

November 21, 2003  
Lars Christiansen  
Doug Green

Assessment Committee  
Summary and Interpretation of Faculty/Staff responses to the  
*Assessment of Student Learning Survey, Spring 2003*

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. 92 faculty and staff responded to the survey; eight are faculty chairs, and fifteen are program directors.

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. 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.

II. Overall Interpretation of Results

This survey of the Augsburg community on the practice of assessing student learning is an important step in determining how assessment is perceived on our campus. However, 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. With that caveat noted, what follows is our analysis of the pattern of responses to the survey.

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." The results were tabulated into percentage distributions for every response.

To interpret the results, we combined the categories of: Strongly Disagree & Disagree; Agree & Strongly Agree; and Neutral & Don't Know. We looked for patterns in the responses, noting when a majority responded in agreement or disagreement, and when there was no clear agreement across response options.

Generally it appears that Augsburg faculty and staff believe that they are engaged in the process of assessing student learning and contributing to that process at the individual level and department level. As faculty and staff are asked to reflect on assessment at the level of the college, agreement is rarely achieved; there were split responses to various questions about college-level assessment programming. In other words, faculty and staff are able to identify their own efforts in the assessment of student learning, see it less so at the department and program level, and significantly less at the level of the college.

We suggest two interpretations of this pattern. First, 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. Less knowledge about assessment plans at levels of the college may simply be a function of proximity and direct exposure. Second, there may be some confusion between classroom-level and program assessment and how the two relate to each other.

While a small number of respondents seem reasonably satisfied with their understanding of Augsburg's assessment goals, plans, and process, we found three main areas of concern contained within responses to questions 2d and 13c (the only survey questions that allow written responses):

1) Faculty and staff overwhelmingly feel a need for more communication. There is particular interest in information about Augsburg's assessment plan—what in question 2d are called components and structure. But faculty and staff also feel the need for further information about what is meant by assessment of student learning, guidance on how to proceed, and timely, regular feedback about their assessment plans and activities.

2) Many faculty and staff also identify problems with compliance and institutional support: Departments where assessment may be delegated to one person who does not communicate with others, finding common time to work together on assessment, feeling perhaps that assessment right now remains a concern and practice primarily at the individual rather than the program level. Several respondents would like to see resources dedicated to assessment, including personnel, to bolster guidance, collation, and reporting.

3) Faculty and staff also note the problem of time—not having enough of it to do assessment thoroughly at the program level and not having a clear sense of an assessment cycle or timetable here at Augsburg.

### 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 program”*

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
a) <i>“meaning”</i>	60	7	31
b) <i>“goals”</i>	69	7	23
c) <i>“characteristics”</i>	42	14	43
d) <i>“value”</i>	62	6	31

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

a) <i>“structures”</i>	39	31	30
b) <i>“components”</i>	41	28	31
c) <i>“timetable”</i>	39	30	29

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

	46	20	33
--	----	----	----

4. *“The College has a sustainable structure in place for ongoing assessment.”*

	35	22	42
--	----	----	----

12. *“Regular feedback from the Assessment Committee has been provided about department/program plans for assessment.”*

	27	27	46
--	----	----	----

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

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
a) <i>“development”</i>	47	12	41
b) <i>“implementation”</i>	43	15	42

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

a) <i>“material needs”</i>	22	27	60
b) <i>“release time”</i>	10	40	51
c) <i>“hiring consultants”</i>	12	25	63

With the exception of 1 a), b) and d), responses for every question indicate no majority response for any option.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, questions 1c), 4, 12, 13, and 14 indicate that over 40% of respondents gave neutral/don't know responses. Our interpretation is that respondents are unaware of various dimensions of the assessment process at the level of the college, especially the specific concrete characteristics of assessment, and institutional support available for assessment.

To Question 1 -- which asked if respondents understand the meaning, goals, and value of the college's assessment program -- a majority of respondents responded affirmatively. What they didn't understand were the “characteristics” of the program. This indicates that faculty and staff understand the meaning and value of college's assessment in the abstract, but not its particular features.

