

Alternative assessment in higher education

Web sites for a learner-centered approach

by Bonnie Chauncey

Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College," a report by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (available at www.greaterexpectations.org/), calls for vast curricular reforms encompassing learner-centered "classroom practices that stress inquiry and engagement with unscripted and contested problems, including those drawn from real life." In instituting these curricular reforms, colleges and universities have had to grapple with a corresponding need for new forms of assessment, often designed by faculty, that can address multiple types of learning and evaluate nuanced capacities, such as critical thinking and analytical ability.

These forms of alternative assessment are wide-ranging, including portfolios, performance assessments, rubrics, peer- and self-assessments, options for evaluating the work of cooperative learning groups, and ideas for creating and assessing problem-based or active learning experiences. Originally emerging in the K–12 system, these assessment practices are being widely reinterpreted nationally and internationally in college and graduate classes, with the goal of expand-

ing possibilities for teaching and learning, creating options for divergent learners, and providing opportunities for applying practical, critical, and original thinking.

This list of Internet resources includes some excellent comprehensive sites on all facets of assessment in higher education. Potentially even more valuable to faculty, however, are the selected links to university sites, which provide practical methods for creating a variety of alternative assessments and integrating them into college course work. Serving less as final measurements than as vital components of the classroom dynamic, these alternative or authentic assessments can inform ongoing course development and invigorate teaching and learning.

Comprehensive sites

- **AAHE Assessment Forum.** Part of the comprehensive American Association of Higher Education site, these pages provide readings on assessment equity, fair assessment practice, and other essential aspects of evaluation reform, as well as an extensive list of links that includes in its variety and depth assessment glossaries, links to other assessment megasites, and discussion

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lists. *Access:* <http://www.aahe.org/initiatives/assessment.htm>.

- **Field-Tested Learning Assessment Guide.** From the National Institute for Science Education, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, this exceptionally useful guide provides a primer on assessment that gives an overview of innovative alternative assessment strategies. The heart of the guide, however, is the description of each CAT (or classroom assessment technique), written by a university instructor, including personal experiences with the method, clear descriptions of what is involved, how to proceed, and how to analyze results. *Access:* <http://www.flaguide.org>.

- **Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcomes Assessment.** This encyclopedic site is exceptionally useful for the range and depth of its coverage and the clarity of its annotations. The many links to college and university assessment pages could be especially helpful to institutions taking on the task of designing a comprehensive assessment process. *Access:* <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm>.

- **NCREL: Assessment.** Each of these essays on issues of assessment philosophy and practice contains embedded links to additional pages in which crucial points brought up in the body of the essay are examined in depth, a structure making for absorbing reading. *Access:* <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/as0cont.htm>.

University and foundation sites: Alternative assessment in the classroom

- **About Prior Learning Assessment.** According to the introductory text, more than 1,000 institutions of higher learning now have programs in place that assess prior learning for credit. This site includes a suggested method for an experiential learning assessment procedure, prior learning assessment criteria, and a guide for portfolio preparation. *Access:* <http://edtech.jmu.edu/bis/homepage/PortfolioAssessment.htm>.

- **Authentic Assessment Toolbox.** The author, Jonathan Mueller, describes the Toolbox as “a how-to hypertext on creating authentic tasks, rubrics and standards for measuring and improving student learning.” The site, some pages of which are under construction, contains clear definitions of types of authentic assessments, justifications for these, and guidelines for designing each assessment process. *Access:* <http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/tasks.htm>.

Authentic Assessment Toolbox

- **Best Practices in Higher Education.** The Assessment and Evaluation link offers, among other things, the Teaching Goals Inventory from the University of Iowa. The Best Practices page also provides a host of links for those interested in issues related to the teaching-learning-assessment dynamic, such as steps for encouraging critical thinking and assessing learning styles. *Access:* <http://cte.udel.edu/bestpract.htm>.

- **Classroom Assessment Techniques.** This well-constructed site has an array of classroom assessment options for instructors to choose from, from Primary Trait Analysis to a student self-assessment of effective study habits. *Access:* <http://www.siue.edu/~deder/assess/catmain.html>.

- **Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.** This site provides techniques for in-class assessment, developing collaborative and active learning situations, and strategies for encouraging student self-assessments. *Access:* <http://www.psu.edu/celt/>.

- **CSTL: Teaching Resources.** Designed to assist Syracuse University faculty in supporting student learning, this site discusses best practice for the creation and use of student ratings of teaching effectiveness, as well as classroom dynamics, creating a course portfolio, and various aspects of student assessment. *Access:* <http://cstl.syr.edu/cstl/T-L.htm>.

