

ASSESSMENT AND DIVERSITY

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NEW ASSESSMENT AND DIVERSITY UNIT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION



Monica A. Price is Assistant Director of Assessment and Diversity – Distance Education

Photo by: Mike Cuales

It has been nearly two years in the making, but the new **Assessment and Diversity Unit** has been created to assist in leading the Distance Education (DE) assessment efforts as well as in enhancing DE diversity. Due to the foresight of Dr. Tom Miller, Vice Provost of DELTA and Rebecca C. Swanson, Associate Vice Provost of Distance Education Planning and Development, the unit is now being developed to provide support for a myriad of assessment and diversity projects. This new unit presents an exciting opportunity to be of service to NC State University and to the citizens of North Carolina.

As Assistant Director of Assessment and Diversity, I will be working closely with faculty and other university personnel to look at developing more comprehensive assessment methods for DE services and to make more visible the Distance Education assessment tools that professors utilize for student learning. The Assessment and Diversity

Unit is also charged with assessing how DE can serve a more diverse population in accordance with the university's land grant mission. This endeavor will involve meeting with various individuals on campus to develop innovative diversity projects. In the coming months, I look forward to interacting with each of the Distance Education areas regarding how we can help to meet needs in assessment and diversity, including how student assessment of faculty in particular relates to promotion and tenure. In the interim, several activities that are required to build an effective unit are underway. Some of the activities include the following:

1) Scan of the Current Assessment and Diversity Practices — In the spirit of appropriate assessment, it is important to determine what the existing practices are in order to prescribe the best steps forward. I am in the process of conducting an

environmental scan regarding current assessment and diversity practices and would appreciate correspondence expressing your views on assessment and diversity.

We value faculty as the experts in terms of what works best for student instruction. Therefore, it is important that there be venues such as this newsletter through which faculty members can communicate and share existing assessment and diversity techniques. Throughout the year, I will be sharing information in terms of overarching guidelines for assessment, best practices, and other resources.

I am pleased that we have highlighted in our first edition Dr. Martha Scotford, who will share some of her thoughts on Distance Education course assessment as well as some of her diversity practices. Our own University Director of Assessment, Dr. Joni Spurlin has contributed an article about the use of discussion boards in assessment. These articles are not meant to be prescriptive, as assessment must be specific to instructional needs. However, the articles are meant to encourage discussion, debate, and dialogue and to provide possible ways of looking at assessment in terms of what works best in the classroom setting.

(continued on page 4)

BEST PRACTICES

IN

TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED

INSTRUCTION

- "Good practice encourages contacts between students and faculty."
- "Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students."
- "Good practice uses active learning techniques."
- "Good practice gives prompt feedback."
- "Good practice emphasizes time on task."
- "Good practice communicates high expectations."
- "Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning."

From Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever (1996) from Arthur W. Chickering and Stephen C. Ehrmann

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>From the Desk of Rebecca Comles Swanson</i>	2
<i>DE Faculty Viewpoint</i>	3
<i>News Assessment and Diversity Unit (cont.)</i>	4
<i>Faculty Viewpoint (cont.)</i>	5
<i>Use of Discussion Boards for Classroom, Course, or Program Assessment</i>	6
<i>Diversity</i>	7
<i>Conferences/Resources</i>	8

FROM THE DESK OF

Rebecca Cowles Swanson

ASSOCIATE VICE PROVOST—DISTANCE EDUCATION PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Welcome to the first edition of the **Assessment and Diversity Newsletter**. In keeping with NC State's land grant tradition, the Distance Education program provides equal access to learning opportunities for the diverse population represented in North Carolina and beyond. We recognize the value of diverse perspectives in education and in life. We are committed to participation in engagement activities among diverse populations fostering awareness of NC State's educational opportunities offered through DE. Through advising, orientation, and mentoring strategies, we help students at a distance feel welcome and engaged as part of NC State's community of learning.

