
REACHING THROUGH TEACHING

A NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTING CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE AMONG KENNESAW FACULTY

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CONSIDERING ASSESSMENT

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Some things in life we do because we want to, others because we need to, and still others because we have to. Parallel to that continuum most of us probably have an enjoyment scale that goes from pleasurable, to tolerable, to painful. We go to a play because we want to (pleasurable), to the grocery store because we need to (tolerable), and to the dentist because we have to (painful).

Where on the continuum does assessment of the college experience fall? The word (some would say the "A" word) is on the lips of legislators and educators in every state of the union. About assessment, some say we should *want* to do it, others that we *need* to do it, still others say we *must* do it. Some say we shouldn't do it. Not that assessment is anything new to teaching; it was old hat when Socrates was around. In its purest form, probably few professors would consider it a bad idea. It's just that it goes against the grain to be told that our past efforts have not been enough, and that we *must* become more accountable.

There is a paradox to be transcended. Where is it written that those things we must do will be automatically painful, or that the things we want to do, need to do, and must do are mutually exclusive? There are many things in life we *must* do



that we also enjoy—like walking the family dog, cooking dinner, or doing the preparation required to teach a new course. While a root canal will never become my favorite thing to do, a dentist with a good chairside manner and a commitment to painless dentistry can make even this a tolerable experience.

It looks as though a more viable form of assessment is something we're going to have to do. Must it be painful? Many departments on this campus are already involved in the process, and several of their efforts are described in the pages that follow. Some have decided this is something they need to do to improve their programs, some (dare I say) may even want to.

As you read through this issue, please observe several things: 1) There is a noticeable absence of assessment based solely upon standardized tests. This has

been tried for many decades and has proven inadequate. 2) Assessment is developing as a departmentally based enterprise, with strong faculty involvement. It is not controlled by some external office with no concern for the unique evaluation requirements of disparate major programs. 3) Assessment is perceived by those who are trying it as something which can improve the degree programs. Further, it is used by those who are in the position to make changes, namely, chairs and faculty. On the other hand, some faculty have deep concerns and valid questions over the issue of assessment, especially mandated assessment (See *Point/Counterpoint*, page 6).

Much sharing of ideas is needed, and this issue of *Reaching Through Teaching* is dedicated to promoting dialogue. Questions which have to be asked include: How will assessment be used? Who will do the work and how will it be paid for? Does it threaten academic freedom? What modes of assessment fit varying departmental needs? How can the results of these various modes be tabulated into a meaningful, credible report? I hope you'll read every article, formulate your own questions and solutions, and exchange ideas with the authors and other colleagues. 🍎

While you're reading about assessment, don't overlook the article on page 2 on Howard Shealy, recipient of the 1991 Distinguished Teacher Award.