

Chapter XIX: SCHOLARSHIP OF ASSESSMENT GRANTS

Last year the *Assessment Almanac* chapter on the Assessment Grants reported on the number of approved grant proposals from Summer 2004. This year's chapter includes an update on the 2004 Grants as well as a preview of what the Summer 2005 Grant recipients will finish in December 2005.

UPDATE: Summer 2004 Assessment Grants:

There were five Assessment Grants awarded in 2004 to ten Truman faculty and staff:

1. Teaching HIST 231 Introduction to History and Historiography as an Extended Truman Week Class
2. Promoting Student Success: Development and Assessment of an Early Identification Model
3. Developing Authentic Assessment for Formative and Summative Graduate Student Evaluation in Communication Disorders
4. Mathematics Placement: Assessing and Revising Truman's Current System for Assigning First-Year Students to Their Introductory Mathematics Course
5. Pilot of Collegial Review of Student Writing

Results from three of the grants were presented at a campus-wide forum, and all final reports were posted online for the campus community to read. The posting of the reports was done in large part by a Spring 2005 Assessment Intern: an undergraduate student earning 4 hours of credit under the assessment program to learn about assessment and help improve assessment at Truman (see Chapter XX for more information). The Intern worked on making the reports easy to read by creating an interactive table of contents and posting the abstracts. The full reports can be viewed at <http://assessment.truman.edu/grants/2004.htm>.

The first project, Teaching HIST 231, tried to answer two questions: a) has the three-year experiment of teaching HIST 231: Introduction to History and Historiography as an Extended Truman Week (ETW) course enhanced student success in the major?, and b) has that success translated into better student retention to the University in general and the History major in particular? HIST 231 is a required course for History majors. Traditionally, sections of the course are offered to sophomore majors. A few sections were recently created for incoming first-year students to see if the History majors benefit from an early exposure to the material. The researchers found that first-year students who took HIST 231 as an ETW course did not exhibit higher success/performance in the History major or higher retention rates than those students who took HIST 231 as sophomores. However, first-year students did note that taking the course as a freshman was a valuable experience and they were grateful to have been prepared for upper-level classes. The researchers plan to conduct further analyses and inquiries during the 2005-2006 academic year to verify or disclaim their findings.

The purpose of the second grant project, Promoting Student Success, was to develop a system for early identification of students at risk of academic failure that incorporates both cognitive and non-cognitive factors. The non-cognitive factors come from the College Success Factors Index (CSFI), which evaluates eight relevant areas (responsibility/control, competition, task precision, expectations, wellness, time management, college involvement, and family involvement). The researchers used ACT scores, high school rank and GPA, and number of grades at or below C as their cognitive factors. Researchers found that students on probation had a significantly higher number of high school Cs, Ds, and Fs, were lower in high school rank, and had a lower high school GPA than students who were not on probation. A discriminant analysis showed that the CSFI score and number of high school Cs, Ds, and Fs were the

most reliable predictors of which students were likely to end up on academic probation at Truman. The researchers applied for and received a 2005 Assessment Grant to continue their project.

Faculty from the Communication Disorders (CMDS) discipline re-evaluated the formative and summative assessment tools and procedures in use by the CMDS graduate program and updated them with more effective alternatives. The researchers developed a Clinical Process Commentary (CPC) for graduating master's students and will require it of all their students entering the program as of Fall 2005. The CPC is replacing the Comprehensive Exam in Communication Disorders. Faculty believe that the CPC will provide them with pertinent information on their graduates that can be used for curriculum improvement and assessment of the program. The CPC involves a sequence of three projects: a) clinical process commentaries #1 and #2; b) responses to clinical process writing prompts; and, c) a portfolio of key assignments. The CPC will be required at two different points. Results will be gathered and comparisons made between the two tracks for master's students: thesis or non-thesis.

Mathematics placement is an important element of students' first-year experiences at Truman, and one faculty member received a Grant in 2004 to investigate the placement process. The researcher's goal was to determine the best way to place students in their first mathematics course that will result in the highest success for the students. The researcher found that although none of the models considered in this analysis were able to reliably predict a student's actual grade in their first mathematics class, the models were able to give reasonable predictions of success and failure for the various classes. The best predictors were students' high school mathematics GPAs and the ACT: Mathematics score. Further, Truman's placement exam was useful in placing students into the correct level of calculus because of its inclusion of trigonometric problem sets. The researcher recommends that Truman use the models developed in this study for mathematics placement of incoming students.

The final Grant issued in 2004 involved Truman's new writing assessment. The Grant provided funding for the collegial review of student writing: one of the three prongs of Truman's writing assessment. (For more on the writing assessment, see Chapter XV.) Faculty participating in this pilot of the collegial review appreciated the process. They said it allowed for the free exchange of ideas, showed that the University supports writing and writing-enhanced courses, it validated what they were doing in their classrooms, and was a beneficial collegial and learning experience. The Grant recipient went further and said this approach to professional inquiry has much to offer Truman, supports many of our ongoing activities, is consistent with Truman's goals, and has the potential of expanding our sense of the meaning and range of assessment. The challenges in implementing this project are largely ones of time and resources.

Overall, the 2004 Grants were very meaningful.

Summer 2005 Assessment Grants:

The third year of Scholarship of Assessment Grants were awarded in Spring 2005 for projects to be conducted during the summer. The Grants provide an opportunity for faculty and staff at Truman to conduct research using institutional, divisional, or discipline assessment data. The Grants are directed toward two basic goals: 1) to improve the quality of student learning and development at Truman, and 2) to enhance the culture of assessment through faculty and staff participation in assessment research and scholarship.

As in the past, the 2005 Grant recipients were required to turn in a preliminary report and a final report to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Preliminary reports were due on September 1, 2005 and the final reports are due on December 1, 2005. The goal is for each of the 2005 Grant recipients

to present their findings at a campus-wide forum. The researcher on The JINS Effect did so at the October Assessment Colloquium. The recipients of the Promoting Student Success Grant will likely present their results in Spring 2006.

Funding in 2005 was unchanged. Faculty and staff proposing the grants could request up to \$1,000 for a single-investigator project, \$1,500 for two investigators, and \$2,000 for three or more investigators. The proposals were rated for clarity of purpose, appropriateness to the grant purposes, project description, timeline feasibility, application of results, intended communication of results, and benefits to student learning. In 2005, two Scholarship of Assessment Grants were awarded to a total of one faculty, three staff, and two graduate teaching/research assistants. Funded projects were:

1. Assessment of JINS Outcomes: The JINS Effect
2. Promoting Student Success: Development and Assessment of an Effective Intervention System

The JINS investigation involves studying the effects of the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar (JINS) course on students' abilities to identify interdisciplinary thinking. Do students who have taken JINS courses identify interdisciplinarity at a more accurate rate than students who have not? Comparisons between student and faculty responses from the University Portfolio Interdisciplinary Thinking prompt will also be made.

The Promoting Student Success Grant is a follow-up study to last year's conducted by the same investigators. Students on academic probation are required to take a course called Academic Planning and Development (APD). This study will investigate whether or not the APD class is effective in contributing to student academic success. In 2004, the researchers used an instrument called the College Success Factors Index, or CSFI. In 2005, the researchers hope to find out if the CSFI scores improve between the beginning and the end of the APD course.

Since the final reports for the 2005 Grants are due on December 1, 2005, a summary of results will be printed in the next issue of the *Assessment Almanac* in Fall 2006. The reports will also be printed online at <http://assessment.truman.edu/grants/2005.htm> as soon as they are received.