

Out Comes Learning

McHenry County College's Assessment Team Newsletter

A newsletter dedicated to the promotion and recognition of Academic Assessment at MCC

iRespond: An Exciting New Tool for Assessment

Over the summer, MCC purchased an exciting new handheld wireless response technology designed for instantaneous classroom assessment. Known as "iRespond," the technology literally comes packaged in a suitcase which contains thirty handheld computers (resembling Gameboys) and a base station that connects to a computer. In a class using the iRespond technology, each student has a hand-held device at his/her desk and can respond to instructor-designed questions by simply pressing a few buttons. After students in the class respond, instructors then receive an immediate snapshot of student comprehension including the percentage of students who answered each question correctly and the number of incorrect answer choices that were selected or inputted. The process is analogous to the "Ask the Audience" portion of the TV game show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire."

The immediate feedback regarding student comprehension is useful to instructors as it allows us to make instructional decisions that are data-driven. Instead of simply asking "Are there any questions?," hearing no response, and moving on to the next topic on the syllabus, instructors can use the iRespond technology to truly check for understanding. If a large percentage of students incorrectly answer comprehension questions, instructors have an immediate indication that additional activities should be assigned or further time should be spent on the topic, **before** students even leave the classroom. It is a technology designed to aid instructors to intervene in a timely manner instead of discovering belatedly on a midterm or final exam that students just "didn't get it."

The iRespond technology is also a useful tool for course assessment as it allows for simple collection and compilation of student responses. For example, an instructor could easily deliver a pre-test and post-test to students via the iRespond units and immediately enjoy a compiled set of data without having to manually grade student responses. The data are automatically saved to an instructor's H:\ drive and can be accessed and reviewed at a later date.

Additionally, the hand-held devices serve as an aid to students in their self-evaluation of their own understanding. The iRespond assessments provide a useful "self-check" for students, and instructors can use the iRespond software to print out individualized study guides for each student based on their responses and identified gaps in comprehension. Finally, the "game-like" qualities of iRespond technology including active participation and immediate feedback in the classroom adds an intangible touch of excitement that helps to keep students engaged and eager to return.

Faculty interested in using the iRespond technology in their classes can contact Kathleen Plinske, Coordinator of Media Development and Technology Training.



Students using iRespond hand held units.

Our Mission: The mission of the McHenry County College assessment team is to provide support to divisional faculty for learning outcomes assessment. This support will be provided by division liaisons who will communicate information about the assessment and transformation process; coordinate the flow of information; investigate and recommend plans to record, organize, analyze, and report data; and be an advocate for the integration of assessment into the College community for the purpose of improving student learning.

Developing Information Literacy Skills

One of the College's General Education Objectives is "to develop information literacy skills." Information literacy is defined as the ability to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. Information Literacy is the cornerstone of the MCC Library's instructional program, complete with its own mission, goals, and objectives. The reference librarians and several English faculty have worked to integrate information literacy into the College's transfer curriculum by infusing key information literacy goals and objectives into the English composition curriculum. Mainly, we have focused our assessment efforts on the skills to critically evaluate and select appropriate information sources, because through previous assessment efforts, it was found this was one of our goals with which students had the most difficulty.

During the 2004 Spring Semester, the librarians targeted five sections of English 152 for assessment. After students participated in information literacy instruction sessions led by the librarians, the students in these sections were asked to select one source listed on the works cited page of their research papers and to explain how s/he evaluated the source. The librarians assessed these assignments for both the quality of the sources selected as well as the students' ability to articulate how the sources were evaluated.

We found that although students were selecting quality sources, they were not able on the assessment instrument to articulate why they selected the source or how they evaluated the source. During the information literacy instruction sessions conducted for these sections, students did seem to be able to explain orally why a source did or did not

meet the necessary criteria to consider it a quality source appropriate for college level research. Did students simply not make the effort needed on their assignments to explain their reasoning behind their source selection? One of the items on the rubric used to score the assignment assessed students' effort. More than 55% scored poorly on this item. Classroom observation followed by the written assignment leads us to believe students have the ability to select quality resources, but did not make the effort to tell us why they picked the sources they did. To verify this conclusion, we plan to continue our work with the English 152 faculty, and in spring 2005, gather the entire works cited page of students' research papers and analyze the quality of sources they are using.

TracDat Chair Training

On Oct. 8th and 19th all Department Chairs attended a training session facilitated by the Learning Liaisons on the use of a new assessment tool called TracDat. The Chairs were introduced to the software and its capabilities for housing institutional assessment data. Time was spent doing hands-on inputting of each Department's Assessment Report. In the future, more workshops will be held to support the important process of Academic Assessment. It is expected that all Departments will be in the system by the end of November.

Assessment Vocabulary

Goal – A general direction or aim that an organization commits itself to attaining in order to further its mission. Goals are usually expressed in abstract terms, with no time limit for realization.

Objective – A specific achievable outcome of actions taken to achieve a stated goal, expressed in measurable terms and subject to a time limit.

Assessment Procedure Changes in Distance Education

Course or summative assessment is a dual responsibility equally shared among student, instructor and program administrator. At MCC, there has been a slight change in the course/program assessment procedure. Previously, Distance Education asked instructors to paste a message in the Blackboard Announcement Area and encourage their students to complete two specific course/program surveys, a course content one and a technology one. Students anonymously submitted their course content feedback and separately submitted feedback about the technology. Student responses are then held in a blind email account. After grades are posted, responses are segregated and the appropriate student feedback is sent to the appropriate parties: course feedback goes to the instructor and/or Dean (in the case of non-tenured faculty) and the technology feedback to the DE Director. Now, in an effort to improve assessment procedures, DE will post assessment information and the survey link directly in the Announcement Area of Blackboard approximately two weeks before the end of the course. In this way, all students and instructors in the online classroom receive the assessment information on the exact date.