As Distance Education's Assistant Director for Assessment and Diversity, Monica Price provides leadership and strategic planning for initiatives that encourage diversity. She also directs assessment for DE diversity efforts and student services. These assessment activities help gauge the effectiveness of current DE student services and provide direction for future initiatives. She has developed the information below regarding the surveys that we provide as well as the process by which UEI surveys can be requested. We welcome your comments and suggestions as we continue to develop and refine our efforts in the key areas of assessment and diversity for Distance Education.

Distance Education Assessment

We are really glad to have you as a part of the Distance Education mission. Assessment and Diversity is a new unit designed in part with providing your assessment needs in mind. We provide the following:

- 1) **Distance Education Student Surveys**—We currently take a sample of the Distance Education student population to obtain demographic information, aggregate data on their overall experiences with DE services, and other items relevant to the provision of DE courses and programs. Over time, the survey will include the entire body of DE students.
- 2) **A Distance Education Faculty Survey**—This survey will assist us in gaining a fundamental understanding of faculty experiences with DE.

The Distance Education Unit will automatically send out the DE Student Survey components as well as the DE Faculty Survey because these tools provide feedback to us for responding to the specific needs of our students as well as faculty.

- 3) **The University-wide Evaluation of Instruction (UEI)** - As you are aware, the UEI, is the tool that NC State uses to officially assess instruction. An online version of the UEI is available to instructors through DE as a convenience, but the survey is not automatically sent out to students. Please utilize the request process below in order to have the UEI sent to your students:

Assessment Request Process Reminders

Written department head approval is required to distribute the UEI to your students. We do not distribute or provide access to UEI surveys without written department head approval (by email or letter).

A **UEI Survey Request Form** has been developed to assist in streamlining the survey request process and, at a later date, we will work to more fully automate the process on the Assessment and Diversity website. **Please send an email to request the PDF version of the form to monica_price@ncsu.edu.**

The **UEI Survey Request Form** will collect the needed information in order to process your survey request. In addition, upon your request, we can customize your UEI survey questions in spaces #19-#33, provided that your department has agreed upon the questions to be included.

Thank you for your assistance!



Distance Education Faculty Viewpoint—*Martha Scotford*

Online Courses and Assessment

I have been teaching my History of Graphic Design course online for four years (after eighteen years of the traditional slide-lecture-in-the-dark way). With the online course, I think my role has changed from teaching to facilitating learning. The course is semester-long, with an average of fifty students, about 20% real Distance Education (DE) students (beyond Raleigh). As the course is a humanities elective, I have students from across the university, departmental majors (required course) and students from the professional community. The course is supported by WebCT, and by many wonderful DELTA individuals. The website contains the following: syllabus, handbook, thirty-six lectures with many images, five quizzes, four writing assignments, study aids, a timeline, a map, and extra resources like website links, e-reserves, basic book list, video list, and a glossary.

During these four years, I have been able to respond to many of the students' comments from the annual end-of-semester evaluation sheet, to which I have added questions. Unfortunately, the response rate has been low, which I believe is mostly due to the fact that the survey is online and easily ignored. My questions have targeted specific features of

the course website (linked slide carousels, designer profiles, e-resources, etc.), such as their quality and how often they are used by students. In addition, I asked about effective use of the message board and the discussion group activity; and for open-ended comments on the quality of their online experience and how to improve it.

Based on the comments received, I have changed or added the following features:

- Created PDF files of all the lectures so they are easily printed out.
- Clarified how discussion groups should operate and posted discussion summaries.
- Developed discussion questions to connect historical practices with contemporary ones to emphasize relevancy of course material.
- Created collections of images related to each quiz for easier studying.
- Changed the nature of the quizzes to make cheating more difficult.
- Reduced the value of quizzes in student's total grade to reduce cheating.
- Created short audio files for variety within website information channels.
- Created short videos for 'tours' of significant book design examples,

so multi-paged works are not solely represented by a few pages.

- Created a 60-minute video tour of selections from Special Collections at DH Hill Library to introduce a writing assignment that requires use of Special Collections materials.
- Expanded the variety of videos about design and designers shown on campus (DE students receive videos by mail).
- Developed optional extra credit writing assignments to raise low quiz grades.
- Encouraged use of the message board to develop 'community' by having each student introduce him/herself at the semester start and by asking for comments on the videos as they are shown.

