

Evaluating General Education: Using a “Home Grown” Student Performance Assessment

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Alverno College

- Integrated professions and liberal arts
- 2,100 undergrads, 550 graduate students
- Women’s college at undergraduate level; masters programs are co-ed
- Organizational Structure: traditional discipline, plus matrix for 8 Abilities
- Ability-based curriculum
- Developmental curriculum

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Alverno’s Eight Abilities/Outcomes

- Communication -- e.g., writing, speaking, **quantitative literacy**
- **Analysis**
- **Problem Solving**
- Valuing in Decision-Making
- Social Interaction
- Developing a Global Perspective
- Effective Citizenship
- Aesthetic Engagement

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Developmental Levels of Analysis Ability

- **Level 1** – Make accurate observations
- **Level 2** – Draw reasonable inferences
- **Level 3** – Perceive & make relationships; use disciplinary concepts
- **Level 4** – Analyze structure and organization; use disciplinary concepts and frameworks
- **Level 5** – Purposefully select and use disciplinary frameworks
- **Level 6** – Independently employ frameworks to analyze increasingly complex phenomena

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Student Assessment-as-Learning

A process in operation at Alverno College, integral to learning, that involves observation and judgment of each student's performance on the basis of explicit criteria, with self assessment and resulting feedback to the student.

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Our Final Design of the Mid-Program General Education Assessment

- **Focuses on:** Quantitative Literacy Levels 2 & 3; Analysis Level 3; Problem Solving Level 3
- **Includes** real tables of data on contaminants in Milwaukee tap water and bottled water
- **Students required to complete 2 parts:** 1) take-home portion; and 2) in-person assessment (both have self assessments)

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For the Mid-Program General Education Assessment, Students Are Required to...

- Write a research question and hypothesis based on data provided in assessment
- Calculate means, medians & percentages
- Create charts/tables (illustrate data)
- Analyze and interpret data

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For the Mid-Program General Education Assessment, Students Are Required to...

- Show how hypothesis is supported or refuted by presenting evidence and their analysis of data
- Complete a self assessment
- Meet with assessor to discuss the performance and receive feedback.

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Our Key Questions in Evaluating Student Learning & General Education

- What evidence do we have that students achieve our stated learning outcomes?
- Can students integrate and transfer knowledge and abilities across courses and over time to demonstrate learning outcomes being assessed?

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*Dilemmas and Decisions in
Conceptualizing the Assessment*

➤ **What should be assessed?**

» *Focus on questions raised by faculty
about the quality & effectiveness of
student learning (Problem-based)*

» *Focus on a cluster of Abilities & Levels
and General Education Content
(Rationale: feasibility, validity, and
reliability of assessor judgments)*

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*Dilemmas and Decisions in
Conceptualizing the Assessment*

➤ **How will Alverno's teaching principles be
reflected in the assessment design?**

Examples of Principles:

» Education goes beyond knowing to being
able to do what one knows
(performance-based assessment)

» Feedback is essential for each student's
improvement of thinking and learning

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*Dilemmas and Decisions in
Conceptualizing the Assessment*

More Examples of principles:

» Self assessment is an essential ability
for the autonomous lifelong learner.
Refers to the ability of a student to
deepen learning by observing,
analyzing, and judging own
performance on the basis of criteria
and determining how s/he can improve

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*Dilemmas and Decisions in
Conceptualizing the Assessment*

- Therefore, the assessment prompt, performance, feedback & self assessment should:
 - » *foster individual student learning*
 - » *help students broaden their perspectives beyond the immediate assessment context to consider future roles in the discipline, profession, or personal/civic life*

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*Dilemmas and Decisions in
Conceptualizing the Assessment*

- **How can we enhance feasibility?**
 - » After each year of administering assessment, faculty collectively analyze patterns of student performance data and create/implement plans for improvement (action research cycles)
 - » Every 4-5 years, focus on a new set of Abilities & Levels and General Education Content
 - » Use faculty & community assessors

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*Questions We Addressed in
Designing the Assessment*

1. What are the assessment's purposes?
2. What collaborative process will we use to identify the focus (content/discipline and Ability) of the assessment?
3. Who should be on the assessment design team?
4. At what point in the curriculum should students take the assessment?

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Questions We Addressed in Designing the Assessment

5. Further, what will the prerequisites be?
6. How will we ensure that learning outcomes for the assessment are intentionally connected to students' prior coursework (course outcomes)?
7. Do students tend to take the prerequisite courses when they should? If not, how will we address this issue?

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Questions We Addressed in Designing the Assessment

8. How will we determine the *topic* for the assessment prompt?
9. Who will the assessors be – faculty in specific disciplines, faculty across the institution, community assessors? What strategies can we use in the assessment design process to help assessors make accurate judgments about student performance?

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Description of Mid-Program General Education Assessment

Refer to handout for descriptions of:

» *Abilities and Levels Assessed*

» *Assessment's Learning Outcomes and Specific Criteria*

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Questions We Addressed in Implementing the Assessment

1. What training materials do we need?
2. How, when and who will train the assessors?
3. How will we assure consistency of judgment across assessors?

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Students' Perspectives

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What Happens When a Student Isn't Successful on the Assessment?

- Intervention workshops
- Goal setting by student before and after workshop
- Re-assessment using a similar assessment (e.g., same outcomes, criteria, topic)

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*Getting Faculty Involved in Interpreting
Data and Making Plans for Improvement*

- All faculty workshop – Analyzed patterns of student performance data (by School, Division/Department, Non-transfer & transfer students, etc.)
- Departments identified plans for improvement
- We’re following-up with Departments about their plans and links to program evaluation

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