Teagle Tri-College Assessment Forum: *Summary of Round 1*

**Round 1 timeline:**

![Timeline Diagram]

**Round 1 project abstracts:**

* [HUMANITIES ]

**English / Bryn Mawr.** Given the departmental goal of developing majors' ability to "write persuasively and thoughtfully about a topic of her own choosing", the project assessed the value added by the capstone sequence, English 398-399. The project involved developing a rubric that was then used by two independent evaluators in assessing a junior-level piece of writing (pretest) and the senior thesis itself (posttest). The department gauged the extent to which student scores improved from pretest to posttest.

**English / Swarthmore.** The project focused on improvement in writing about literature during first-year introductory seminars in literature, using a pre-test and post-test design with embedded course assignments. Papers written early and late in the semester in 12 introductory course sections were scored using a rubric and the results showed that student writing improved from pretest to posttest, with different patterns of strength emerging across the rubric dimensions. Student self-ratings collected separately, also reflected improvement, but not always in a way that closely correlated with instructor ratings on the rubric.
History / Haverford. Student mastery of disciplinary research skills is among the History Department student learning goals, and this project evaluated how this learning goal is integrated across the curriculum and in the two-semester Senior Thesis. The Department developed a rubric to articulate evaluation criteria for the senior thesis. Majors were surveyed through the senior year about the effectiveness of specific assignments and activities in developing their research and writing skills. The rubric facilitated standardization of grading procedures and identified areas in need of improvement within the curriculum which, combined with analysis and discussion of the indirect measures, led to a proposal to modify the senior thesis curriculum as well as to develop independent research skills earlier in the major.

[ NATURAL SCIENCES ]

Chemistry / Haverford. The project probed one of the department's key learning goals -- empowering students to be successful in research environments. The department developed a rubric for the senior research experience, administered a standardized test on the main pillars of chemistry (inorganic, organic, physical, instrumental analysis and biochemistry), and conducted an alumni survey which related specific curricular components to the various career stages of professional chemists. Utilizing the rubric encouraged formative assessment of student performance in weekly mentoring sessions and enhanced student/faculty communication. Both the standardized test of current students and the survey of alumni emphasized the importance of Superlab and other research experiences in the formation of chemists. The test results also confirmed the appropriateness of initial departmental chemistry course placements.

Computer Science / Swarthmore. The Department's overarching goal is to increase students' proficiency in computational thinking and practice in a liberal arts context. This goal includes skills such as algorithmic problem solving, abstraction, top-down design, analysis, and testing. The assessment project focused on introductory courses, where the primary aim is to teach students the skill of algorithmic problem solving. A performance task, administered at the beginning (pretest) and end (posttest) of the course and scored with a simple rubric, was used to investigate whether students' problem solving skills improved during the semester.

Geology / Bryn Mawr. The project focused on three of the seven fundamental concepts of Geology as defined in the department's statement of learning goals: plate tectonics, the geologic time scale, global climate change. Student knowledge in these three areas was measured at the beginning of three relevant introductory courses designed to teach to these learning goals, and again at the conclusion of the course(s), using a multiple-choice exam developed by the department (20 questions devoted to each learning goal, 60 questions total).
Educational Studies / Swarthmore. The department developed a rubric to evaluate the two-credit thesis -- one of the culminating experience options in the interdisciplinary special major -- for students’ abilities to select, implement, and provide a rationale for research methods employed. An external reviewer used the rubric to evaluate samples of student work. This information was supplemented by retrospective feedback by thesis advisors about the students’ development during the experience, and by student feedback, both based on the framework of the rubric. The department is using what it has learned to inform curricular planning, and the rubric has since been adapted for use by other departments at Swarthmore (e.g., Sociology and Anthropology) and has been shared with other Departments of Educational Studies through the Consortium for Excellence in Teacher Education schools.

Psychology / Haverford. The Psychology project assessed the departmental learning goal of research skill mastery. Majors completed a diagnostic assessment at the beginning of the senior year to determine proficiency in research design issues and data analysis techniques. Based on the results of this assessment, senior thesis students spent extra time with faculty mentors on the portions of their projects related to the skill areas that the assessment identified as being weakest (data analysis, using appropriate tests). This assessment process was repeated with the next group of Senior Psychology Majors in the fall of 2011, and represents a sustainable practice for the future. Since the department also has information about the specific classes taken by each student, the additional diagnostic test data will feed into a larger programmatic assessment of the sequence of courses taken in preparation for the senior project.

Sociology / Bryn Mawr. After developing a comprehensive statement of department-level learning goals, the project focused on assessing four of these in the context of the junior writing seminar (Sociology 303). These included, responsible generalization, pursuing a research question through systematic sociological analysis, reading and comprehending research methods, and making effective presentations. The department developed a rubric to assess the written junior essay along these dimensions.