

Assessment Committee
Summary and Interpretation of Faculty/Staff responses to the
Assessment of Student Learning Survey, Spring 2005

Synopsis: The 2005 survey of faculty and staff suggests that we seem to have consolidated awareness and understanding of assessment of student learning. It also suggests that resistance to assessment may no longer be our greatest obstacle; availability of information/resources as well as communication from the assessment committee seem to be the current problem. Respondents' perceptions and involvement in assessment remain at the individual and department level rather than at the college level.

The purpose of this report is to summarize and interpret the results of a survey of Augsburg faculty and staff about the assessment process at Augsburg College. Ninety-eight faculty and staff responded to the survey: 11 are faculty chairs, and 12 are program directors, 57 are faculty members, and 36 are staff members. The number of respondents represents a significant increase over 2004 and a return to the level of 2003.

This report is organized into four sections: I. Background of the Survey; II. Overall Interpretation of Results; III. Item Specific Results; and IV. Next Steps.

I. Background of the Survey

Based on North Central Association's "Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Levels of Implementation" (1 March 2001), this survey of faculty and staff was designed and distributed by the College's Assessment Committee to get baseline evidence of second-stage implementation of assessment—"making progress in implementing assessment programs"—in these three areas: Institutional Culture, Institutional Support (both resources and structures), and Efficacy of Assessment. In an effort to see whether we were developing an institutional sense of "shared responsibility" for assessment, surveys were developed for and distributed to faculty and staff, board and administration, and students.

The first time the survey was given was Spring 2003, and the Assessment Committee's report on those results was finalized in a document dated November 21, 2003; a similar report on the Spring 2004 survey was compiled in Fall 2004. This report focuses on our third iteration of the survey, and much of the analysis will draw comparisons with results from the first two years. As in the past, this report deals only with the faculty/staff survey. The results have been recast to shed light on shared values (institutional culture), awareness of structures and resources (institutional support), and efficacy of assessment at the institutional, departmental, and individual levels of assessment.

There is one striking difference between this year's report and the past two reports: this year we present for comparison the percentages of agreement, disagreement, and neutral/DK responses for each item over the three years of the survey. Doing so enables us to speculate about assessment trends at the college over this critical period.

II. Overall Interpretation of Results

We begin with our perennial caveat: Nowhere on the survey did we define “assessment” for respondents. Consequently, when respondents answer the survey questions, we have no way of knowing what they have in mind. What assessment means for one person may be different than what it means for another. The aim here is to gauge people’s attitudes and ideas about the assessment of student learning for future action. With that noted, what follows is our analysis of the pattern of responses to this year’s survey in light of what we have seen in past years. We use 2003 as our benchmark year.

The survey asked 14 questions about various dimensions of the assessment process at Augsburg College. Most questions are given a Likert scale response pattern, “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree,” “Neutral,” “Agree,” “Strongly Agree,” and “Don’t Know.” As in the past, the results were tabulated into percentage distributions for every response. Once again, to interpret the results, we combined the categories: Strongly Disagree & Disagree, Agree & Strongly Agree, and Neutral & Don’t Know. This year we focused our interpretation of the results on changes over time, most significantly from our benchmark year.

The good news is that the number of respondents rose from 64 in 2004 to 98 in 2005—slightly above the 92 responses in 2003, our benchmark year. But as this report suggests, the increase coincides with some problematic trends in perception and understanding of assessment at the college. Nonetheless, such a significant rise in responses suggests that assessment is—for better or worse—on people’s minds, an important first step in the development of a culture of assessment. We note as well that we remain significantly above benchmark in positive understanding of the “value of the college’s assessment of student learning” and in the perception that “assessment of student learning is valued across the institution (see Questions 1d and 3 below).

Moreover, with a few noteworthy exceptions, the overall response patterns show that faculty and staff awareness of and engagement in assessment remain at benchmark levels. This is the primary finding in this report.

As in the past, the general pattern of responses indicates that faculty and staff respondents may be less aware of efforts toward assessment in areas of the institution that are further away from their daily work lives. Respondents’ perceptions and involvement in assessment continue to resonate more at the individual level and department level than at the college level. However, this year respondents seem more articulate and focused in their questions and concerns about assessment at the institutional level.

Specifically, responses to questions 1b, 1c, 2c, 13, 9c, 10, 11, and 14a appear, in varying degrees, below the benchmark responses of 2003. But in many of these cases there was a shift away from the “Agree” to the “Neutral/DK” categories rather than (or in addition to) the “Disagree” column. Similarly, in these as well as other cases (1d, 4, 7a, 7b, 7c, 8, 9b, and 14b), where there was a decline from 2004, the shift away from agreement was almost always included a significant rise in the “Neutral/DK” category, sometimes alone

and sometimes along with disagreement. At worst this kind of shift suggests confusion and uncertainty, as well as disagreement, about various aspects of assessment of student learning at the college; at best it suggests that the problems have less to do with disagreement about the need for assessment and more to do with conceptual and practical challenges of assessing student learning.