- **Faculty Resource Center.** From the Critical Thinking Consortium, this site provides a series of resources (some of which

are free online) designed to guide faculty in developing opportunities for critical thinking in every area of course work; encouraging student capacities for self assessment is an essential component. *Access:* <http://www.criticalthinking.org/University/univclass/trc.html>.

- **Good Practices in Student Assessment.** From the Centre for Teaching and Learning at University College Dublin, this page contains a rich list of possibilities for assessing reflective writing, ideas for student-peer and self assessment, and other strategies for assessing subtle qualities such as problem-solving abilities. *Access:* <http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/good/lea.htm>.

- **JMU: Assessment Resources.** From James Madison University, this site may be especially useful to an institution engaging in the evaluation or creation of a comprehensive assessment plan, with the goal of developing an ongoing program based on the principle of measurement with multiple forms of assessment. The site includes a list of links to research associations and other institutions of higher education. *Access:* <http://www.jmu.edu/assessment/aresource.shtml>.

- **Links of Interest: Instructional Innovation Center.** From St. Philip's College, this site allows exploration of alternative assessment tools as well as many subjects closely associated with innovative teaching, such as active learning, critical thinking, and learning styles. Because there are a few well-chosen sites in each area, the site is comprehensive without being bewildering, and the focus is solely on higher education. *Access:* <http://www.accd.edu/spc/iic/master/linkscontents.htm>.

- **Problem-Based Learning.** From University of Delaware, whose faculty won a Hesburgh Certificate of Award in 1999 for seeking out methods of student-centered active learning and assessment, this site contains



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articles, sample scenarios for problem-based learning, and access to the Problem-Based Learning Clearinghouse. *Access:* <http://www.udel.edu/pbl/>.

- **Student Assessment in Higher Education.** Notable for its focus on higher education and the clarity of its design, this site from Central Queensland University in Australia has, among other offerings, a full bibliography of online articles and an extensive list of useful links to other sites on assessment. *Access:* <http://ahe.cqu.edu.au/>.

- **Teaching for Learning.** As stated on the welcome page, the aim of the site is to assist college and university educators in finding ideas to maximize student learning and invigorate the teaching experience. Ranging from the inspiring to the practical, the site includes reflections on what's worth learning at the university and an online tutorial on assessment design. *Access:* <http://www.flinders.edu.au/teach/home.html>.

- **University of Virginia Teaching Resource Center: Teaching Concerns.** Primarily consisting of articles from the University of Virginia Teaching Resource Center's newsletter, this site provides thoughtful discussions of aspects of the art of college teaching, including integrating assessments through the use of concept mapping, evaluating cooperative learning, and creating and grading writing assignments. *Access:* http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Teaching_Concerns/TC_Topic/Engaging_Students.htm.

Portfolio assessment

- **Center for Teaching and Learning Resources: Faculty Portfolios.** From SUNY Buffalo, this site includes sample faculty portfolios from a range of disciplines and a rich list of links on portfolio development from other universities. *Access:* http://www.wings.buffalo.edu/vpaa/ctrl/files/faculty_portfolios.htm.

- **Electronicportfolios.org.** Helen Barrett's excellent site includes an extensive library of online articles about portfolios as well as her selected favorite Internet sites,

and much more, from the philosophical to the practical. *Access:* <http://electronicportfolios.org>.

- **Eportfolio.** Faculty assigning electronic portfolios may want to recommend this site to students. Explicit and concise, it includes a gallery of portfolio examples. *Access:* <http://portfolio.psu.edu>.

- **The Gallery of Teaching and Learning.** From the Carnegie Foundation, the Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning page contains an online exhibit of course portfolios from national universities. The course portfolios include novel and exemplary assessment approaches for exploring student learning. *Access:* <http://gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/index.htm>.

- **Kalamazoo College Portfolio.** Recent research indicates that assessment approaches optimize learning when they promote reflection, construction of meaning, and self-monitoring of learning. Portfolios allow for all three. This site gives students a framework for designing and cumulating a portfolio over successive years of undergraduate education. *Access:* <http://www.kzoo.edu/pfolio/index.html>.

- **Portfolio Clearinghouse.** Recently acquired from Kalamazoo College by the American Association of Higher Education, this is a searchable database of portfolio projects from around the world. *Access:* http://www.aahe.org/teaching/portfolio_db.htm.

- **Preparing a Teaching Portfolio: A Guidebook.** Creating and receiving feedback on a teaching portfolio can be considered an experience of alternative or authentic assessment for faculty. This guide, from the Center for Teaching Effectiveness, outlines the process step-by-step. *Access:* <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/teachfolio.html>.

