



Some Thoughts About Program Assessment

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Part 1: Some Propositions



Proposition 1 PA Starts with "Why"

- External accountability as extrinsic motivation: not so good
- Intrinsic motivation (self-interested improvement): good
- External accountability as intrinsic motivation: OK
- Formative assessment first: good



Proposition 2 "Why" Leads to "What" and Vice Versa

- What do you want to find out?
- Why do you want to find it out?
- Ex.: Find out whether our placement system is accurate and valid -----> in order to create stronger learning gains and a better experience for students
- Ex.: Study the consistency of our courses in focus and method -----> in order to ensure that students are having the same general learning experiences and leaving with similar competencies



What Can We Assess?

- **Students' writing and learning** (multiple stages, contexts, genres, etc., in terms of any outcome, scale, or feature)
- **Teachers' practices and performance** (of all kinds, at all levels--response to writing, grading, assignment design, classroom management, etc.)
- **Curriculum** (placement, exemption, course structure, etc.)
- **Behaviors** (e.g., retention in courses, attendance)



Proposition 3 PA can be Focused and Specific

- "How" can be based on resources
- Modest data-collection and analysis can be better than none at all
- Sampling often provides excellent information without a huge effort
- Informal assessment activities can be highly valuable formatively



What Leads to How . . .

- **Gains over time** (longitudinal) require pre- and post-test data, or "benchmarks"—need to consider validity of measure, confounding variables, and the like
- **Groups or treatments:** need to hold two sets of experiences (e.g., courses) constant and vary one by the thing being assessed (e.g., blog interaction focusing on peer revision)
- **Sets of collected data:** need to examine both sets in exactly the same way; when raters are involved, the assessment requires a high level of inter-rater reliability
- **Correlations** (scores, success as independently measured, success as grades, exposure to a curriculum, other measures such as learning style inventories or surveys of engagement, etc.)



Proposition 4 PA Should be Ongoing

- Little sense in bursts of activity with long periods of nothing
- Continuous assessment can provide longitudinal data
- Ongoing PA develops a culture of interest in improvement through self-analysis



Proposition 4 Involve Teachers at All Levels

- Assessment works from the outside in and inside out
- Nothing happens without teachers, classrooms, and students
- Involving teachers creates a climate of trust and engagement



Example

- Program outcome: demonstrate ability to summarize texts effectively and accurately
- Assessment: samples of identical summaries from two courses, pre- and post-course
- Primary trait analysis of samples show poor abilities, plus little improvement in one section and significant improvement in the other (but still not rising to acceptable levels)
- What to do? Work with one teacher? Refine and extend the assessment? Implement training?



Example

- With knowledge of assessment, the teacher in one section begins reflecting on summary
- Notices a crucial relationship between *reading* and summarizing
- Classroom experimentation yields strategies for teaching summary as a reading/writing process
- Classroom assessment can inform PA, or new teacher-development can be implemented from simple observation of results



Reflection in Action (Schön)



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Reflection in Action

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Part Two: Assessing Program Outcomes

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Common Broad Focus of PA

The overarching purpose of program assessment is to indicate the extent to which a program achieves its objectives and outcomes so that the program can use the findings to inform:

- planning and decision-making to improve the program
- revisions of program objectives
- resource allocation and budget requests



Common Process of PA

- A program develops sensible, teachable, assessable **objectives and outcomes** for student learning
- Faculty development helps to **align teaching practices** to these goals and outcomes
- Periodically, the program engages in an **assessment of student learning outcomes** to measure the effectiveness of its instruction *across the board*
- Results lead to new implementation strategies, teacher development, or modification of the objectives and outcomes



Develop Goals/Outcomes

- Identify specific learning outcomes on a programmatic level
- These can vary by course (e.g., ENG 100, ENG 101, ESL sections, etc.)
- Best to create these collectively
- Outcomes are teachable and assessable



Collect Data

- Collect data focusing on the achievement of one or more of the outcomes
- Data can take many forms (samples, pre/post tests, portfolios, teacher judgments or surveys, student self-analysis/reflection, etc.)



