“A pilot [engineer, nurse, physical therapist, teacher…] can’t get by with just memorizing the facts. How can I know if they’re able to apply what they’re learning in order to make the real-world decisions that are so critical for a professional?”

“A lot of my students are aimed at grad school or law school. And I’ve been trying to incorporate more research-based writing into my classes to help them prepare. How can I tell if it’s working? (Sometimes their work is just so bad that it really feels hopeless.)”

“Students in my advanced class are used to solving problems by plugging numbers into formulas. But I try to teach them how to design experiments which answer real questions—and it’s hard to tell sometimes if they understand what I’m after, let alone if they’re making progress in learning to do this.”

Any thoughtful teacher debates such questions with colleagues—and, all too often, lays awake at night puzzling over the quandaries these questions pose. Yet, when that same teacher “does” assessment, she may approach the task with the same overly simplistic, right-answer mindset that she sees (and is frustrated by) in her students. How can she answer these questions about student learning? Can finding answers to questions like these be at the heart of program assessment?

Lee Shulman, educator and author, wrote “We are limited in our recounting by the instruments we use to count.” He’s right. And assessment which doesn’t provide useful answers to real questions about teaching and learning is assessment that wastes our time.

Individual faculty and entire programs rushed to get assessment plans developed and posted over the last several years, especially in the wake of the 2003 accreditation visit which cited assessment as a significant problem at UND. But in many cases, those first efforts don’t represent our best work, any more than the first classes we developed could be expected to represent our best work as teachers—or our first research ideas represent our best scholarship. Some of those early plans were overly ambitious, committing faculty to collection and analysis of reams of data. Others were scattershot, devising mechanisms for collecting whatever information seemed plausible rather than designed to answer real questions about learning. Some plans have been only partially implemented, or data get collected with no follow-up discussion.

But assessment has not gone away—and it will not. Expectations that we pay careful attention to what students actually learn are growing, not diminishing. As teachers, we may not be in control of externally mandated expectations and requirements, but we certainly can—and should—ensure that the work we do to meet those requirements is genuinely valuable. And, hence, the

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importance of using assessment as an opportunity to do better at work most of us take very seriously: our teaching.

So imagine that you’re that faculty member in Aviation, Teaching & Learning, or Nursing, and you’re worried about your students’ ability to apply what they’re learning in messy, real world situations. You come up with an example of the kind of application question you’d like them to be able to answer, and you try to revise it so the question asks them to use content knowledge, rather than just reciting it. You especially don’t want them to see the assignment as an invitation to “dump” random facts onto the paper in an effort to get at least partial credit. Once you have a model question, you maybe develop more. Perhaps you use one of these questions early in the semester or in the program of study and consider it a “pre-test” of their application skills. You try incorporating more of them into occasional tests, using them as homework problems, or asking groups to wrestle with them as a prelude to class discussion. You make sure that another question – or maybe the same one used for the pre-test – shows up on your final exam, or as a homework problem during the last week in class.

Later, you score student responses with a rubric that correlates with the application skills of concern. Or maybe you read each response and write three or four phrases that sum up what the student has done (and not done) in comparison to how a competent professional should approach the task. Then you look back at your scores or notes from all 28 students to find out how they’re doing overall, and whether you can see a difference between the first and last iteration. Voila – classroom research that answers a question you really care about, while also providing data relevant to a learning outcome (“demonstrates ability to apply knowledge in addressing problems”) mentioned in your program’s assessment plan. Maybe you consider expanding your work into something usable for a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) presentation or publication – thereby benefitting three times from your classroom research project and sharing the insights gained with a larger audience. Or maybe you’re the faculty member who wishes students’ research writing skills were better, and you’ve been spending increasing amounts of class time working on that.

Since you’re teaching a senior level course, you figure your class is one of their last opportunities to learn these things. So you make a list of the writing and research skills that you’re specifically interested in, e.g., “finds relevant articles in professional journals appropriate to the discipline; makes ethical use of outside source material; competently weaves source material into his/her own argument.” You read the stack of final papers written in your class – in which you’ve tried to emphasize these skills. At the same time as you’re reading the papers to grade them for the class, you score each paper, using a numerical score or a summary phrase, on each of the three key skills. You go back through your scores for all students and notice that in fact they’re doing better than you expected on finding articles and at least attempting ethical use. But they really are not able to integrate the source materials with their own ideas.

At an end-of-semester faculty meeting, you mention the little study you did this semester, and an energetic discussion ensues. By the end of the meeting, two other faculty have agreed to be part of your experiment. One teaches a sophomore level class and will begin emphasizing some of the same things in that class, as well as collecting data from the first paper. Your colleague’s findings will tell you if your students really are making any progress over the semesters since, as he points out, what seems like “inadequate integration” in your senior level papers may actually be significant progress from their sophomore level work. The other colleague teaches a second senior level course, and, between the two of you, there could be some continuity, at least for most students, from the first to the second semester of the senior year. Now you not only have useful information about learning in your own course and end-of-program achievement for your majors, but you also have some ideas for addressing the problem with future students and collecting more information which might help you do even better in the future.

