



MAGNA ONLINE SEMINARS

5 Steps to Renew Program-Level Learning Outcomes Assessment

Thursday, July 22, 2010

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM (Eastern)
12:00 PM – 1:00 PM (Central)
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM (Mountain)
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM (Pacific)

Presented by:

Dr. Lisa R. Shibley

Today's presenter:



Lisa R. Shibley is the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Planning at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. In her role at Millersville, Dr. Shibley facilitates student learning outcomes assessment, accreditation, and strategic planning processes. Prior to her arrival at Millersville in 2007, Dr. Shibley established the office of Planning, Research, and Assessment at The Pennsylvania State University – Berks College. Dr. Shibley received her PhD in Higher Education Administration with an emphasis in Educational Psychology from The Pennsylvania State University after over 10 years experience serving in the Student Affairs field. Dr. Shibley presents posters and presentations on assessment regularly, is published in the Schuh and Upcraft work, Assessment Practices in Student Affairs. She has taught business administration and management courses, language and literacy education courses, and first-year seminars.



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5 Steps to Renew Program-Level Learning Outcomes Assessment



July 22, 2010
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**5 Steps to Renew
Program Level Learning
Outcomes Assessment**

July 22, 2010



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**ACADEMIC
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THE NEWSLETTER FOR ACADEMIC DEANS AND DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

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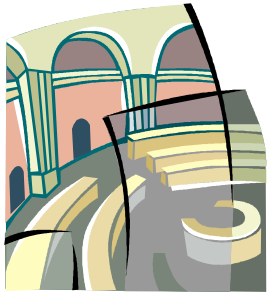
Our presenter



Lisa R. Shibley, PhD
Assistant Vice President,
Institutional Assessment and Planning

Millersville University

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**Means more than
ACCOUNTABILITY**

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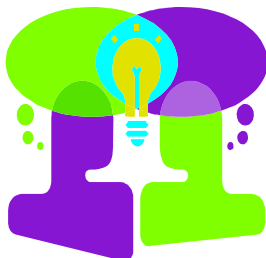
Seminar Objectives

Participants may ...

1. Adjust program learning outcome(s)
2. Align learning opportunities with outcomes
3. Consider criteria for performance
4. Strategize to use learning activities as evidence
5. Identify actions for using assessment results

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5



Poll Questions

6

Getting to know you—
What area is your discipline?

- a) Arts or Humanities
- b) Biological or Physical Sciences
- c) Business or Professional
- d) Education
- e) Social Sciences



Poll question 1

7

Getting to know you—
How many years have you been involved in assessing program-level learning outcomes?

- a) 0 (just beginning)
- b) 1 to 2 years
- c) 3 to 4 years
- d) 5 to 6 years
- e) 7 or more years



Poll question 2

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Renewing your assessment process results in.....

- Sharing ideas about teaching
- Focusing on student learning
- Enhancing synergy within the program
- Connecting with purpose
- Fostering faculty growth

9

**Student Learning Outcomes
Assessment is....**

*“the systematic collection of information
about student learning,
using time, knowledge, expertise, and
resources available, in order
to inform decisions about
how to improve learning”*

Walvoord, B.E. (2004). *Assessment clear and simple: a practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p. 2

5 Steps to Renew the Process

Step 5: Update assessment process

Step 4: Develop potential solutions

Step 3: Select improvement opportunities

Step 2: Identify problem(s) or need(s)

Step 1: Determine who’s involved





Step 1: Create a team

- Identify those who care about learning
- Involve faculty who need scholarship
- Include both junior and senior faculty
- Consider involving students

How involved are your colleagues in your program-level assessment of student learning?

- a) None of my colleagues participate
- b) A few of my colleagues participate
- c) Most of my colleagues participate
- d) All of my colleagues participate
- e) Not sure



Poll question 3

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Do you have a formal group of faculty within your program charged with assessing student learning outcomes?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not Sure



Poll question 4

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Are you recognized or rewarded for your contribution to your program's assessment of learning outcomes?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not Sure



Poll question 5

15

Who provides feedback on your program's assessment activities or results?

