

***Constructs and consequences:
Toward useful assessment in the humanities***

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“Ich lerne sehen.”
Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*

A. Dealing with change in college humanities programs

1. *Rethinking the value of humanities education*

- Perpetual evolution, recent events
 - Δ Changing students
 - Δ Changing understandings of how college students learn
 - Δ Changing public perceptions about humanities education
 - Δ Changing disciplines, domains, canons
 - Δ Changing times
- Contemporary challenges
 - What do we teach, to which students, to what end?
 - How do we enable deep and broad learning to take place?
 - What is the value of a humanities degree or core requirement?
 - What is the role of the liberal arts in higher education and beyond?
 - Who determines the future of higher education and our role within it?
 - Who determines the educational and social contributions we make?

→ College humanities education is undergoing fundamental and inevitable change in response to societal, intellectual, and other forces—how to respond?

2. *Why worry about assessment? Determining the value of humanities education*

- Increasing demands from a variety of quarters to assess our outcomes
- Implications of the accountability movement for college education
- Widespread culture of assessment/eval misunderstanding and misuse
- Reactions to accountability, assessment, managerial model of academe

→ Assessment and related processes can exact considerable negative consequences on teaching, learning, and professional survival, if left unheeded or left to others

BUT... “We have a social and moral responsibility towards our students and towards society at large to state as clearly as we can what it is that we do for them and why what we do is valuable.” (anonymous survey respondent)

→ Assessment and related processes can provide an effective heuristic for dealing with change, offering empirical bases for deliberation, demanding clear thinking, and sharpening our understandings of program successes and value

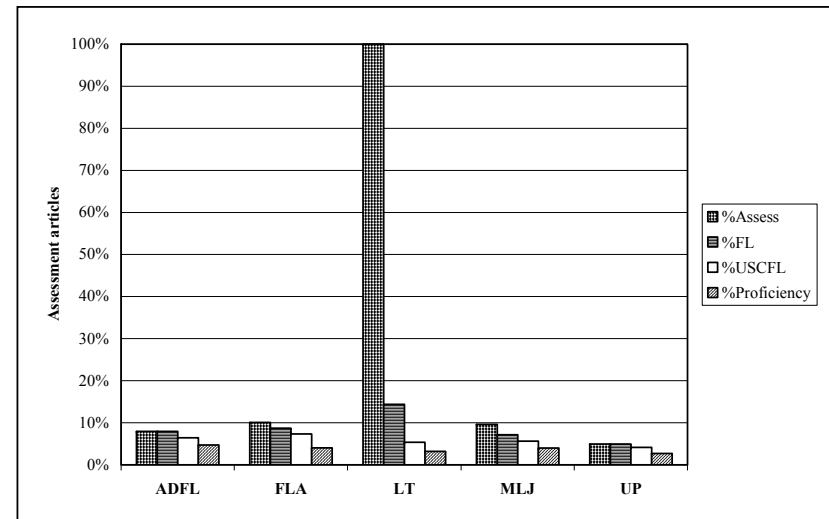
3. *Basic premise: Assessment as change agent*

Assessment is playing a decisive role in changes that occur in college humanities education at both micro (program-internal) and macro (institutional, societal) levels. How we act now via assessment will condition the nature of that change. By *learning to see* our programs through assessment (and by enabling others to see), we can demonstrate the educational and social good that we do, reflect on exactly what that good should be, and articulate/improve our practices to ensure we continue to achieve it.

☞ To what extent are humanities educators, programs, and the professions prepared to utilize assessment (and related processes) in dealing with change?

B. Traditions, trends, and the status quo in college humanities assessment

1. *Some received traditions in assessment and evaluation*



Percentage and type of FL assessment articles in five journals, 1984-2002 (Norris, 2006a)

- How do we see assessment?

→ Technocratic practice: “After all, if teachers do not know how to *measure* what students can do with language, how will they be able to determine whether their students are *measuring* up to the expectations of the 21st century?” (Swender, 2002, p. 591)

→ Commercial practice:

ACTFL OPI – WebCAPE Placement Exams – STAMP
CLA – MAPP – MFT – IDI... (and other acronyms)

→ Accountability practice:

NCLB – NCATE – Commission on the Future of Higher Education

2. The current trend to assess student learning outcomes

- Why outcomes assessment?

