

TCNJ Assessment Update



Office of Institutional Research & Assessment
Center for Institutional Effectiveness

February 2008 Volume 1, Issue 2

Paula Maas, Ph.D.
Acting Executive Director
CIE
Green Hall 106
609-771-2143
maas@tcnj.edu

Jason Schweitzer
Research Analyst
OIRA
Green Hall 106
609-771-3031
ir@tcnj.edu

Christine Leichliter
Assessment Fellow
OIRA
Green Hall 106
609-771-2389
assess@tcnj.edu

Debra Frank, Ph.D.
Assessment Fellow
OIRA
Forcina Hall 253
609-771-2522
frank@tcnj.edu

Web
www.tcnj.edu/~assess
www.tcnj.edu/~ir

Fax
(609) 637-5136



The Center for Institutional Effectiveness

The *Center for Institutional Effectiveness* (CIE) was initiated in Fall 2007 to enhance college operations and outcomes through inquiry and continuous improvement. It is a campus community effort, under the auspices of both Academic Affairs and IT and Enrollment Support Services.

CIE will partner with faculty and staff from all units at the College and assist with the design, performance, and communication of institutional data analysis.

Paula Maas, as the Acting Executive Director of CIE, will be identifying and coordinating partnerships aligned with the five strategic initiatives articulated in Dr. Gitenstein's October 31st speech.

We are fortunate to have two half-time Assessment Fellows in the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) working with us this Spring:

- Debra Frank, School of Education, will be

coordinating preparation for Program Review and the *One Question* initiative.

- Christine Leichliter, School of the Arts and Communication, will be supporting Liberal Learning and other institutional student learning outcome assessment efforts.

Jason Schweitzer, Research Analyst, will continue to coordinate our required external reporting efforts and provide institutional data to support CIE partnerships.

Program Review

In the spirit of embracing continuous planning - marked by periodic evaluation, assessment and review - academic departments and programs at TCNJ engage in periodic, faculty-led reviews to enhance the quality of their programs. The procedures for these program reviews are described in the document entitled *Academic Department and Program Strategic Plan and Periodic*

Review which can be found at:
www.tcnj.edu/~steering/200506/CPPIFinalRecDeptPlanninq.doc.

Several programs are scheduled for review in the 2008-2009 academic year: Art, Computer Science, Education, Interactive Multimedia, Nursing, Political Science, Technology Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies. Since this

is a relatively new effort, Dr. Debra Frank, Assessment Fellow, will be providing support to programs as needed in planning for program review. She will be contacting the Deans, Program Chairs and Assessment Liaisons in the next few weeks to begin this process.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact Dr. Frank at frank@tcnj.edu or x2522.

"But it's not just learning things that's important. It's learning what to do with what you learn and learning why you learn things at all that matters." – Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

Deadlines & Dates

CLA Testing	2/1 – 4/16
IT & Assessment Workshop	5/14
07/08 <i>One Question Answer</i> Due	5/28

This spring we will continue to participate in college-wide liberal learning assessment by implementing the second phase of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).

We will invite 100 seniors to participate this spring, beginning February 1 and continuing through April 16. Participating students will complete either the 90 minute *Performance Task* – which requires students to answer several open-ended

questions about a hypothetical yet realistic situation using an accompanying document library – or the 75 minute *Make an Argument and Critique an Argument Task*.

Each student will receive an individual score and a comparison to others at TCNJ and nationally. TCNJ will receive an institutional report placing our students' scores in a national context. Using various statistical measures, an estimate of

the "value added" by a TCNJ education is also derived.

The CLA was cited in the Spellings Commission Report, among others, and provides empirical evidence of the critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem-solving, and written communication skills honed through the college experience.

For more information visit the Council for Aid to Education, www.cae.org.

Check the website for more information about these Spring '08 events

- *Academic Advising Assessment Results*
- *Revised Final Exam Policy Implementation Evaluation*
- *Instructional Technology & Assessment Faculty Workshop*



Focus Groups and FSP

Glenn A. Steinberg, Coordinator of the First Seminar Program

As coordinator of the First Seminar Program, I want to know as much as possible about how the First Seminar courses (FSPs) are going, both in order to know whether the classes are accomplishing what we set out for them to accomplish and in order to know where improvements may be needed. So, in consultation with the First Seminar Coordinating Committee (FSCC), I have put in place an assessment plan that includes collecting and scoring writing from the FSPs and surveying students at the end of the semester about their experience in the class. But given the primary mission of the course (to introduce students to – and enhance – the intellectual culture on campus), I thought that knowing how students perceive their FSP a year or more after they have taken it might be a particularly interesting way to gauge whether the course is succeeding in its mission.

As a result, last semester, Paula Maas and I arranged with three professors (from

Spanish, Engineering, and Business) to visit their mid-level writing-intensive courses and run a focus group with their students about the students' FSP experience and its effect on their education to date. We chose two specific learning goals from the FSPs as the basis of our focus group questions, concentrating on how well the FSPs fostered intellectual curiosity and how well they introduced students to college-level expectations and assignments.

The results of the focus groups were certainly provocative. The good news is that all the students indicated that they engage in activities that suggest intellectual curiosity (e.g., reading newspapers regularly, searching the Internet just to learn about a topic, reading books for pleasure), and many students reported that they engage in such activities in more depth or detail now than they did in high school (although in most cases they reported that they had more time for such activities in high school). But the bad news is

that most of the students did not seem to understand the role that their FSP is meant to play in their education at TCNJ. Students complained that their FSP had nothing to do with their major or that it wasn't a "real course" with "factual" content. At the same time, they commented that their FSP included more discussion, required more independent learning, and allowed for more depth and "creative thinking" than their high school classes. So, the students seem to be having the right experience (an introduction to the intellectual process and to critical thinking through exploration of a focused topic), but they seem not to understand the purpose or usefulness of that experience. As a result of these findings, plans are already afoot to educate our first-year students better about the purpose of their FSP and about the nature of the intellectual enterprise.