Discussion lists

- **ASSESS.** From the University of Kentucky, this list is notable for its well-organized searchable archives and its focus on assessment issues at the college and university level. *Access:* <http://lsv.uky.edu/archives/assess.html>.

- **DeLiberations: Assessment.** With the aim of offering a forum for debate, the site provides a space for readers to air ideas and responses in the Comments Archive. *Access:* <http://www.city.londonmet.ac.uk/deliberations/assessment/>.

- **Learning Assessment listserv.** The stated goal of this list is to feature learning assessment practices and issues related to learning assessment, primarily in the community college setting. *Access:* http://rccd.cc.ca.us/assessment_committee/listserv.htm.

Online journals, e-books, and articles

- **EPAA Education Policy Analysis Archives.** Current and past issues of this peer reviewed electronic journal contain articles on aspects of alternative forms of assessment. *Access:* <http://epaa.asu.edu/>.

- **Knowing What Students Know: The Science and Design of Educational Assessment.** Available online, this book by the Committee on the Foundations of Assessment offers a broad and thorough discussion of current knowledge in the fields of cognitive development and learning, and how this knowledge can be used in designing assessment measures, both large-scale and for formative assessment practice in the classroom. *Access:* <http://books.nap.edu/books/0309072727/html>.

- **Learning and Teaching: Briefing Papers Series.** From Oxford Brookes University, papers on assessment principles and selection. *Access:* http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/2_learntch/briefing_papers.html.

- **National Teaching and Learning Forum.** The full issues of the forum are available for subscribers only, but the Web site provides a valuable Supplemental Materials collection on topics such as implementing and assessing problem-based learning, assessing student writing, and strategies for embedding accountability in student learning group projects. *Access:* <http://www.ntlf.com>.

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Dominique Turnbow in attendance. Here is what Turnbow had to say about it: "Immersion was an unforgettable experience that inspired me to reflect upon my own teaching pedagogy and create a repertoire from which to build to improve my skills. The Immersion faculty are clearly experts in their field, with a passion for passing on their knowledge. I would highly recommend all librarians with instruction responsibilities to attend the program."

("Enhanced public access . . ." cont. from page 600)

To date, other federal agencies have not made investments in the technical infrastructure comparable to PMC. In part, this reflects the differing means by which disciplines share data and research results. As noted by the Council of the National Academy of Sciences, "While we endorse this NIH initiative, we note that it addresses issues relevant specifically to biomedical research, and that it may not be replicable for research supported by other agencies, or in disciplines with different funding levels or different modes of research communication" (www4.nationalacademies.org/news.nsf/isbn/s09162004?OpenDocument).

12. Does the Information Quality Act apply to the NIH proposal? The Information Quality Act, enacted in December 2000, directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines that "provide policy and procedural guidance to Federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integ-

("Alternative assessment . . ." cont. from page 589)

• **Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation (PARE).** A cornerstone of the late and much missed ERIC.AE site, PARE is still a very much alive and essential online peer reviewed journal for all areas of assessment. Readers interested in alternative assessment can find here a resource for study in the areas of the use and development of scoring rubrics, performance assessment in the

With both the 2004 regional and national programs behind us, we now have a total of nine librarians who have participated in the Immersion experience. For those of you who have not had this opportunity, applications are now being accepted online at www.acrl.org (click "Events & Conferences" then "Upcoming Events") for the National Immersion '05 Program to be held at Eckerd College, July 29–August 3, 2005. The deadline for application is December 6, 2004. ■

rity of information disseminated by Federal agencies" (www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/final_information_quality_guidelines.html).

The Information Quality Act is not applicable to the NIH proposal for two reasons. First, the OMB guidance does not apply to archived documents distributed by a federal agency. In fact, the guidelines specifically state, "OMB agrees that archival information disseminated by Federal agency libraries (for example, Internet distribution of published articles) should not be covered by these guidelines." And second, the guidelines do not apply to documents produced by grantees that do not represent "agency views." As noted by OMB, "the agencies have not authored these document and . . . are simply ensuring that the public can have quicker and easier access to materials."

Note

With my thanks for the contributions of Rick Johnson, SPARC director, and Peter Suber, www.earlham.edu/%7Epeters/fos/nihfaq.htm. ■

classroom, and current assessment practice for the Web-based classroom environment. Access: <http://pareonline.net/Home.htm>.

• **TCRecord.org.** A free registration gives access to many areas on this online journal site, which features a rich page on alternative assessment and includes multiple paths for involvement and investigation, including a discussion forum and a weekly e-mail newsletter. Access: <http://www.tcrecord.org/default.asp>. ■