→ Outcomes embody the essential purpose of an educational program: developments in knowledge, skills, dispositions of learners

→ Requires rethinking of educational programs as something more than the delivery of experiences or the exposure of learners to information

→ Calls for articulation of curriculum and instruction in support of targeted outcomes; demands integrated vs. isolationist thinking

→ Provides a clear statement of educational program value; answers the question “How do you know?” with evidence of educational effectiveness

- Is that how it is seen? Reactions to received view of outcomes assessment:

Barrington (2003): “To design and administer (intellectually honest) assessment plans that will *measure* such capabilities with a dozen or more standardized ‘learning objectives’ is next to impossible” leading to “pestilent repercussions” for the truly valued learning objectives that constitute the liberal arts, in that it “discourages teaching such skills because they are difficult to *measure*” (p. 31).

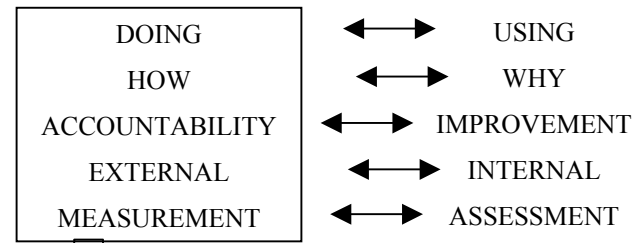
3. The status quo

...assessment ↔ professional development, scholarship...

...assessment ↔ responsibility, participation, ownership...

...assessment ↔ curriculum/teaching/learning improvement...

...assessment ↔ use...



Feasibility?

Relevance?

Coverage?

Buy-in? **UTILITY?**

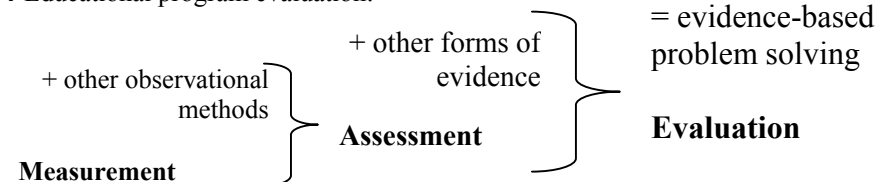
☞ If assessment is intended to support educational programs and improve student learning, in response to crises/change, what’s wrong with the status quo?

C. Re-envisioning assessment in college humanities education

1. Resolving terminological confusion

- **Measurement**: “the consistent elicitation of quantifiable indicators of well-defined constructs via tests or related observation procedures; it emphasizes efficiency, objectivity, and technical aspects of construct validity”
- **Assessment**: “the systematic gathering of information about student learning in support of teaching and learning... may be direct or indirect, objective or subjective, formal or informal, standardized or idiosyncratic... provide locally useful information on learners and on learning to those individuals responsible for doing something about it”
- **Evaluation**: “the gathering of information about any of the variety of elements that constitute educational programs, for a variety of purposes that primarily include understanding, demonstrating, improving, and judging program value... brings evidence to bear on the problems of programs, but the nature of that evidence is not restricted to one particular methodology” (Norris, 2006c, p. 579)

→ Educational program evaluation:



2. The nature of useful evaluations (and related processes)

- the individual intended users of evaluation participate directly in all evaluation processes, from asking questions to collecting data to making recommendations for change;
- evaluation is pursued as a process, not an end-game;
- sufficient time and resources are allocated and evaluation activities are feasible and focused on the problems at hand;
- the evaluation produces interesting, credible, and immediately relevant findings;
- findings are reported in a timely fashion and communicated in a way that can be readily understood and applied by intended users; and
- interpretations and recommendations are contextualized to the specific program setting and variables (see Patton, 1997)

Light (2001), on the special case of outcomes assessment in higher education:

“[A] process of evaluating and improving current programs, encouraging innovations, and then evaluating each innovation’s effectiveness. The key step is systematic gathering of information for sustained improvement. And always with an eye toward helping faculty or students work more effectively.” (p. 224)