- a) Department Chair
- b) Dean (or Assistant/Associate Dean)
- c) Assessment Officer (or Institutional Research staff)
- d) No one
- e) Not sure



Poll question 6

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Renewing Responsibility for Assessment

- Identify a point person with credibility
- Provide training
- Recognize and reward appropriately
- Seek feedback

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Step 2: Identify issues

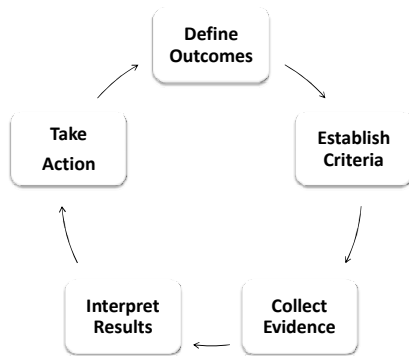
- Revisit the **elements** of your process
- Collect information about what's been done
- Review prior reports using **rubric**
- Determine strengths and challenges

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Clarifying Assumptions about Assessment....

- How do faculty in your program define assessment of student learning outcomes?
- For what purpose are you and your colleagues assessing student learning outcomes?

An Assessment Cycle



The Assessment Checklist

1. Links to mission and strategic plan(s)
2. Uses a specific cycle framework
3. Identifies role of faculty
4. Connects to program review



The Assessment Checklist

5. Utilizes faculty or staff expertise
6. Includes multiple measures
7. Describes how data will be used
8. Reviews process for improvement



Principles for Good Practice of Assessment of Student Learning (P1)



1. Begins with educational values.
2. Reflects an understanding of learning over time as multidimensional and integrated.
3. Works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.

Principles for Good Practice of Assessment of Student Learning (P2)



4. Requires equal attention to outcomes and to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Works best when it is ongoing not episodic.
6. Fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.

Principles for Good Practice of Assessment of Student Learning (P3)

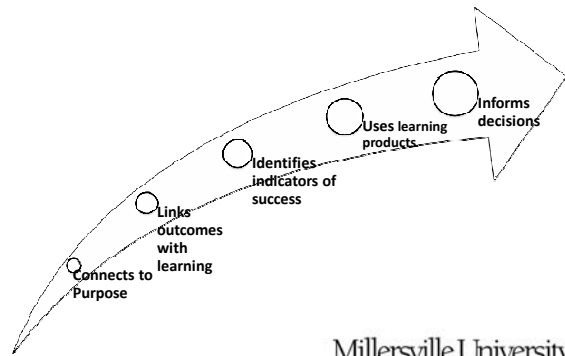


7. Begins with identifying issues of use and questions that people really care about.
8. Leads to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

Source: AAHE (1996.) accessed May 20, 2010 at http://www.academicprograms.calpoly.edu/pdfs/assess/nine_principles_good_practice.pdf

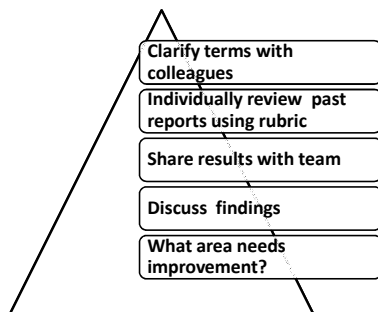
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Elements of the Assessment Process



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Apply the Rubric



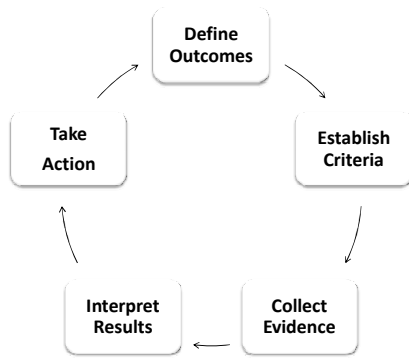
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Step 3: Select opportunities

- Prioritize issues by phases of the cycle
- Seek to build upon strengths
- Select weak areas to improve

An Assessment Cycle



Step 4: Develop solutions

- Identify resources
 - Use the Learning Opportunities Matrix
- Create & implement action plans
- Communicate!

Identifying Learning Opportunities

- Across first column: list outcomes
- Down first row: list courses **& experiences**
- Identify benchmark criteria
- DISCUSS!

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Components of an Action Plan

Goal

Action	Target timeline	Expected results	Individual responsible	Resources needed
--------	-----------------	------------------	------------------------	------------------

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Step 5: Update the process

- Change assessment strategies
- Improve reporting processes
- Modify policies
- Create faculty development opportunities

Summary

- Identify your champions
- Develop a formal process
- Implement your plan
- Collaborate
- Use tools & resources
- Get feedback
- Recognize & reward
- Provide training



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After the Webinar...

