



Assessment Matters

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Critical Thinking Corner

Developing critical thinkers is central to the mission of all educational institutions. By ensuring that students learn to think critically and fairly, we ensure that students not only master essential subject matter, but become effective citizens, capable of reasoning ethically and acting in the public good. To successfully teach critical thinking, it must be woven into curriculum content, structure, and sequence.

Dr. Richard Paul, Director
Center for Critical Thinking

Mission Statement

Bronx Community College serves students of diverse backgrounds, preparations, and aspirations by providing them with an education that is both broad in scope and rigorous in standards.

Our mission is to give our students a foundation and tools for success, whether they choose to continue their education or enter a profession immediately upon graduation, and to instill in them the value of informed and engaged citizenship and service to their communities.

Nothing New About Assessment

All successful companies, small and large businesses, national and international corporations, and even the mom and pop candy stores routinely assess what is profitable and what is stagnating. All successful software and computer operating systems are continually reevaluated and updated by their makers for their usability, responsiveness, and adaptability. In American higher education, however, assessment of student learning struggles for respect and acceptance. Assessment of student learning is sometimes viewed with suspicion, carrying the same aversion as the scarlet "A" stitched into Hester Prynne's dresses. But there is nothing new or unique or distressing about assessment. The ongoing process of outcomes assessment offers faculty the opportunity to improve weaknesses or shortcomings in their students' general education skills that are so necessary to succeed academically, professionally, and personally. In a now-famous quote by Barbara E. Walvoord, assessment

of student learning is, "the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning." We encourage nothing more, but also nothing less.

General Education at BCC

General education (or GenEd) normally refers to those courses that are required of all or most undergraduate students at a higher education institution. According to the Middle States Commission of Higher Education's *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, "A general education program—developed, owned, and reviewed by the institution's faculty—should be purposeful, coherent, engaging, and rigorous. General education skills may be taught or developed as part of courses in the major, as separate courses, or through a decentralized distribution. However, the skills and knowledge derived from general education and the major should be



integrated, because general education and study in depth, together, comprise a quality undergraduate education.”

Sometimes referred to as “common core,” general education often includes courses in English, languages, philosophy, art, music, religion, mathematics, and natural and social sciences, and are referred to as general education because they develop cognitive abilities, inspire intellectual and aesthetic growth, develop critical skills, and reflect the academic mission of the college.

At BCC, our seven GenEd proficiencies—*communication, reasoning and analysis, mathematical methods, information literacy, scientific method, personal growth and professional development, and global awareness*—are applied to the curriculum through a decentralized distribution, or a proficiency-based approach, that integrates the general education proficiencies into all areas of the curriculum. Our proficiencies are not confined to any particular course or cluster of courses; rather, they constitute a spectrum of GenEd skills one finds across our courses and programs. For example, an essay in a composition course can surely be assessed for a student’s written communication skills; additionally, the essay might also be used to assess the student’s abilities of reasoning and analysis, his or her knowledge and

practice of global awareness, or even an understanding of the scientific method, depending on the purpose and focus of the essay.

Critical Thinking: Point of View

Our personal and collective points of view are abstracted positions from which we judge the world. They shape our daily interactions with students and colleagues and form the basis for our perceptions of “foreign” peoples and how we interpret their beliefs, cultures, and behaviors. As we all know, the act of viewing is not passive, though some students might think otherwise. Our views arrive—or have already arrived—in our consciousness through cultural biases and generational prejudices, some of which we never recognize or question because they are embedded with the injunction *thou shall not look*. However, unless we teach students to question their perspectives and look beyond the *shall nots* of internal and external forces shaping thought, their thinking will remain limited and short of active discernment. The teachings of the world’s great teachers—from Socrates to Joseph Campbell—challenge our self-imposed restrictions and teach us to look and think once more. BCC’s GenEd proficiencies are designed to establish ways and means of employing critical thinking.

BCC’s GenEd Proficiency: Global Awareness

Several departments incorporate global awareness into their programs and courses. One of the program-level outcomes in the **Department of Biology** is: *apply scientific knowledge to the broader contexts of global ecology and human health*, and a course learning outcome in BIO 12 is *demonstrate an understanding of how industrialization and biotechnology have impacted global ecology and human health*. In the **Department of Health, Physical Education and Wellness**, a unique outcomes assessment has been performed for consecutive semesters across five separate courses. The learning outcomes are inspired from the recommendations of the World Health Organization of the United Nations and reflect its global health policy. In the **Department of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences**, one program-level outcome is: *utilizes knowledge of cultural influences and demonstrates cultural sensitivity when providing care and shows respect for patients’ culture, preferences, values, and needs*. A program-level outcome to be met in the AAS degree program in the **Department of Education and Reading** is: *identify the principles that govern effective interpersonal relations in the school setting*.

These outcomes are designed to broaden our students’ awareness of the global and multi-cultural elements in the discipline, while deepening cultural sensitivities and connectedness. We congratulate the departments for assessing global awareness outcomes in their courses and programs.

Academic assessment is designed:

- To develop the GenEd skills BCC students need.
- To determine if students are achieving the learning outcomes of their courses and programs.
- To allow faculty to uncover redundancies in consecutive courses and/or to link ideas across courses in progressive fashion.
- To discuss new technologies and software.
- To inspire faculty to improve delivery of class ideas and materials.
- To fulfill the mission of the college.
- To strengthen institutional commitment.
- To bring faculty together to discuss students’ needs.
- To keep student learning at the center of BCC.

Faculty Assessment Showcase

Thursday, December 6, 2012

10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Closing the Loop: Using Assessment Data To Improve Student Learning

Center for Teaching, Learning and
Technology