Sources of Evidence

Indirect Assessment Direct Assessment

- Grades
 - What they say they learn
 - Content quizzes and tests
 - Peer-group work
 - Performance (quality of products) elsewhere
 - Student evaluations of instruction
 - What other teachers say about the students' work
- **Students' written products**
 - Artifacts of students' processes



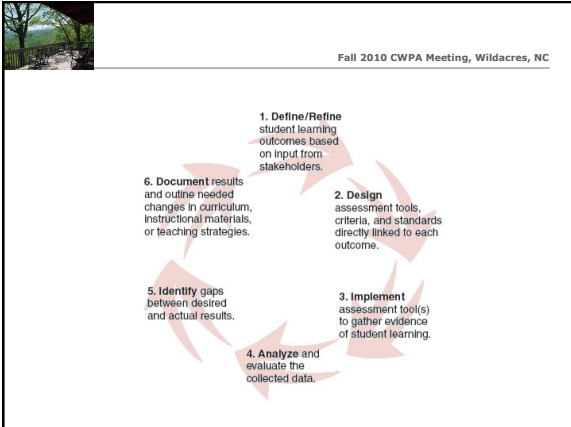
Analyze Data

- Analyze data using appropriate methods
- Methods may require additional steps such as training readers/raters, ensuring inter-rater reliability, running (or getting someone to run) statistics, etc.



Use/Share Results

- Decide what to do with the results
- Dissemination is important (for the "inside-out")
- Implementation strategies might include new training/development, curricular revision, etc.
- Outcomes might also be modified



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- ### Example: NCSU First-Year Writing Program
1. Learn basic principles of rhetoric and develop an understanding of written texts as arguments generated for particular purposes, audiences, and rhetorical contexts.
 2. Examine similarities and differences in forms of inquiry and writing across academic disciplines.
 3. Practice analytical reading strategies and hone the ability to summarize, paraphrase, draw evidence from, synthesize, and respond to the scholarship of others.
 4. Learn to develop original arguments for a range of academic purposes.
 5. Learn to find and evaluate print and electronic source materials appropriate for academic research projects.
 6. Practice critically evaluating their own and others' work and collaborating effectively with other writers throughout the writing process.
 7. Practice and refine technical skills in areas such as grammar, mechanics, and the documentation of source materials.

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- ### Example
- “Examine similarities and differences in forms of inquiry and writing across academic disciplines.”
- Students write projects focusing on science writing, social science writing, and humanities writing.
 - Students read articles that expose them to the forms of discourse in these generalized fields.
 - Discussions focus on ways that inquiry varies across disciplines and how the results of that inquiry are rendered in discipline-specific discourse.



Example: Assessment

- Assessment could focus on the extent to which students "get" the relationship between their reading/writing and the forms and conventions of discourse in the generalized fields.
- Success of the course is based in part on how fully students can mirror practices of inquiry and writing (and how few remain mired in singular discursive habits).
- Outside in: sampling, e.g., with analysis of papers
- Inside out: teacher reports/surveys re: outcome, or teachers submit examples of strong, average, and weak papers



What's Behind Program Assessment of Learning Goals and Outcomes?



"Constructive Alignment"

- Aligns intentions for learning (goals, outcomes, etc.) with what *happens* instructionally and how student learning is *assessed*
- Avoids mismatches between intended (or hoped-for) outcomes of a curriculum, what students experience, and what's measured or evaluated

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Misalignment: Composition Program

Outcome: Be able to write academic papers that structure logical arguments and provide support for assertions

Method: 101 course (whatever/ whoever they happen to get there)

Assessment: passing grade in 101

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Misalignment: English Department

Outcome: Be able to write clearly and competently for audiences in the chosen subfield

Method: Lots of writing across the major

Assessment: Senior English Dept. writing exam, narrative genre, scored for correctness, presence of thesis, and organization

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Misalignment: History Department