At the course start, I set out guidelines for 'course success' that include:

- My observation that, counterintuitively, it seems to take more effort and discipline to 'attend' an asynchronous online course than to fill a seat three times a week. And, therefore, that students must 'schedule' this course like the others.

(continued on page 5).

THE INPUT AND
VIEWPOINTS OF
FACULTY IN THE
PROCESS OF
BUILDING GREAT
ASSESSMENT IS
NOT ONLY
APPRECIATED, BUT
PARAMOUNT TO THE
SUCCESS OF OUR
PROGRAMS.



New Assess. and Divers. Unit in Distance Education (continued)

II) Summer Institute — I am currently partnering with members of DELTA learning technologies to develop seamless assessment training for new faculty. Learning Technologies already places high emphasis on the assessment of technology with assessment principles being inherent in instructional design. The following good practices or best practices in DE instruction are from an article that has been in existence for several years in the Distance Education arena and will be emphasized in DE instruction. The original article is entitled *Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever* (1996) from Arthur W. Chickering and Stephen C. Ehrmann

1) "Good practice encourages contacts between students and faculty." Opportunities for students

to interact with faculty enhance the ability to learn from mistakes and build on knowledge.

2) "Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students." The 'community of learners' that is thought necessary to enhance the learning process is developed by providing opportunities for students to interact with each other in groups.

3) "Good practice uses active learning techniques." Problem-solving allows students to engage with the learning materials and to create their own learning.

4) "Good practice gives prompt feedback." In order for students to learn from mistakes, instructors should provide quick feedback so that

learning takes place.

5) "Good practice emphasizes time on task." Documents such as a well-designed syllabus help the student to have a sense of timing, especially in the distance world, to know if they are progressing as expected.

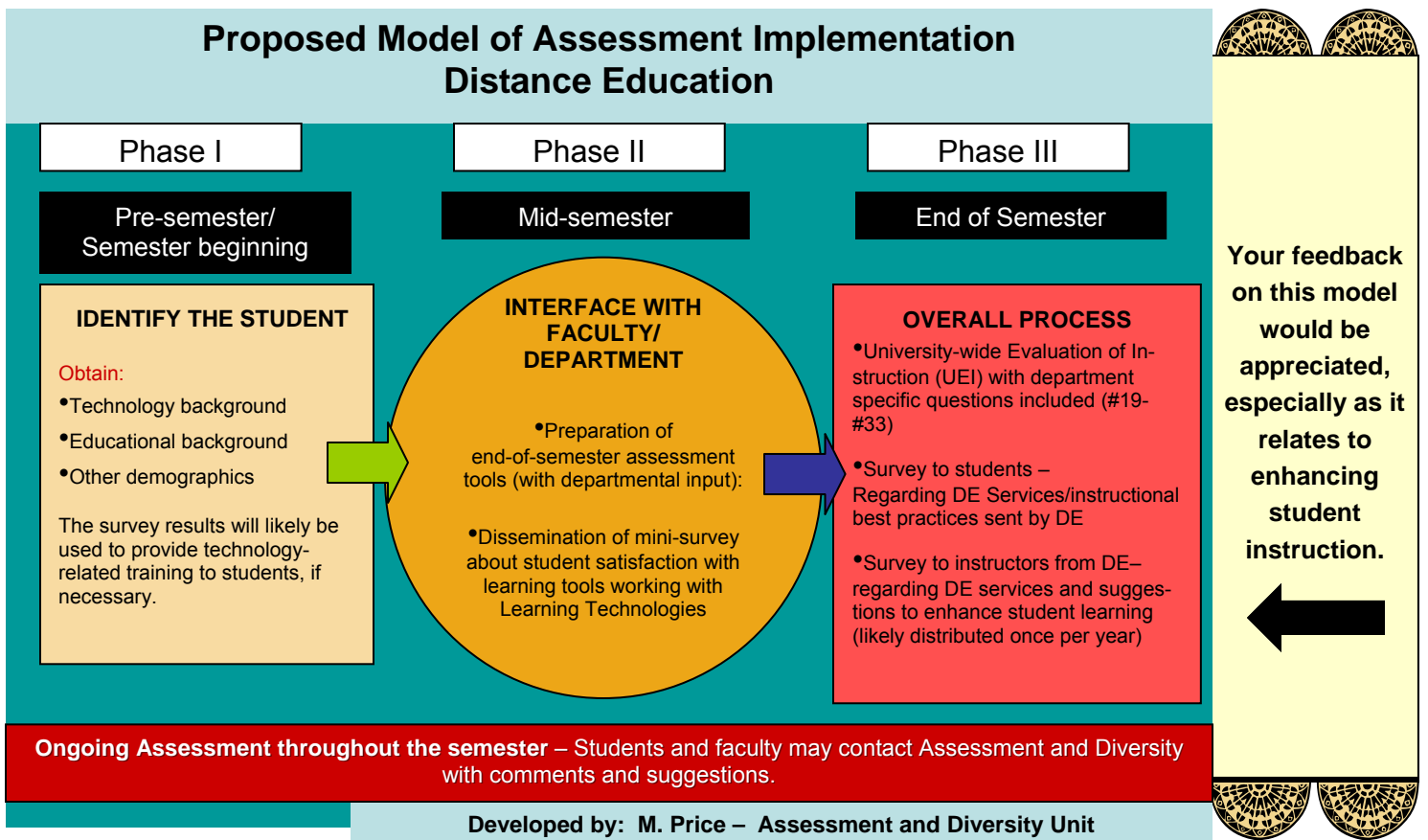
6) "Good practice communicates high expectations." The expectations of the course should indicate the need for academic rigor.

