

Tipping Point: An Update on Progress
College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences

March, 2009

1. Recent examples of how assessment feedback has been used to modify activities for continuous improvement

- **The Value of Reflection in the Assessment Cycle:** One goal of assessment is intentional reflection in the service of improvement. An example of the value of this reflection involves the development of CLASS's assessment of advising program. The program is being developed and implemented by the College's Learning and Teaching committee. In our discussions, that involved as a first step the cataloging of current and best advising practices in the College, we discovered that new faculty did not think that advising workshops provided the detailed, departmentally based information they needed in order to be as effective as they could be. As a result the Learning and Teaching committee is now holding one meeting a month, open to all CLASS faculty, to address advising concerns. Meetings will vary from discussions of general questions about advising students in the humanities, social sciences, and performing arts, to case-based discussions drawn from particular disciplines in CLASS. We will assess the effectiveness of these meetings in the spring of 2010. One immediate result of our first discussion is that we realized the need to have and communicate clear expectations to students about what is required of them to be prepared for an advising session. (This aspect of our assessment practices overlaps with section two of the update--encouraging students to take charge of their own learning.)
- Most departments in CLASS track and analyze students concerns about their programs as part of the ongoing assessment cycle. History and Theatre serve as a representative sample of the kind of changes made on the basis of analysis of student feedback.

History: Based on the student responses to the exit questionnaire, the Department has made adjustments in its schedule of core classes, increasing the number of Methods and Historiography sections during the three quarters and varying their day and time schedules to facilitate student progress and time to graduation. History also shifted three qualified adjunct faculty into assignments that have helped them maintain a full range of European and US course offerings after the retirement of tenured faculty reduced their staffing below the minimum necessary levels. Students in the last assessment reported satisfaction with the variety of options at a higher level than before, which indicates the success of this temporary measure.

Theatre: As a result of Post-Production surveys, more efficient modes of communication between the different branches of production teams have been implemented. These include meetings between designers and directors during the previous quarter, greater accountability for each production job taken on by students, and more e-mail communication identifying production needs-production events-student responsibilities. As a result of Post-Production All Department Meetings, policy changes regarding student behavior during productions were enacted including a required signature from every student that s/he accepts the terms and consequences of the policy.

- As part of the department of Philosophy's most recent program assessment (2007-2009 cycle) the department decided to scrap the format of its existing Senior Seminar, a team taught, four unit seminar course that focuses on a topic of faculty interest, in favor of an eight unit, two quarter

senior thesis requirement. Data from the department's writing assessment rubric revealed that student writing in the existing senior seminar was consistently below departmental expectations, and often individuals did not perform as well on the capstone term paper as the department knew they could. There are many reasons for this, but two important ones concern the time the course was offered (Spring) and the fact that students were asked to engage in a capstone experience that often had little to do with their interests. To rectify these problems the new courses will be offered Fall and Winter and will focus on the writing of a senior thesis on a topic of the student's choice with close supervision of the faculty. To further engage students in the activity, students will be encouraged to submit their senior thesis to an appropriate undergraduate journal or conference. Assessment of this program change will take place over the next two years. (This example of assessment for continuous improvement overlaps with section two—encouraging students to take charge of their own learning—and section four of the update—effective methods used to measure student learning (vs. what is taught).)

- CLASS's First Year Experience (FYE) program has assessed basic issues concerning students' knowledge of literary genres for both of the two years of the program's existence. A consistent finding is that a surprising number of students (approximately 30% both years) do not seem to know the difference between novels and expository prose. To address this problem the FYE program will be including a module on literary genres beginning Fall 2009.

2. Recent examples of measures taken to encourage students to take charge of their learning

- The department of Psychology and Sociology instituted a Peer Mentor program in 2007. Peer mentors take a yearlong course in which they investigate the literature on peer mentoring, and serve as peer mentors for incoming students. The program has led both mentors and mentees to take responsibility for their own learning. Journals, required of all mentors in the program, provide striking evidence of mentors developing a real commitment to Cal Poly Pomona and, as part of that commitment, and as part of their identity as a peer mentor, a serious sense of the importance of being an intentional learner responsible for their own success at Cal Poly Pomona. Moreover, there is an increase in the GPA of mentors in the quarters after they become mentors. This too suggests that the mentors are taking more responsibility for their academic success. There is also evidence that mentees take more responsibility for their academic success, although it seems to be the case that a bit of prodding by both faculty and mentors is needed to ensure this outcome. During the first year of the program both the faculty advisor for the program, Mary Danico, and the mentors (mentors are required to keep track of the number of students they see and the reason for the visit) noted that not nearly as many students made use of the services the mentors provided as they had expected. This led to changes in the program—a more intrusive faculty effort to urge students during office visits, via email, and by phone to make use of the peer mentors, and better mentor training. The net effect of these changes has been a marked increase in the number of students interacting with their mentors. (This example overlaps with section one of the update—using assessment data for continuous improvement.)

3. Recent examples of effective methods used to measure customer satisfaction

NA

4. Recent examples of effective methods used to measure student learning (vs. what is taught)

See sections one and two for examples.