III. Item Specific Results

The survey questions address the assessment processes at Augsburg College at various levels: Questions 1 – 4, and 12 - 14 are questions about assessment at the level of the College; questions 5 - 8 are questions about Departments and Programs; questions 9 - 11 are about Faculty and Staff.

Questions at the Level of the College

1. *“I understand the _____ of the college’s assessment of student learning*

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
	03 04 05	03 04 05	03 04 05
a) <i>“meaning”</i>	60 71 63	7 8 12	31 17 25
b) <i>“goals”</i>	69 74 57	7 10 12	23 13 30
c) <i>“characteristics”</i>	42 49 39	14 20 20	43 29 41
d) <i>“value”</i>	62 75 71	6 6 7	31 16 21

2. *“I’m knowledgeable about the College’s assessment program in terms of its...”*

a) <i>“structures”</i>	39 41 40	31 26 23	30 30 36
b) <i>“components”</i>	41 40 38	28 31 21	31 28 41
c) <i>“timetable”</i>	39 29 28	30 34 27	29 43 45

3. *“Assessment of student learning is valued across the institution.”*

46 49 57	20 19 10	33 26 33
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4. *“The College has a sustainable structure in place for ongoing assessment.”*

35 43 36	22 21 18	42 32 46
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12. “Regular feedback from the Assessment Committee has been provided about department/program plans for assessment.”

27 38 34 27 17 30 46 43 35

13. “Sufficient informational resources have been provided to assist in department or program assessment plan...”

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
	03 04 05	03 04 05	03 04 05
a) “development”	47 50 35	12 17 19	41 30 45
b) “implementation”	43 43 34	15 17 21	42 35 43

14. “Augsburg provides sufficient financial support for assessment in terms of...”

a) ¹ “material needs”	22 20 15	27 64 30	50 54 54
b) “release time”	10 13 10	40 50 41	51 33 48
c) “hiring consultants”	12 16 18	25 22 21	63 60 59

In many of the areas covered by these questions about assessment of student learning “at the level of the college,” we find that responses are at benchmark or exceeding benchmark levels. We are particularly heartened by faculty and staff perceptions that “assessment of student learning is valued across the institution” (#3), which not only exceeded benchmark but, unlike some other important areas, improved significantly since last year. Similarly we note that perceptions of the “value” (#1) of such assessment remains above benchmark despite the drop from last year (see “Overall Interpretation of Results” above). With the proviso that the drop in some areas is split between “disagree” and “neutral/DK” categories suggests something other than resistance to assessment itself (see “Overall Interpretation”), we are concerned about confusion and/or disagreement about the “goals” and “characteristics” of “the college’s assessment of student learning” (#1), the “timetable” for assessment efforts (#2), insufficient resources for “development” and “implementation” of assessment plans at the departmental or program levels (#13), and insufficient funding for “material needs” (#14). While the definitions of terms like *timetable*, *goals*, and *characteristics* have been left up to respondents, the persistent sense of confusion at best and disagreement at worst is troubling. Because the Assessment Committee has been trying to address this persistent problem by, among other things, encouraging personal outreach by the director and consultants to departmental and program chairs and assessment liaisons, the response to question #12 about “feedback from the Assessment Committee” is particularly troubling: the committee is already reconsidering and implementing strategies to improve this outreach.

¹ The response rate for this question is 138%. This appears to be a tabulation error but we have been unable to confirm exactly what happened.

Questions at the Level of the Department/Program

5. *“My department/program considers assessment of student learning to be an integral part of its functioning, not an “add on.”*

<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
03 04 05	03 04 05	03 04 05
63 61 64	19 17 18	16 20 16

6. *“My department has a structure in place for ongoing assessment.”*

50 61 58	24 17 16	23 18 25
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7. *“My department/program is...”*

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
	03 04 05	03 04 05	03 04 05
a) <i>“collecting data”</i>	69 70 67	16 6 13	15 21 19
b) <i>“interpreting data”</i>	42 59 51	20 10 17	38 28 31
c) <i>“using results”</i>	45 64 50	22 12 18	33 22 31

The results in perceptions of assessment of student learning “at the level of the department/program” are in keeping with the kind of responses we are getting from most departments in terms of regular reporting and development/revision of assessment plans—i.e., the activities the committee has been tracking. Most respondents feel their departments and programs have structures in place for “ongoing assessment” of student learning, even though the self-defined understanding of such assessment may not square entirely with the kind of program assessment that the committee and college are encouraging, especially given responses in other areas discussed above. Nonetheless, despite some falling off from 2004, half the respondents claim that their departments and programs are collecting and interpreting data—still significantly above benchmark and rather remarkable given concurrent departmental engagement in other college-wide efforts: further development and implementation of AugCore, development of online curricular components and courses, first-year program development, etc.