And that’s how assessment should work. If we’re not getting information or energy from our discussions about findings, then it’s time to explore better ways to do it. Doing assessment is about teaching well – which is why it remains so central to good pedagogy and practice.

☼ Schedule an SGID for mid-semester feedback ☼

Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) is a confidential feedback process that enables instructors to get frank, useful comments from students on a course that is still in progress. Designed to increase communication between the students and the instructor, with the aim of improving learning in the class, the process uses small group student interviews to identify strengths of the course, areas of student concern, and possible ways to address those concerns. If you request a SGID, a trained faculty facilitator will collect information from your students (taking about 20 minutes of class time), write it up into a report for you, and discuss with you student perceptions regarding their learning in the class. To schedule an SGID, please contact Jana Hollands at jana.hollands@und.edu or 777-4998. For more information on the process, call Anne Kelsch at 7-4233.
Funding Available for Teaching-Related Projects

OID provides funding for faculty instructional and professional development through both Faculty Instructional Development Committee (FIDC) Grants and Flexible Grants. Proposals may be submitted at any time during the academic year and are reviewed on a monthly basis by the FIDC.

FIDC Teaching-Related Travel Grants support faculty involved in teaching-related projects that require travel to professional conferences or workshops. Because travel funds are limited, projects must be directly related to teaching (pedagogy) in higher education. There are two types of teaching-related travel. The first kind of travel involves faculty going to a conference for their pedagogical development and learning about new and innovative teaching approaches that can be brought back to specific classes at UND. The second kind of travel involves faculty making a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research presentation on a teaching method they have conducted research on in their UND classroom.

Faculty wishing to purchase materials or software designed to enhance teaching can apply for FIDC Materials/Software/Minor Equipment Purchase Grants. Generally speaking, materials can be regarded as teaching-related if they are designed to enhance student learning in specific courses or across programs.

Instructional or professional development projects that fall outside FIDC guidelines may qualify for funding through our Flexible Grant program. Flexible grants may be used for group meeting or retreat expenses, outside speaker/consultant fees, and a variety of programs and events designed to enhance student learning.

The Outstanding Faculty Awards Committee has selected the following individuals and departments to receive awards at the Founder's Day Banquet (February 25, 2010):

**UND Foundation Award for Individual Excellence in Teaching**

- **Krista Minnotte, Sociology**
- **Amanda Boyd, Modern & Classical Languages & Literatures**

**UND Foundation/McDermott Award for Excellence in Teaching, Research or Creative Activity & Service**

- **Mary Sens, Pathology**

**UND Foundation/Clifford Award for Graduate or Professional Teaching Excellence**

- **Jason Jensen, Political Science and Public Administration**

**UND Foundation/Clifford Faculty Achievement Award for Outstanding Faculty Development and Service**

- **Tom Steen, Physical Education, Exercise Science & Wellness**

**UND Foundation / Thomas J. Clifford Award for Departmental Excellence in Teaching**

- **Biology Department**

**Fellows of the University Award for Departmental Excellence in Service**

- **Geography Department**

The Academic Advising Committee has also selected the following to receive an award:

**UND Foundation/Karleen Rosaaen Award for Excellence in Academic Advising**

- **Richard "Rocky" Graziano, Aviation**

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On Teaching Lunch Seminar Series

Wed., March 10 (12:00-1:00)    Thinking About Diversity in the Classroom  
River Valley Room  
(register by noon, March 8)

Tues., April 6 (12:30-1:30)    Grade Inflation: An Open Conversation  
River Valley Room  
(register by noon, April 1 )

Wed., April 28 (12:00-1:00)    Innovative Approaches to the Graduate Curriculum  
River Valley Room  
(register by noon, April 26 )

Join us for these informal lunch-time discussion on teaching-related topics of interest to faculty in all disciplines. To register and reserve a lunch, please fill out the online registration form on the OID webpage (oid.und.edu)

Upcoming Deadlines

March 1  
FIDC Summer Instructional Development Professorship Deadline (noon)  
FIDC Online Summer Instructional Development Professorship Deadline (noon)  
FIDC Grant Monthly Deadline (noon)  

April 1  
Summer Mini-Project Grant Deadline  
FIDC Grant Monthly Deadline (noon)  
TwT Workshop application deadline  
Online TwT Workshop application deadline  

May 3  
FIDC Grant Monthly Deadline (noon)  
s should include all requests between May 4-Aug. 31