7) "Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning." Students learn in different ways. The instructor can help facilitate student learning by providing various experiences and methods through which learning can occur.

III) Formative Assessment—Finally, assessment will best assist our processes

if it is structured in a formative way, clearly providing feedback during the course of the semester that will help us to identify areas that may need adapting. A staggered scheduled of assessment delivery will help us not to overwhelm our students with surveys, but to collect useful information. The model below is a likely process that will allow us to gather information in a timely manner. I have worked with the DELTA team to develop a new survey for DE that collects a wealth of demographic information on our students as well as more information on our services. Timely assessment helps to empower us for continuous improvement.

Once again, I am very excited about this great opportunity and I look forward to working with you. ■





Campus Box 7113
Raleigh, NC 27695

Phone: 919-515-9030
Fax: 919-515-6668
E-mail:
monica_price@ncsu.edu

- My suggestion that students take the time early in the semester to visit and understand the full resources of the website so help can be found quickly when needed.
- My suggestion that regular and frequent visits to the course website are required to keep up with communications from me as well as course material.

However, in the end, for all the suggestions toward success and special features to create an effective and responsive learning environment and a friendly online community, some students just don't like taking online classes.

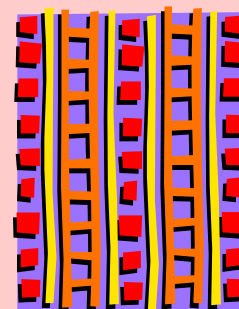
Regarding my assessment of students, there are three components to their final grade: 40% from five quizzes, 50% from four writing assignments and 10% from discussion group participation. The quizzes are created with Respondus software and contain many images about which they are asked questions. The students have 12 hours of access during which they have 30 minutes to complete the quiz (it is timed but they are not cut off if they go over). The four writing assignments are 3-5 page papers, half requiring research and half based on their own observations and/or interpretations. For those papers requiring observation/interpretation, students choose an example from a group of ten appropriate examples. Some of the writing assignments are different for design/art majors

and non-majors. For the assignments posted later to the website, submissions were online as were my comments for revision; otherwise papers are submitted as hard copy. The discussion sessions are posted to the message board as a summary; the task of summarizing is passed within the group of about eight students. Students are expected to participate in five of six discussions for full credit. I sometimes comment on but do not further evaluate the quality of the discussions. The balance of the three components was arrived at through some trial and error. Some students are better at writing than test taking; the range of students in and out of design/art makes the playing field of the course bumpy. Extra credit options address some weaknesses. As well, less overall value to quizzes reduces (the theory goes) the motivation to cheat. I lay down the Honor Code and my belief in their integrity early in the course; after that it is their choice. The short timeframe of the quiz makes it harder to reference notes and outside sources. The grades tend to follow a natural curve, which I take to mean they are not cheating (a lot) or they are very clever at it.

