Writing Portfolios as a Value-Added Mechanism for Assessment and Faculty Development

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Abstract

Carleton College recently implemented of a sophomore-level writing portfolio to assess student writing in a WAC environment. Presenters will provide specific examples of value-added effects to show how an assessment project targeted at a particular curricular/pedagogical problem can serve as inspiration and research archive for additional projects. To date, the Carleton writing portfolio has supported investigations of information literacy, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning in addition to its original purposes of assessing student writing and improving WAC pedagogy through faculty development.

Narrative

The problem: Carleton has a long-established writing requirement as part of its curriculum. Since the mid-1970s, the writing requirement has taken the form of writing across the curriculum (WAC) in the sense that responsibility for writing instruction has been distributed among departments offering introductory courses and special writing-rich (WR) seminars for first-year students. Students write a great deal in their courses at Carleton, and survey data tell us that students see themselves as improved writers after four years. However, until recently, the College was unable to describe students' writing experience and their level of proficiency with any degree of precision. While writing was valued and thoroughly integrated into the curriculum, the amount and kind of writing was not well documented. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence from faculty seemed to indicate a perceived decline in student skills, although that perception could not be tested against specific criteria for writing proficiency. While decrying this apparent decline, faculty lamented that they were not equipped to provide the instruction that would set things right.

The solution: This session provides historical background for Carleton's recent implementation of a sophomore-level writing portfolio to assess student writing in a WAC environment. The portfolio has knit together faculty development and curriculum in value-added ways, which will be explained in detail during the session. Faculty and administrators concerned about the perennial problem of "faculty buy-in" will be interested in Carleton's story. One of our recent findings: During the 2003-04 academic year, 41.5% of our tenured and tenure-track faculty participated in faculty development activities related to portfolio assessment. Active participation in

assessment, therefore, has strengthened faculty commitment to teaching and learning via writing pedagogy.

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Goals for the session: Participants will be able to examine the materials Carleton has developed to assess student writing, including the scoring guides used in rating sessions, and clear directions to a web site that can be accessed after the session. Small groups will discuss their institutional needs vis-à-vis writing assessment and possible applications of Carleton's materials to their situations. Presenters will participate in small groups and offer feedback as appropriate.

Timetable: The 75-minute session will be divided as follows: 30 minutes of presentation, 30 minutes of small-group discussion, 10 minutes of writing and consolidation of discussion, 5 minutes of evaluation and wrap-up.