Questions at the Level of Individual Faculty/Staff

8. *“I take responsibility to insure student learning is aligned with my department or program’s...”*

	<u>Agree</u>			<u>Disagree</u>			<u>Neutral/DK</u>		
	03	04	05	03	04	05	03	04	05
a) <i>“educational goals”</i>	76	88	81	6	3	6	17	8	12
b) <i>“measurable objectives”</i>	65	70	68	5	6	7	28	21	23

9. *“I am engaged in...”*

a) <i>“collecting data”</i>	75	72	71	19	14	19	4	12	8
b) <i>“interpreting data”</i>	55	66	54	21	20	26	20	12	18
c) <i>“using results”</i>	57	64	57	19	20	24	23	14	17

10. *“I contribute to discussions/activities related to assessment of student learning.”*

	75	74	71	15	10	13	9	16	14
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11. *“These discussions/activities are a resource for my efforts to improve student learning.”*

	66	68	59	15	11	12	17	19	27
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“At the level of the individual” faculty and staff member, we are concerned that there is a perceived drop in “using results” (#9c), in contributing to activities and discussions related to assessment of student learning, and in the value of such discussion and activities for “efforts to improve student learning” (11). In the first and possibly second cases, college-wide concerns with AugCore development and implementation may be distracting faculty and staff from engaging in what they consider assessment of student learning. But the response to the value of such efforts is more troubling, though it is worth noting that the shift in this case was almost entirely from the “agree” to the “neutral/DK” category. Are we offering faculty and staff the programs they need to develop and foster useful assessment of student learning? Are faculty and staff aware of what is available? Are individuals still perceiving assessment as an activity for chairs and liaisons rather than departmental responsibility?

Answers to questions 2d and 13c

This section is based on responses to two questions: 2d asks respondents to identify dimensions of Augsburg's assessment process about which they need more information; 13c is the only part of the survey that offers a written response option to respondents. We highlight responses to these questions because both ask for feedback beyond simple agreement statements. Below we provide the full text of questions 2d and 13c, and our interpretation of the responses.

2d. *“About which of the aforementioned areas [Augsburg assessment structures, components, and timetable] do you feel more information is needed?”*

Once again the overwhelming number of responses are focused either on all elements or single out components and timetable, the latter reinforcing concerns raised by question 2c. Regarding “components,” as we have noted in the past, one problem may be how respondents are interpreting the term “components,” as that term is not defined for respondents. Regarding the “timetable,” we note—as we have in the past—that while AQIP is asking institutions conform to certain rates of progress, the Assessment Committee has agreed that our current goal is to get departments “on board” first, and to facilitate progress when and wherever we can. The Assessment Committee doesn't demand specific time constraints because the variability in expertise, compliance, and involvement is still rather high. Moreover, current trends in assessment of student learning are moving increasingly toward practical and useful forms of assessment around issues that affect the quality of student learning.

13 c. *“What informational resources do you feel are needed to accomplish the aforementioned tasks [development and implementation of department or program plan to assess student learning].”*

Several themes emerged from the written responses to this question: communication, training, resources, and time. They are summarized below. A complete list of actual responses is available upon request.

COMMUNICATION, TRAINING, RESOURCES

As in the past, communication continues to be a consistent theme in the responses to 2d. and 13c. Some respondents have more specific concerns than just that we need “more communication,” though we know that there is still a perceived lack of communication from the Assessment Committee (#12). One problem seems to be the difficulty of communicating with adjuncts as well as training them with regard to assessment of student learning. Indeed the responses call simultaneously for training, including “concrete expectations,” sample plans and activities, and other similar resources, and for alternatives to a one-size-fits-all model. While the Committee has begun to address these issues, we clearly have a lot of work before us. The issue of financial resources came up, but was not an overwhelming concern in these responses.

TIME CONSTRAINTS

At least five respondents mentioned the time constraints that members of the Augsburg community face. This has been an ongoing concern, especially during the period of AugCore's implementation.

IV. Next Steps

This analysis of the 2005 survey of faculty and staff suggests that we seem to have consolidated awareness and understanding of assessment of student learning at the benchmark levels of 2003, when the survey was first distributed. It also suggests that resistance to assessment may no longer be our greatest obstacle: we may need to spend more time getting people the information and resources they need both about Augsburg's assessment goals and about how departments and their members can proceed. We will likely need to continue the broadening of our contacts beyond chairs and assessment liaisons to increase campus-wide understanding of assessment of student learning. Reaching our adjunct and off-campus faculty and staff, as well as recent hires in newly established graduate programs, also poses special challenges for the Committee and departments as well. As for the perennial issue of time, let us hope that familiarity breeds efficacy.