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CLA Report

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Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)
Instructor's Assessment Report

Thank you for participating in the project using the CLA in the Classroom. We are conducting this project has in conjunction with our participation in a national study, coordinated by the Council for Aid to Education and funded in part by the Lumina Foundation, that is studying the development of students' writing, analytical reasoning, and critical thinking skills in higher education institutions. The Carnegie Corporation provided us with a mini-grant to help determine the extent to which efforts like "CLA in the Classroom" can make a positive difference in student learning outcomes.

In recent months our CLA project has taken on increased importance for several important reasons.

1. The initial funding from the Carnegie Corporation was intended to support a pilot project to determine feasibility of a much more comprehensive grant project. The information you provide in your reports will provide a basis for seeking additional grant funding. **Your reports will be a very important component of our follow-up grant proposal.**
2. We are planning an event at the end of the academic year to give faculty the opportunity to report on their efforts to assess student learning outcomes. **I hope at least a few of the CLA project participants will be willing to report to the entire faculty.**
3. Our investment of time and resources to this project gives us the opportunity to take a leading role in the national discussion of student learning outcomes. The reports that you post in the Chesnutt Library Digital Commons will become a useful resource for colleagues throughout the nation.
4. As part of our participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), we are now posting our College Portrait on line. You will see that our CLA scores are part of this portrait. http://www.uncfsu.edu/ir/College%20Portrait%202007.pdf Since the CLA results will be an object of public scrutiny, it is important that we do all that is possible to strengthen our students' performance.

In view of the increased importance of our CLA project, your individual reports are very important to our ongoing efforts to improve student learning at FSU.

To receive the remainder of your payment, you must submit the following to Mr. Wes Brown (Barber Building, Room 232; wkbrown01@uncfsu.edu):

- Your written report prepared according to the guidelines below
- A copy of your performance task with all related documents
- A list of students with Banner ID and their score on the test. (We will NOT report individual grades beyond the campus.)
- Confirmation that you have posted your report in the Chesnutt Library Digital Commons.
- A timesheet – Mr. Brown will provide a template. (You are each due to paid an additional $800; the timesheet will reflect this payment due.) Please note that I will need to approve your report before I authorize payment.

Your report is due as soon as possible, but no later than May 1, 2009

CLA Project Report

(Please answer each item; 3.c. is optional.)

1. Course information
   a. In what course(s) did you administer your CLA performance task?
      English 108-02 and English 110-01
   b. Please indicate if the majority of students enrolled in this class are freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors. **freshmen**

2. Performance task
   a. What was the task?

      The task for my CLA in the Classroom activity was to write a recommendation following the scenario below:

      You are part of a family in which no one has a formal education. Because you are smart and motivated, many of your family members are pooling their resources to send you to school. They are counting on you to get a degree that will bring in the most money to the family. Dr. Washington has recently toured your state, and your family is interested in his recommendation for industrial education. Is an industrial education of the kind available at his two-year technical school the best way to ensure you make the most money for your family's long-term future?

   b. Describe the documents you included in the task. Why did you choose these specific documents?
      Document A: Acceptance letter from technical institute: meant to give vague and biased information, stating educational programs available at one school with no specificity nor comparison to other schools
      Document B: Newspaper feature story on a technical institute graduate who later became a millionaire: meant to provide an atypical case study
      Document C: Chart of data from US Census for each of 5 North Carolina counties showing population, average income, percentage of graduates from 2 and 4 year schools; also a second chart showing average annual income for 2 and 4 year school graduates and total average cost of tuition for 2 and 4 year schools: meant to see if they can read charts and recognize which data is relevant
      Document D: cartoon about the high cost of college tuition: meant to plant the idea that a 4-year college is too expensive without giving any support
      Document E: the top chart from document C in graph form: extra data, totally irrelevant
      Document F: the bottom chart from document C in graph form: contains the relevant data graphed against data in a different form; meant to see if the students look at how the bars line up against one another or if they check for comparable units

   c. To what extent did a successful response to the performance task require students to integrate information and data in both narrative <u>and</u> quantitative forms? Explain.

