Winners of the 2013-2014 Linda Johnston Excellence in Assessment Award

Congratulations to this year’s winners of the Linda Johnston Excellence in Assessment Award: Ms. Deborah (Debbie) Wolk, Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy, and Mr. Kenneth (Kenny) Wilson, Director of Health Occupations Programs. Debbie and Kenny are being recognized for their commitment to the following:

- Communicating a positive attitude about assessment.
- Helping to foster the concept of assessment at Jefferson College.
- Using a variety of assessment measures and techniques.
- Using results of assessment to impact the curriculum and/or student learning.

Deborah (Debbie) Wolk, Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy

Debbie Wolk regularly communicates a positive attitude about assessment through her collaboration with other faculty in the health occupations programs. Her colleagues describe her as “passionate” about finding new ways to assess not only learning outcomes but program- and institution-level outcomes as well. She is often one of the first to implement a new assessment technique, striving to provide supporting evidence for its practicality and utility. She also looks for assessment measures that help create a positive climate for learning. For example, she uses the Blackboard 9 survey tool as a nonthreatening method to assess students’ learning and satisfaction with their clinical experiences.

As a professor in the Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) program, Debbie is well aware of the role assessment plays in accreditation processes for programs such as hers. She volunteered to serve on the Accreditation Committee so that she could help in the critical work of that committee. She also has served as a mentor for all OTA adjunct faculty who come from a clinical environment to work in higher education. These adjuncts often have minimal experience in formal assessment of outcomes and programs, so Debbie encourages and coaches adjuncts in fulfilling their roles in the assessment process.

Debbie understands the importance of setting measurable goals and of using a variety of assessment measures and techniques. Summative measures she uses include not only tests, quizzes, and performance exams, but also completion of service-learning projects, professional behavior assessments, attendance tracking, journaling, and clinical skills assessment. Debbie employs a variety of formative techniques, as well, including peer assessment,
role-playing, review games, construction of models, and the TurningPoint audience-response system, which she uses to assess understanding both pre- and post-instruction. Many of the questions she asks are further designed to assess the compatibility of students’ learning style preferences with the teaching techniques utilized in class. When advising students, Debbie uses a formal conference record to track student improvement during the semester.

Effective assessment is an ongoing process in which assessment results are used to improve student learning. Debbie regularly utilizes the results found in her assessment efforts to improve instruction. Based on student performance, she has made recommendations for alternate texts and has added elements to courses in order to increase understanding and to appeal to a variety of learning preferences. She uses information gleaned from formative assessments to slow or increase the pace and level of instruction and to look for alternate approaches when the need is indicated. She uses the results of summative assessment to evaluate her own teaching and assessment techniques and to examine topic sequence and cohesiveness of concepts throughout courses and clinical experiences in the OTA program.

According to the Higher Learning Commission, assessment is “more than a response to demands for accountability, more than a means for curricular improvement. Effective assessment is best understood as a strategy for understanding, confirming, and improving student learning.” Debbie demonstrates a commitment to the process of continuous assessment in order to improve student learning.

Kenneth (Kenny) Wilson, Director of Health Occupations Programs

Kenny Wilson developed a positive attitude toward assessment as a physical therapist working in the field, where his patient care plans included a combination of evidence-based treatments as well as treatments that had yielded positive outcomes for his patients in the past. He also created an application for the DASH, a commonly used functional assessment tool in therapy for patients with Disability due to Arm, Shoulder, or Hand injuries. He has brought to Jefferson College his continued excitement about the utilization of assessment to inform decisions.

In the classroom, Kenny uses a variety of classroom assessment techniques (e.g., the TurningPoint audience-response system, Muddiest Point, One-Minute Paper, etc.) to verify students’ understanding of material before proceeding. He continually researches and tries new technologies, such as Adobe Connect, a web-conferencing platform that he has implemented for students’ study sessions. He has also implemented a Bring Your Own Device program so that students may use smart phones, iPads, or e-readers to interact with PowerPoint slides and other teaching materials presented in class.