- part of overall evaluation process
- programmatic, and program-specific
- formative, improvement oriented
- supportive of innovation
- focused on effectiveness of teaching and learning

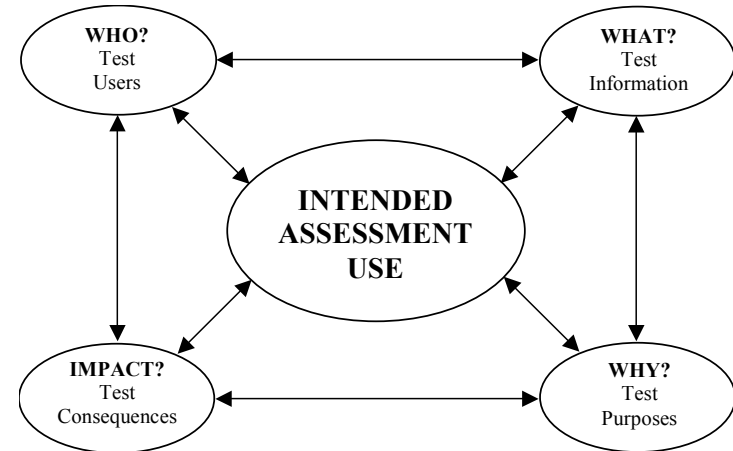
☞ If assessment is going to happen, one way or the other, and if we want it to perpetuate and extend the valued learning that occurs within college humanities programs, how do we get there? How do we make assessment a useful and used process that contributes in these ways?

3. How does assessment use happen? Realization + Proceduralization

→ **Multiple purposes:** holding ourselves accountable, yes, but also motivating learners, diagnosing needs, improving teaching, articulating courses, revising curriculum, illuminating degree value, developing programs, justifying expenditures, certifying abilities, etc.

↑ARTICULATION & ALIGNMENT↓

→ **Multiple methods:** quizzes, self-assessments, tests, standardized assessments, performance assessments, journals, portfolios, surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, document analyses, etc.



From Norris (2000, 2006a)

- **Process:** For every assessment, intended use should be specified in terms of:
 - who will use the assessment information, to make
 - what kinds of interpretations about learners, in order to inform
 - what kinds of decisions or actions, to result in
 - what consequences for whom or what.
- **Participation:**
 - Primary *intended users* of assessment (e.g., faculty, chair,) meet and negotiate intended uses, potentially...
 - in consultation with an *assessment/evaluation advisor*, and, where needed...
 - with representation of additional internal and external assessment *stakeholders* (e.g., students, university administration)
- **Products:** Outcomes of the intended use specification process include:
 - public documents* on the exact roles to be played by assessments in the program and the different forms that those assessments take
 - policies* on assessment practice at the individual, classroom, and program levels
 - assessment methods* that lead to actions
 - justification* for assessments and their uses *in situ*
 - identification* of other program factors in need of evaluation

Why bother? Alignment with curriculum and instruction → Awareness-raising among students, faculty, institution, others → Increase in assessment information actually being used → Improvements in learning (processes and outcomes) → Decrease in frequency & number of assessments!

Any examples? Georgetown University German Department:

<http://www3.georgetown.edu/departments/german/programs/curriculum/assessment.html>

