Welcome and Thanks
Jennifer Myers
Work Study, Office of Assessment

Hello, Messiah College community! What a whirlwind this past semester has been. We are proud of our educators’ diligent work to quickly adapt courses and their planning to prepare for whatever fall might bring.

The discussion topic of this issue is assessment of online learning. It is critical that we continue assessing students’ skills and knowledge, in spite of having to leave our traditional classrooms and our comfort zones. Our office desires to equip our faculty to evaluate student learning in online coursework.

This issue’s feature article provides some tips and tricks for effective assessment of virtual learning. We included some information directly from campus resources, research from nationally-recognized assessment organizations and advice from some of our own faculty who regularly teach and assess online courses.

If you have questions or want more information, please feel free to contact our office. We also have an updated list of assessment resources on our website that you can access at any point.

I would like to extend a special thank-you to Dr. Leah Clarke and Dr. Kim Fenstermacher for their time and willingness to share parts of their experiences with virtual assessment with the rest of our campus community. Thank you also to Rocky Allinger and Cindi Kerns for sharing some of their knowledge and campus resources for online assessment. Collaboration is certainly one of our greatest advantages in the face of challenging circumstances.

From all of us in the Office of Assessment, thank you for your continued dedication to our students during these tumultuous times. We hope that you and your family continue to stay healthy and safe in the coming months, and we look forward to seeing you back on campus soon. Happy reading!

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We want your feedback!

Is there an area of assessment that you think you could help others in, or a problem you need help with? We created this newsletter for you, so we’d love to include it in the next issue.

Please send your requests to wsassess@messiah.edu
Assessing Online
Best Practices for Virtual Learning Assessment
Jennifer Myers
Work Study, Office of Assessment

Higher education looks very different now than it did just a few months ago. Classes are completely conducted behind a screen, campuses across the country are bare, and technology has become necessary for learning instead of a supplement.

Yet, in the midst of this chaos, it is as crucial as ever that we continue assessing student learning.

What’s the Difference?
Because classes looked different this past semester, assessment inevitably looks different as well.

Professor Kim Fenstermacher notes that “the way information is communicated and organized in an online class” is completely different than face-to-face. “Before we can assess student learning,” she says, “the information has to be delivered to students in a clear and organized manner so they understand the requirements of the assignment.

It also means requires assessment in variety of ways. According to Cindi Kerns and Rocky Allinger, faculty should conduct online assessments frequently, take time to add personal feedback and make assessments relevant to the world offline.

We must also consider the fact that we are not just teaching online, but teaching in the midst of a global state of crisis.

This complicates learning and assessment even more, as the U.S. Department of Education has permitted flexibility in accreditation, many schools (including Messiah) have changed grading policies, and many students and staff may not feel well equipped to learn and teach virtually.

Tips from the Pros
The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) offers three main recommendations for online assessment during this pandemic. The first is to understand that the complexity of our current educational circumstances requires some additional creativity.

Dr. Fenstermacher advises faculty to consider “the level of student stress, particularly when the ‘shift’ to online learning is not their preferred way of learning” and “to be willing to be creative” in how faculty deliver and assess course content.

Second, we should emphasize compassion over compliance. While maintaining policies and accreditation standards is important, we must first and foremost extend graceful hearts and helping hands (from a safe distance) to make assessment meaningful.

Dr. Clarke shares, “Give yourself grace when things don’t go right. Creating a sense of collaboration with students and colleagues will help everyone feel that they are in these efforts together.”

This can take the form of student surveys, personal checking in with colleagues, and understanding that productivity may look different for you right now.

Lastly, learning is more important than data collection. While data is an essential part of the assessment process, it is educators’ discussions and actions to ensure student success that make assessment efforts worthwhile.

Dr. Fenstermacher points out that “the assessment data has to be evaluated and used for improvement. It can’t just be something we collect; it has to be meaningful.”

Dr. Clarke also offers some great wisdom on this subject: “As we often say in counseling you have to trust the process…. Not clinging too tightly to our plans and including as many voices as possible in the process can get us meaningful results we can use.”

How Can We Improve?
Moving forward, Dr. Clarke hopes “our perception of what learning can look like is expanded and I hope that we feel excited about engaging our students in different ways.” After all, “Online learning asks students to be more independent learners which is a good set-up for becoming a lifelong learner.”

In our context, learning has been pushed to new bounds that many of us never expected. It has been a humbling reminder that every day is a chance to learn something new.

Dr. Fenstermacher adds, “I hope that the campus community has learned that students can learn quite well in an online environment when the courses are well designed and assessment is thoughtfully considered... I also hope that faculty will realize how incredibly resilient we can be in the face of challenging times.”

As we enter into summer and a new academic year, may we hold our heads high knowing that our campus persevered, learned something new about the growing platform of virtual learning and serves a God who uses all circumstances for our good (Romans 8:28).