Issues of diversity are inherent in historical study. An early lecture discusses developments in history writing and responses to feminist history as well as critiques related to minority and non-western cultures. Where possible, based on available materials, the lectures sup-

plement the limitations of the textbook by addressing the contributions of women and African-American designers and design practices in two non-western countries, Japan and China. In these countries, economic development has created modern design communities and mass media. ■

Martha Scotford is a professor of Graphic Design at NC State.



Many faculty are using discussion boards in their courses to encourage communication and critical thinking. For this article, discussion boards are defined as asynchronous, structured methods that allow students to discuss course content or work on group projects. This article addresses how faculty can use discussion boards as part of their classroom assessment, course assessment or program assessment. What are the differences in these types of assessment processes and how can discussion boards be used for each?

Classroom assessment is used to get immediate feedback from students to ensure that they are learning what the faculty is teaching. Angelo and Cross (1993) developed Classroom Assessment Techniques (CAT), many of which are based on asking the students one or two questions to assess their level of knowledge and understanding of the material. In face-to-face classroom settings, this is usually done during class. For example, the Minute Paper is a well-known CAT. The Minute Paper technique asks the students to write down a short statement about the most significant things the student has learned during the session. By examining the Minute Papers at that time or at the end of the class period, the faculty can immediately identify material that needs more attention. The faculty can then, immediately, provide additional material or lectures on misunderstood concepts.

The discussion board can be used for classroom assessment by using the Classroom Assessment Techniques (CAT). The questions that the faculty asks the students to address in the discussion board can be any that are traditionally used in face-to-face classrooms. Some common CATs can be found at <http://www.siue.edu/%7Ededer/asses/catmain.html>. Traditionally, the CAT responses are anonymous. But the discussion board could be

structured so that each student responds to a specific topic and other students can then comment on the “correctness” of the knowledge of all students. This allows other students to be teachers as well as learners. The use of the appropriate CAT technique in conjunction with the discussion board will result in the faculty member being able to quickly determine how well the students, as a whole, understand the concepts in question.

Course assessment is more concerned with how well students are meeting the course objectives and outcomes. Many times, course outcomes are related to how well students can think critically or communicate within that field of study. These outcomes are well suited to assessment through examination of the students’ discussion. The faculty can design a rubric (a set of criteria) to measure how critically students are thinking and apply that rubric to one or two discussion boards. One type of holistic rubric that is known in the field of critical thinking is one developed by Facione and Facione, 1994: <http://www.insightassessment.com/HCTSR.html>. One could apply this rubric to a set of discussion board outputs developed near the end of the course to assess the students’ level of critical thinking. This assessment is not intended to give individual students a grade but to assess how well students can think critically in the field; to measure how well students, as a whole, can meet the course outcomes. One could also look at these outcomes developmentally, by using the rubric on a set of discussions at the beginning of the course as compared to a set of discussions at the end of the course. Have the students grown in their abilities by the end of the course? Is there change over time?

Program assessment is concerned with how well students are meeting the specific discipline’s learning outcomes. This would be relevant to

those courses that have a component of the program’s learning outcome as one or more of the course outcomes. As discussed under course assessment, the faculty would design a rubric or other criteria to assess the program outcome and use the content within the discussion board as the evidence against which to apply the rubric or criteria. An outcome that is used in many programs relates to communication skills. An example of a rubric that could be used to assess communication skills can be found at: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~drmartin/rubric.htm>. The faculty can use this type of rubric on a series of discussion boards to assess students’ ability to communicate through writing. The use of the results for program assessment would occur when the faculty gave the overall score from the rubric, averaged across all students, to those who are coordinating the efforts of the program assessment. This would be one piece of data that could be used in an overall discussion on how well students meet program outcomes.