A final note about Question 12: In order to determine with greater specificity the people who need more feedback from the Assessment Committee, we were interested to know how Chairs and Program Directors responded to this question, in comparison with all respondents. Chairs and Directors responses were: 22% Agree, 30% Disagree, and 48% Neutral/Don't Know. This is almost identical to the general response to this question. Therefore, we found no significant difference between the responses from Chairs and Directors and all respondents.

---

<sup>1</sup> Although results for question 14 do indicate a majority response, that majority answered “neutral/don't know.” This reinforces our interpretation that most respondents are unaware of assessment processes at the level of the college.

**Questions at the level of the Department/Program**

5.	<i>“My department/program considers assessment of student learning to be an integral part of its functioning, not an “add on.”</i>		
	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
	61	19	16
6.	<i>“My department has a structure in place for ongoing assessment.”</i>		
	50	24	23
7.	<i>“My department/program is...”</i>		
a)	<i>“collecting data”</i>	69	16
b)	<i>“interpreting data”</i>	42	20
c)	<i>“using results”</i>	45	22

Except for question 7 b) and c), the responses show a majority agreement to departmental/program efforts toward assessment of student learning. Faculty and staff indicate that departments and programs view assessment as integral, they have created structures for ongoing assessment, and are in the process of collecting data. The exceptional results in 7 b) and c) may reflect the early stages of the assessment process in departments and programs.

**Questions at the level of Individual Faculty/Staff**

8.	<i>“I take responsibility to insure student learning is aligned with my department or program’s...”</i>		
	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
a)	<i>“educational goals”</i>	76	6
b)	<i>“measurable objectives”</i>	65	5
9.	<i>“I am engaged in...”</i>		
a)	<i>“collecting data”</i>	75	19
b)	<i>“interpreting data”</i>	55	21
c)	<i>“using results”</i>	57	19

10.	<i>“I contribute to discussions/activities related to assessment of student learning.”</i>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
		75	15	9
11.	<i>“These discussions/activities are a resource for my efforts to improve student learning.”</i>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral/DK</u>
		66	15	17

These results indicate clear majority agreement in faculty and staff actions to assess student learning.

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?”*

(61 responses to this question were received)	
all	21
components	13
structure	11
timetable	11
none	3
goals	1
clarity	1

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].*

Three major themes emerged from the written responses to this question: Communication, Compliance & Institutional Support, and Time Constraints. They are summarized below. A complete list of actual responses is available upon request.

## COMMUNICATION

### General Communication:

Summary: Communication is a consistent theme in the responses to 2d. and 13c. The communication issues raised by respondents seem to be primarily between the administration and college-level committees and departments, though intradepartmental communication, or lack thereof, clearly has an impact on disseminating institutional assessment plans, objectives, and practices.

### Information:

Summary: These comments indicate the need for more information in a variety of forms. Some would like more general guidelines about assessment practices; some need clarification about the rationale for the assessment process; some are seeking clearer connections between college-level and department-level assessment practices; and others are simply unaware of the process/program in general.

### Guidance:

Summary: These comments articulate a single theme: Respondents would like to be provided with models and tools for assessment, and feedback on current practices. Perhaps faculty and staff don't want to (re)invent assessment programs when some are already in place or available for use.

## COMPLIANCE & INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Summary: There are several related themes articulated here. First is a concern about getting members of the Augsburg community to engage in assessment of student learning. Some voice concern about departments' total unawareness of their charge to do assessment, and lack of interest among some faculty and staff. Some suggest that consultants should be hired to do assessment, while at least one disagrees.

## TIME CONSTRAINTS

Summary: Another major theme was a concern about time constraints that members of the Augsburg community face. Put simply, some respondents expressed concern about adding assessment procedures to their existing responsibilities and the time they take.

#### IV. Next Steps

As stated in the opening section of this report, the purpose of this survey was to formulate baseline data on, and analysis of, the implementation of assessment programs at Augsburg College. In the future, we will refer to these results as we continue to do the following: We are working on ways to disseminate information about the college plan, template, and models. We are in the process of developing a website as one of several strategies for providing better feedback for programs and departments. Second, we will continue gathering and disseminating assessment resources for the same purpose. Finally, we will strive to increase awareness of and support for what's being done—e.g., we will give more timely feedback on reports, and increase committee contact with departments (planned for Feb), etc.