As always, please feel free to reach out to our office if there is anything we can assist you with regarding your assessment tasks. Kate and Susan would be happy to meet with you. We also encourage you to visit the resources below for additional information and strategies for assessing online learning.

Sources and Resources
"Accreditation and Assessment Resources When the Unexpected Happens" (Weave)
The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning (Educause)
Messiah Assessment Resources
NILOA Webinar
"7 Assessment Challenges of Moving Your Course Online (and a Dozen+ Solutions)" (Faculty Focus)
Welcome and Thanks
Molly Sherman
Work Study, Office of Assessment

Hello again, Messiah College Community! As the semester wraps up, we wanted to update you with one final issue of our newsletter for this academic year.

The topic of this issue is rubrics. This is an aspect of assessment that, when used effectively, can significantly benefit our teachers and students.

We hope that the feature article in this issue will help our faculty understand why creating and using rubrics thoughtfully is so important, and how using Canvas for our rubrics can help us get the most out of our rubrics and benefit assessment, as well.

We are also accompanying this issue of the newsletter with a Rubric Resource Handout on our website, if you want to learn more about rubrics!

Lastly, I’d like to give a few shout outs to some members of our community who have helped make this newsletter a reality.

Sustaining the newsletter and keeping it relevant to you has required a lot of thought, planning, and work, and not just on our part in the Office of Assessment. Additionally, because I am a graduating senior, this is the last issue of the newsletter that I will be working on! So, I wanted to thank each individual who took the time out of their schedule to interview for our stories.

To Dr. Andy Babyak, Dr. Kris Cravey, Dr. Raean Hamon, Professor Krista Imbesi, Cindi Kerns, Dr. Rob Pepper, and Ashley Sider, thank you for allowing us to tell your stories and share your wisdom with the rest of the Messiah community. This newsletter couldn’t happen without you!

We Take Suggestions

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The Rubric Rundown

The Benefits of Rubrics and The Best Tool for Using Them

Molly Sherman
Office of Assessment Work Study

Have you ever lost sleep due to the piles of student work you needed to grade? Gotten carpal tunnel from writing comments on student work?

These area few signs that you could benefit from using rubrics.

Putting work into rubrics on the front end can save you a significant amount of time and effort later in the grading process.

Professor Krista Imbesi has found this to be true. Professor Imbesi says using rubrics makes grading faster, because different performance levels for an assignment have already been identified; all she has to do is assign the appropriate level to each student.

Rubrics also help educators to think more deeply about what they are looking for in student work.

Dr. Andy Babyak says that, “teachers are able to grade in a more meaningful manner as they use the rubric.”

Professor Imbesi agrees. She has discovered that rubrics help her grade more thoughtfully, “because I’m not just trying to ambiguously give comments and then come up with a number.”

When you’ve given careful thought to the different aspects of student work that you will be grading, your grading will be more intentional.

And the benefits aren’t limited to you, either!

Dr. Babyak says that when you use rubrics, it helps students succeed.

“Students have a clear picture of what is going to be graded before they submit, and they are able to have a better understanding of what they need to improve after they receive the instructor’s feedback via a rubric,” Dr. Babyak says.

When assignment directions and our criticisms are clear, students perform better on assignments, and will be better equipped to do well on the next one. Plus, as a benefit for you, making the assignment clear results in less confusion, and with more transparency in the grading process, you will have fewer grade contestations from students.

But these benefits won’t come to you overnight.

Professor Imbesi says that “It has been a process to come up with rubrics that work well.” So, you do have to put a significant amount of work into your rubrics before you use them, and continually revise them.

Fortunately, a great tool for building rubrics that will help make using them easier and more effective is right at your fingertips—and it’s called Canvas!

Professor Imbesi says that grading is faster when using the Canvas rubric feature because, “I can just go to my rubric and click, click, click,” to assign grades.

The rubric feature is also very flexible.

Instructional Designer Cindi Kerns says, “If you want a holistic rubric, canvas can do that. If you want to remove the points from the rubric, you can do that. You can even have multiple rating systems.”

Professor Imbesi has experienced the flexibility of Canvas rubrics firsthand. She uses a holistic rubric for most of her assignments, and she says the rubric feature accommodates that easily.

The rubric feature also allows you to build your own library of rubrics, so you don’t have to re-create rubrics each time you teach a course. You can simply edit them as needed.

This capability can also help us assess student learning more effectively. Canvas can share these library rubrics with instructors teaching the same course, which helps with consistency, Kerns says.

For program level assessment, you can set AEFIS to pull data from individual criterion lines on Canvas rubrics. That way, you collect more accurate and specific data for each of your learning objectives.

This might sound like a lot, but you are not in it alone! Cindi Kerns encourages faculty to contact her or visit the ITS blog for more information on creating rubrics on Canvas. And if you need any help with assessment-related tasks, Kate and Susan are always happy to meet with you.
Greetings, campus community, and welcome to the newsletter.