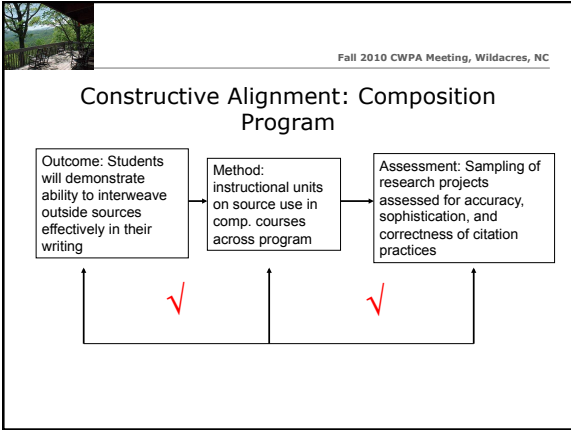
Outcome: Be able to think critically about historical events and understand that history is inscribed and socially constructed

Method: Lectures textbook readings across all courses

Assessment: Ability to identify events correctly in history

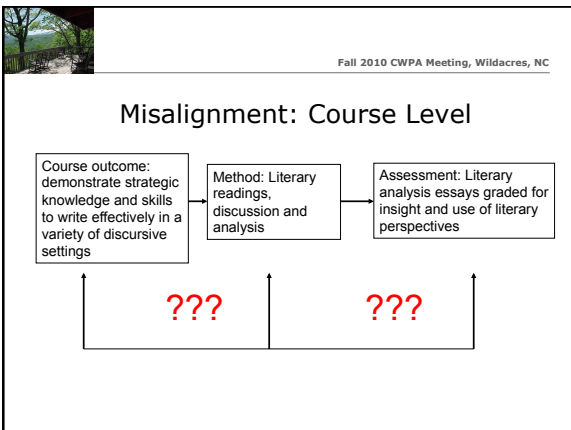
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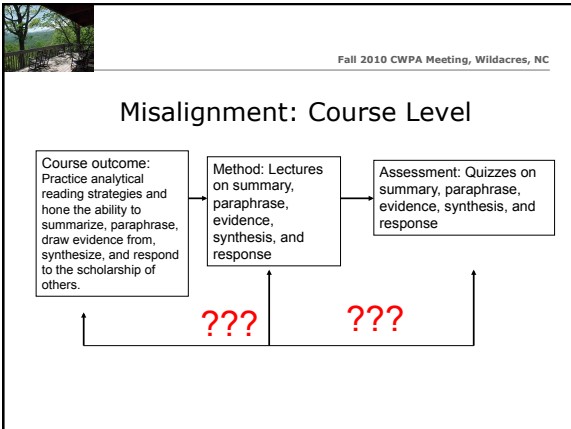
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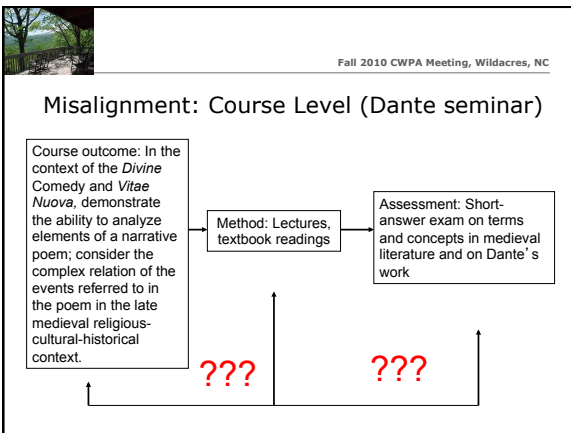


