approved the purchase of TracDat software in August 2009. The software will be used to assist in the institutional-wide assessment process on the Jonesboro campus, as Arkansas State University prepares for

the next Higher Learning Commission accreditation visit in fall 2012.

The TracDat software configuration and implementation process will begin in November 2009. The software should be available for use to deans, chairs, directors, faculty, and others in spring 2010.

You can find more information about TracDat at the following web address:

http://www.nuventive.com/products_tracdat.html



The Scholar is located on the exterior of Wilson Hall.

Arkansas State University educates leaders, enhances intellectual growth and enriches lives.

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“Closing the Loop”

The phrase “**closing the loop**” refers to the idea that the assessment process is a continuous cycle of activities that are connected with the purpose of improving student learning.

Ask the following questions:

- What do you expect your students to know at the beginning of the semester?
- What do you expect your students to have learned by the end of the semester?
- Did the students meet your expectations?
- What can be done to change the course or program so that students can meet or exceed your expectations next semester?

Measuring student learning

outcomes and collecting and analyzing data is part of the assessment process, but the cycle isn’t complete until the data is used to make decisions regarding course and program modifications that can enhance student learning.

The continuous cycle of assessment of student learning involves faculty who facilitate learning by providing a variety of learning experiences to fulfill goals and learning-outcomes in the various disciplines. Faculty, departments, and the university then assess student learning to determine if students are developing the appropriate skills, abilities, and knowledge. Analyzing and reflecting on the results provides

the university with the information to determine our success or effectiveness as an institution. From this reflection, faculty can draw conclusions about what is needed to improve student learning. The assessment cycle also involves making adjustments to teaching strategies, curriculum, programs, and student services. All of this takes place because improving student learning is our primary purpose.

By participating in a continuous assessment cycle of facilitating learning, assessing learning, reflecting on learning, and improving learning, we are “closing the loop.”