A successful response to my prompt required students to read and evaluate both narrative and quantitative data. The only relevant information was found in Document C, which is a table, and it was graphed in Document F. However, a great deal of irrelevant and misleading information is also available both in the charts and graphs and in various narrative forms. Since both my classes are at the freshman level, I tried to make the extraneous information fairly obvious. My goal was for students to read all the information and figure out what was useful in answering the question, to use only that information, and to be able to explain why they discarded the rest. It was far less tricky and detailed than the crime example we saw in the workshops. Even so, students were by-and-large not very adept at this task.

3. Performance Task Administration
   a. When did you administer the performance task? **Friday, February 6, 2009**
   b. Was the student's score on the assessment calculated in the final grade? If yes, what weight did it have?

   They were told it would count as their midterm exam grade. In actuality, they got credit for doing it as if it were a daily assignment, not a major grade. However, the perception that it would count as a major exam was meant to encourage them to take it seriously, which I believe they did.

4. Student Performance
   a. Identify any consistent strengths you found in student performance.

   The strengths in my students were in their writing. Both the 108s and the 110s were able to put together an argument with a beginning, middle, and end that sounds comfortable for them in a limited amount of time. It was especially heartening to see that the 110s, whom I've taught for two semesters now, are significantly stronger writers than those in 108, which lends credence to their initial placement and to the idea that they have developed since their enrollment at FSU. The 110 students also did a pretty good job of picking out the most relevant information and not relying on the red herrings.

   b. Identify any consistent weaknesses you found in student performance.

   The biggest weakness is consistently taking the evidence at face value. Only a couple of students questioned any of the evidence at all, and none commented on possible bias from the source. Only one recognized that the scales compared in the chart were not comparable (ie, annual income versus total cost). They have been so programmed to accept whatever we give them that they are not likely to try to evaluate the quality of the evidence. This kind of thinking requires an entirely new approach.

   c. (optional) If you reviewed the results with your students, what kind of comments did they make about it? Did they indicate whether they believe their FSU experience is preparing them to take assessments like the CLA?

   I did review the results with students, and they felt much more comfortable with the exam after discussing it. Since my students are all first-years, they did not have much to say about being prepared for this kind of test, except that it was a radical departure for them and that it was much harder than they would have expected, because it required them to think. Except for a few high achievers, most students prefer to stick to bubble-sheet type exams, which they are comfortable with and which have clear answers.

This is probably linked to their age and experience; ie, they are straight out of the K-12 system, where bubble tests are familiar. They did say that the CLA-type test was interesting and kind of fun. My feeling is that they are resistant to change and fearful of their ability to produce in an unfamiliar context, but given opportunities to practice, they will embrace the new way. It is more interactive, more engaging, and more likely to stimulate their education.

I allowed my students to rewrite their responses after discussing them in class, and not surprisingly, their scores improved. Even one opportunity to review and revise produced significant growth; repeated opportunities across their college experience should encourage much more considerable progress in their critical thinking skills.

5. Recommendation and follow up
    a. Knowing that our students' performance on the CLA will be part of our institutional assessment, what will you will do in the courses you teach to address the skills and competencies assessed by the CLA?
    b. What recommendations would you offer for all faculty members?

    The most important change I will make in my own teaching is the same recommendation I have for other faculty: we need to incorporate critical thinking into our courses in a conscious, deliberate fashion. Students need to be taught to evaluate evidence, and they need to be given opportunities to do it. I will be doing more than one of these CLA-type exams each semester, and I will also be asking students to evaluate various kinds of texts for relevance and reliability as we move through the semester rather than allowing them to assume everything I give them is sound.

Please submit your report on your project as soon as possible, but no later than May 1, 2009.