In his role as Director of Health Occupations Programs, Kenny leads many of the assessment efforts in these programs. He has implemented a new system of course surveys that provide the assessment data needed for improvement as well as for reaccreditation. These surveys help measure students’ mastery of course objectives and will foster utilization of student feedback for continual course improvement. He has also created a template for use by each of the health occupations programs to track students from admission throughout their programs and after graduation. This data will allow faculty and advisory committees to make educated recommendations regarding admission criteria. Further, at his request, many of the health occupations programs are utilizing a healthcare-contextualized Work Keys Assessment upon admission, which will serve as a baseline for comparison when the students graduate from Jefferson College.
In collaboration with Linda Abernathy, Math, Science, and Business Division Chair, Kenny is currently surveying two-year colleges to collect data regarding prerequisites for the Anatomy and Physiology I course to ensure that Jefferson College is in line with typical practices around the country. He is also researching the HAPS (Human Anatomy and Physiology Society) Comprehensive Examination, an outcomes measure established as a standard assessment instrument for two-semester college courses in anatomy and physiology. The intended purpose of the test is to provide a means by which one institution can compare its students’ collective performance with the normalized data accumulated from the results of students at other institutions.

As Director of Health Occupations Programs, Kenny is aware of the various accrediting bodies’ requirements of data to support program changes and decisions, so he is actively involved in the work of the Jefferson College Accreditation Committee. He works continuously to create systems that allow for the collection and analysis of admission and course data to benefit each class, each program, and thereby the College as a whole.

It is clear that Kenny is dedicated to fully participating in a continuous assessment process that will improve student learning. He has demonstrated drive, determination, and commitment in assessment efforts at Jefferson College.

Both Debbie and Kenny will be named on the award plaque located outside the Arts & Sciences Little Theater. Each will be also be awarded a $250 stipend. For more information about the Linda Johnston award, see page 4 of the November 2008 issue of Assessment Update.

Resources for Assessing Learning at Jefferson College

Several assessment resources are available on the Jefferson College Center for Teaching and Learning webpage under the “Assessment” tab.

- Assessment Guidebook
- Institutional Assessment
- Glossary of Assessment Terms
- Action Research
- Closing the Loop
- Collaboration with Missouri Institutions
- Designing and Assessing Student Learning
- Assessing Learning with Student Response Systems
- Creating Expected Learning Outcomes and Corresponding Assessments
- Reporting High Impact Educational Experiences
Quality Matters Training Opportunity

Jefferson College faculty and staff participating in the Quality Matters pilot have completed the first round of training, “Applying the QM Rubric,” and based on the very positive response of workshop participants, the workshop is being offered to others this summer. The workshop has no prerequisites. It is intended for a broad audience and can be taken by anyone who is interested in improving the quality of online course design. The workshop will be offered online and will run from June 9 through June 23. It requires approximately 25 hours total. Anyone who is interested in participating in the training should contact Allan Wamsley, Director of Online Learning and Instructional Technology, by May 15.

For more information
See the official course description at
https://www.qualitymatters.org/professional-development/courses/appqmr

“The training took quite a bit of time, but I learned a lot from it. As a result, I am eager to make improvements to my online courses.”
Andrea St. John, English Professor

“This workshop is very worthwhile; however, it requires a significant time commitment, well beyond ten hours per week. A primary focus of this workshop includes practice in evaluating a sample course using the Quality Matters rubric. By the end of this workshop, participants should be able to apply this same rubric to their Jefferson College online courses.”
Mary Baricevic, Business Administration Professor

“This is a great workshop and I highly recommend it to others. It was a great opportunity to learn about the QM rubric and to explore how it can be applied to my courses.”
Niki Vogelsang, Health Information Technology Instructor

“The QM workshop is worth the time investment. First, the online delivery of the workshop gave me a fresh perspective from the student side. That, along with the rubric, helped me identify a few things to be included or revised in my own courses to improve my students’ experiences.”
Connie Kuchar, Mathematics Professor

“I thought the training was demanding, but also professionally beneficial. I learned some new design techniques that I am going to implement in my online course. I am sure these modifications will make my course a better experience for students. The standards in the QM course gave me a tool or framework to evaluate my course’s design. Alignment between QM standards and the course outcomes helps ensure course effectiveness. I was glad to have had the opportunity to participate.”
Allan Wamsley, Director of Online Learning and Instructional Technology
2013-2014 Assessment Committee

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Michael Booker, Arts & Science Division Chair

Jefferson College
1000 Viking Drive
Hillsboro, MO 63050
(636) 481-3000 / 797-3000
www.jeffco.edu

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