D. What does it look like? Using assessment and evaluation intentionally in college humanities education

1. Looking at humanities learning on our own terms

Challenging Outcomes	Reasonable Assessments
<p><u>Spirituality</u>: Students define spirituality among individuals representing distinct worldviews. (from Maki, 2004)</p>	<p>→students photograph ‘spirituality’ images →definitions/captions written for each →album compiled with final 10 →short narrative rationale →semi-structured interview with professor</p>
<p><u>Cross-cultural awareness & stereotyping</u>: Students understand, evaluate, and revise their stereotypes of cultural phenomena. (from Byon, 2007)</p>	<p>→pre-post questionnaire on Korean culture →hypothesis about one cultural phenomenon →library, web, and interview research →log of changing cultural understandings →portfolio, presentation</p>
<p><u>Creative writing critique</u>: Students master critical and evaluative skills to respond concisely and effectively to written work. (from Sweetbriar College, English Major)</p>	<p>→course-embedded peer critique →multiple exemplars reviewed formatively and summatively by professor →Fiction (editing, questions, summary) →Poetry (rhythm, form, diction, title, sum.)</p>
<p><u>Hermeneutic imagination</u>: Students encounter and explore texts as holistic, aesthetic, embodied experiences. (Solloway & Brooks, 2004)</p>	<p>→self-evaluation of response to texts →identify thoughts before reading →read intended excerpts →explain change or confirmation in ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepening understanding • Shifting perceptions • New questions </p>
<p><u>Critical thinking</u>: Students engage in reasonable reflective thinking when deciding on what to believe or do in complex situations. (www.wolcottlynch.com)</p>	<p>→open-ended, embedded problem posing →students write problem-response argument →guided self- and peer-assessment for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainties, interpretations • Biases, connections • Prioritizing alternatives • Envisioning, directing innovation →professor review of student assessments </p>

Wiggins (1994): assessment “should reveal something not only about the student but about the tasks and virtues at the heart of the subject.”

2. Transforming programs through assessment

→Iwai, et al. (1999): University of Hawaii Japanese Program

Q: What do students need/want to learn, and how does that match our perceptions?

Methods: Analysis of teacher & student views on learning needs

Uses: Identify teacher & learner perceptions of learning needs, revise outcomes for 2-yr. core, revitalize curriculum and materials

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Transformations

- Revised texts, materials development
- Focus: speaking/culture/performance
- Japanese use in Hawaii & abroad
- Revised balance/pace of instruction
- Increase in learner interest
- Commitment by administration to ongoing assessment and development

“Future efforts to incorporate teachers’ and students’ perceptions of students’ needs into the program will help to improve all the interconnected and dynamic components of curriculum development...” (p. 73).

→Byrnes (2002): Georgetown University German Department

Q: What should students learn to do in the L2, and how does our curriculum help them to get there?

Methods: Task-based writing performances, end-of-semester

Uses: Cross-curricular tracking of learner development/achievement for revising curriculum, instruction, outcomes expectations

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Transformations

- Made the curriculum “real”
- Improved curricular articulation
- Clarified outcomes expectations
- Raised teacher and learner awareness
- Integrated assessment into teaching and learning

“Assessment in this kind of a context is, I would almost say probably an indispensable aspect in order to clarify any number of things. Because it is in the discourse about assessment and how we would do that that our knowledge became articulated or the holes in that knowledge became clearer to ourselves, or the cover-ups that we had engaged in were no longer possible if we wanted to be honest with ourselves about it.” (Byrnes, personal communication).

☞ What are the characteristics of assessment and evaluation practice underlying these examples? What are the implications for the next steps to be taken in humanities programs and the professions?

E. Learning to see assessment and evaluation as useful processes

→What can we do about it? *Learn to see* assessment and evaluation as useful and essential processes:

1. Clarify roles for assessment & evaluation in humanities programs
2. Encourage, enable, and engage in professional development; make a professional space for assess/eval scholarship in your programs
3. Generate and share examples, participate in the discourse
4. Hold assessment accountable to your programs, teachers, learners
5. USE it or lose it...

“Capacity for change” is exactly what program evaluation provides, if we learn to see it as a practice of our own devise, in the service of our own programmatic and professional values, and in response to the needs of our students and teachers.

F. References and Resources

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See also these web sites on humanities outcomes and assessment:

- Teagle Foundation, *Resources on liberal learning*
<http://www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/resources.aspx>
- Wabash College, *Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts*
<http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu>
- Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Assessment page*
<http://www.aacu.org/issues/assessment/index.cfm>
- American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Initiative for Humanities and Culture*
<http://www.amacad.org/projects/humanities.aspx>

- Assessment Reform Group
<http://www.assessment-reform-group.org/>

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FL Assessment and Evaluation Resource Web Sites

- **University of Hawai'i Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project**
<http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation>
- Center for Applied Linguistics, Testing and Assessment
<http://www.cal.org/ta>
- University of Minnesota *Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition*, Second Language Assessment
<http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment>
- National Foreign Language Resource Centers (central web site for all LRCs)
<http://nflrc.msu.edu/>

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