Our goal for this publication is to resource educators and administrators in their assessment processes and performance at Messiah. We hope you gain new ideas about how to assess student learning in your department or office, and we invite you to celebrate your colleagues' success stories. It takes the collective efforts of the excellent educators and staff across campus to ensure our students are achieving Messiah's educational outcomes. Thank you for the role you play in serving our students and the mission of this institution.

Effective learning assessment requires collaboration—so in our first edition, we focus on ways to engage various stakeholders in your department’s assessment efforts.

By building bridges between individual offices’/departments’ assessment efforts and internal stakeholders like department faculty, students, staff, general education, student affairs, and campus leaders, we learn to see the interconnectedness of our efforts and we can discover new ways to improve the coherence of students’ educational experiences. By building bridges with external stakeholders such as alumni, employers, and members of institutional oversight groups, we can gain new perspectives on our educational objectives and programming in relation to the rapidly changing world around us.

If you’re thinking “Sure, I can see the benefits, but...how can I do any of this and still do the rest of my job?” then this edition is for you.

We need to make assessment meaningful, but we need to make it manageable as well. Thanks for reading!

We Take Suggestions

Is there an area you think you could help others in, or a problem you need help with? This newsletter is made with you in mind, so we’d love to include it in the next issue.

Send your requests to Molly at wsassess@messiah.edu
As you all know, our goal for stakeholder engagement is to involve all relevant stakeholders in the creation, revision, implementation, analysis, and improvement of our assessment plans. That can sound like an overwhelming task. But many of our departments have found success in this area and felt the benefits of effective stakeholder engagement.

Here are a few examples of superb stakeholder engagement from some of our departments and programs. We hope that you can learn from them and celebrate their successes with them!

**Faculty**

Our hope when it comes to this group of stakeholders is that all departments would involve all faculty, including some adjuncts, in assessment efforts and discussions. A significant benefit here is that we gain a greater understanding of collective efforts and how their pieces contribute to shared outcomes.

Dr. Rob Pepper, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, realizes the importance of engaging adjunct faculty in assessment discussions. An adjunct-taught course may even have a “course shepherd” who is responsible for that course.

“The course shepherd works with that adjunct to make sure the course is run correctly,” Dr. Pepper says.

This ensures that assessment results are consistent, and that “students are ready for the next class.”

**Prospectives**

Our best method for engaging prospective students is sharing objectives and assessment outcomes on department websites and at open house presentations. This will help improve transparency and spread a greater understanding of the outcomes and effectiveness of our programs, which will catch the attention of prospective students.

“And their parents,” adds Dr. Raeann Hamon, Chair of the HDFS Department.

“Individuals aren’t making decisions in vacuums. Their families are part of these decisions, and so we need to be talking to parents as well.” Dr. Hamon features alumni on the department website and pamphlets, so prospective students and their parents can see the success coming from the HDFS department.

**Students**

Many of you interact with this group of stakeholders on a daily basis! We definitely recommend that you talk to current students for feedback. Consider asking for a select student or group of students to give feedback on aspects such as program learning objectives, course offerings, and sequencing, so as to encourage more systematic engagement.

“Our program has evolved based on student feedback,” says Dr. Kris Cravey, Director of Graduate Programs in Business and Leadership.

Dr. Cravey says he does “a lot of independent inquiries, where I’ll schedule some time to meet with a student and just talk about the program.” He also selects one current student to serve on the board of advisors, since students have a vested interest in the program’s success.

**Alumni**

We also aim to keep alumni involved after they have left Messiah.

Dr. Hamon’s department sends out an alumni survey. Both she and Dr. Kravey have also included alumni in their advisory boards.

But how do you find alumni to contribute to your assessment efforts? Ashley Sider, Assistant Director of Alumni & Parent Relations, says that there are always alumni who are interested in serving their alma mater.

“We have 28,000 living alumni. There’s always a pool we can draw from,” Sider says. The issue is plugging them into departments in a way that is actually useful.

Sider encourages departments to communicate their needs to the Office of Alumni & Parent Relations.

That way, their office can let alumni know of any available opportunities and connect alumni to departments in helpful ways.

**The Community**

Individuals outside of Messiah College can also help inform our programs. Involving professionals in the assessment process can help maintain their positive images of Messiah and keep our programs relevant.

Dr. Cravey’s program includes industry professionals in their board of advisors.

This helps the program "ensure we are staying relevant and adequately preparing students," says Dr. Cravey.

The board asks those professionals about the big challenges in their field to make sure the program prepares students and appropriately addresses the needs of the community.

Want to learn more?

Visit the Assessment of Student Learning page at Messiah.edu for resources to help you with engaging stakeholders and other assessment tasks.