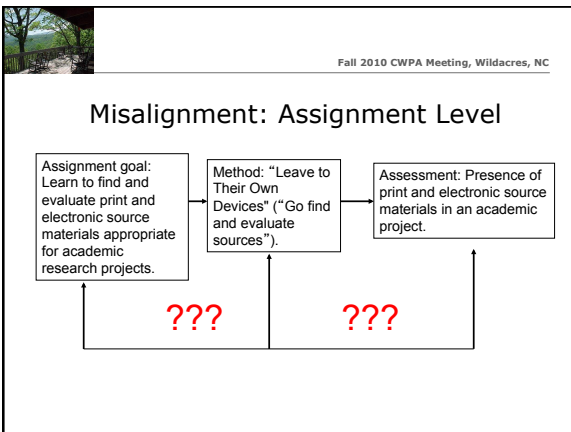
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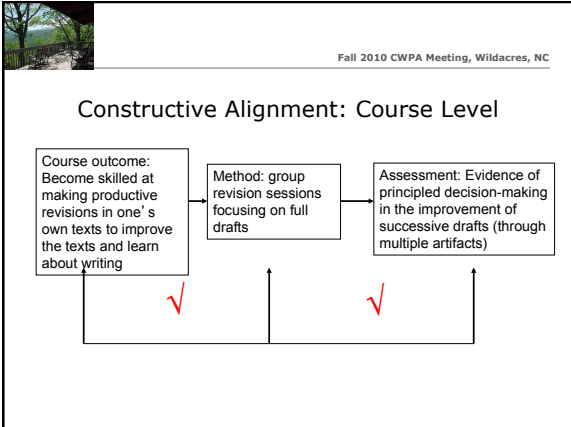
Constructive Alignment is also crucial at the course and assignment levels

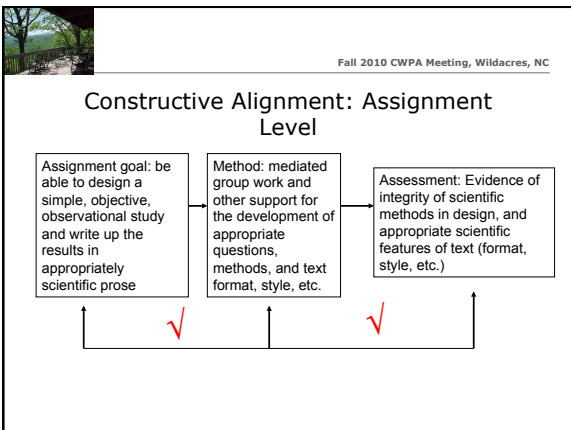






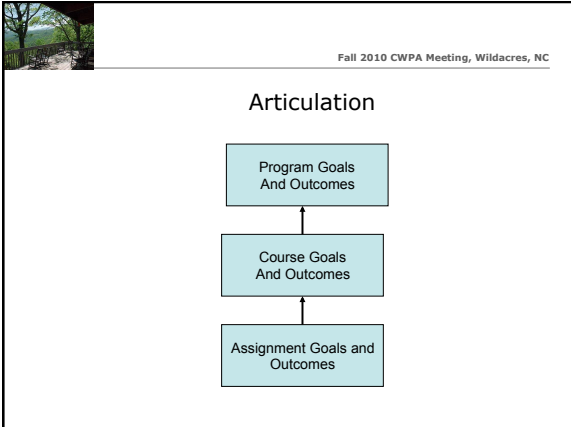


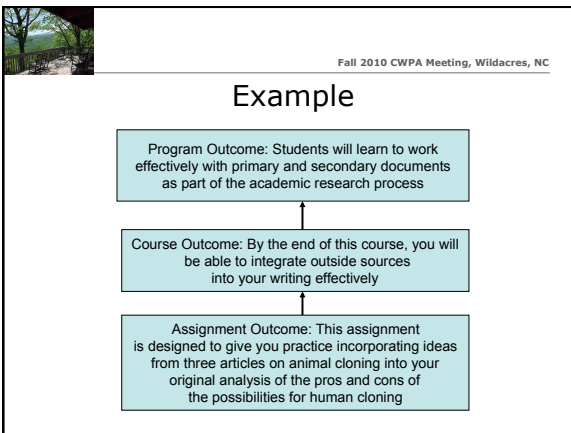




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Articulation links assignments, courses, and program goals/ outcomes





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- ### Four Steps in Program Assessment
- **What do we want to know?** Focus on an assessable goal or question
 - **How will we know it?** What kind of data will answer our question(s)?
 - **How will we gather the data?** Choose an appropriate assessment method.
 - **How will we analyze the data?** Choose an appropriate method to work through the results.
- (Angelo and Cross, 1993)



Discussion

- What do you want to know? *Why?*
- How will you know it?
- How will you gather the data?
- How will you analyze the data?
- What will you do with the results?