In summary, discussion boards can be used not only as a method that allows students to discuss course content, but also as an effective assessment tool, depending on the need of the faculty.

For more information about this topic, please feel free to contact Joni Spurlin at Joni_Spurlin@ncsu.edu.

References:

- Angelo, TA. And Cross, P.K. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques. A handbook for college teachers (2nd Edition)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Peter A. Facione, Noreen C. Facione, (1994). *The Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric*. The California Academic Press. ■

Diversity is inherently important and, at its core, is about individuals valuing differences. The only way to break the cycle of prejudice is to challenge the stereotypes. Different experiences, perspectives, and beliefs can often lead to greater understanding. Fundamentally, how well we work with others will determine how productive we ultimately can become. Just think, if we were all alike, then we would have the same viewpoint, the same weaknesses, and, ultimately, likely make the same mistakes. Scholarly debate for sake of a good argument would not exist! Differences can bring strength. The key is that respect is important regardless of the factors that make us diverse. The following are a few things that you can do to promote diversity in your area.

- **Host a 'Diversity Dialogue' at lunch time.** Invite colleagues to bring a brown bag lunch to hear various topics surrounding diversity. Many partners from around the campus would gladly come to discuss various diversity topics.
- **When there is a problem valuing diversity, address it.** Matters of not valuing diversity that go unaddressed tend to get worse. As soon as a problem with valuing diversity is identified, it should be dealt with appropriately. On some occasions, an open dialogue among colleagues will help. In other occasions, assistance from sources such as the Equal Employment Office may be necessary.
- **Develop programs to involve young people of diverse backgrounds in your academic area.** The only way to ensure that there will be a continual supply of bright, diverse individuals to attend NC State University is to nurture their academic growth and development before they are of college age. Evaluate your programs to insure that diversity is present and develop programs that ensure a future of diversity.

If you would like to collaborate with the Assessment and Diversity Unit in Distance Education on any of these areas, please feel free to contact us.

Books and Literature to Review



Affirmative Action has long been associated with giving minorities an advantage in hiring that is perceived by some as unfair. Ira Katznelson, in his book, *When Affirmative Action Was White* looks at various programs that have been developed throughout the years that he says have actually served to widen the gap between 'white and black living standards' not 'level the playing field' or correct past wrongs. Read Katznelson's book to see if you agree with his perspective. **ISBN 0-393-05213-3**

ASSESSMENT AND DIVERSITY NEWSLETTER

We hope that you have found this first edition of the *Assessment and Diversity Newsletter* of value to you. If you have suggestions, articles relevant to assessment and diversity, or comments that you would like to submit for future editions of this publication, please send your request to the editor at monica_price@ncsu.edu.

Thank you.

CONFERENCES TO ATTEND/RESOURCES—ASSESSMENT AND DIVERSITY

The following are a few conferences/resources in which you might be interested (for both assessment and diversity) that have been suggested by Dr. Karrie Dixon and Dr. Joni Spurlin:

- **Symposium on the Recruitment and Retention of Students of Color**—Presented by Noel Levitz - April 23-35, 2006, Embassy Suites, Kansas City, MO

For more information contact:
Robert N. Page, Jr., rpage@ku.edu,
(785) 864-4351

- Although the conference has already occurred for this year, the **Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) Assessment Institute** comes recommended—visit <http://www.planning.iupui.edu/conferences/national/nationalconf.html> for details.

- **Join an assessment listserv** to receive additional information on assessment—visit <http://lsv.uky.edu/archives/assess.html> for instructions.
- **REMINDER:** The UNC Teaching and Learning with Technology (TLT) Conference will be held **March 15-17, 2006 in Raleigh**—visit <http://conference.unctl.org/> for details.

Submit your conference and resource suggestions to monica_price@ncsu.edu for publication in the newsletter.

NC STATE UNIVERSITY



Campus Box 7113
Raleigh, NC 27695

Phone: 919-515-9030
Fax: 919-515-6668
E-mail: monica_price@ncsu.edu