1. Coordinate needed materials
2. Collaborate with colleagues (See discussion items)
3. Complete the checklist
4. Complete the rubric
5. Complete the Learning Opportunities Matrix
6. Complete the action plan



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Resources to keep in mind

- Books and Monographs
- Newsletters
- Websites
- Associations
- Colleagues

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5 Steps to Renew the Process

Step 5: Update assessment process

Step 4: Develop potential solutions

Step 3: Select improvement opportunities

Step 2: Identify problem(s) or need(s)

Step 1: Determine who's involved

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Remember: Renewing your assessment process results in.....

- Sharing ideas about teaching
- Focusing on student learning
- Enhancing synergy within the program
- Connecting with purpose
- Fostering faculty growth

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Questions?

Take advantage
of the good
work that's
already being
done!



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Contact Information



Lisa Shibley

Assistant Vice President,
Institutional Assessment and
Planning

Millersville University of
Pennsylvania

(717) 871-2390

Lisa.Shibley@Millersville.edu

Thank you for attending

We would like to hear from you! Please
consider completing an evaluation form
found at:

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Evaluation Rubric for Renewing Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Process

For best results:

1. Read the rubric and underline phrases that may need clarified among colleagues. Identify how you interpret the phrase – what it means to you. Build consensus with colleagues regarding the meanings of the phrases. Adjust the rubric accordingly. You may even add examples within each cell.
2. Review each element of the assessment process against at least three years of assessment reports. Use **Renewing Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Process Worksheet** to track responses. Discuss findings with colleagues.
3. Clarify strengths and weaknesses of the program’s assessment process. List areas for improvement. Include in assessment plan and departmental strategic planning process.

Process Elements	Best Practice (3)	Acceptable (2)	Marginal (1)	Unacceptable (0)
Student Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes embody the mission of the program, school, and institution. • Outcomes are aligned with course objectives. • Outcomes are linked to learning activities (both inside and outside of the classroom). • Outcomes are promoted to stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes are identified in program’s purpose or mission. • Six to eight broad outcomes. • Each outcome statement is clear, concise, contains only one construct. • Faculty agree to outcomes. • Take into consideration external needs (i.e., accreditors, discipline specific, general education program) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 4 or more than 8 outcomes are identified. • Outcomes include student success outputs. • Outcomes contain more than one construct. • Adoption of professional association’s suggested outcomes, not adjusted for unique characteristics of program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of outcomes does not exist. • Origin of the learning outcomes is unknown.
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria are tracked overtime. • Several points of information are considered. • Identify appropriate levels within skills, abilities, knowledge, behaviors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria are measurable. • Criteria establish boundaries or appropriate targets. • Criteria are output oriented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria are input-oriented. • Criteria have no basis in prior performance or normative data. • Expectations are unfounded or unrealistic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria rely upon student grades. • Criteria are difficult to measure . • Not able to determine application of results if students meet or do not meet criteria.
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporates products of learning activities (direct and authentic assessment). • Longitudinal assessment or assessing students at multiple time points occurs. • Opportunities for triangulation of information sought. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance of direct and indirect evidence. • May require collection of information over several years to generate large enough sample. • Cost efficient. • Collection strategies are based in research methodologies (rigor). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counting student enrollments. • Incorporates student retention or persistence to degree data. • Relies only on one source of information. • Student perceptions only (surveys, ect). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades are only method for assessing outcome. • Strategy is too complex – almost impossible to implement due to cost or resources needed. • Not able to repeat.

Process Elements	Best Practice (3)	Acceptable (2)	Marginal (1)	Unacceptable (0)
Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies potential changes in curriculum or learning experiences. • Informs pedagogical • Discussed by faculty in curricular committees, program retreats. • Shared with stakeholders, including students. • References prior use of results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report to administration using template or program provided. • Shared with faculty and discussed. • Includes appropriately summarized data. • Identifies whether met or did not meet criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data summarized poorly (only counts, no frequencies or means reported.) • Information may be referred to in annual report or program review. • Not shared with departmental faculty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reporting mechanism exists. • Student identities not protected.
Use of Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed with students and other stakeholders. • Action plan created with targeted dates, goals , responsibilities, and resources identified. • Considers curricular processes in timelines. • Includes use of information in promotional or recruitment materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate use of evidence. Shared with colleagues and administrators. • Lists suggested changes to curriculum or assessment process. • Identifies improvements to assessment strategies or changes to criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only seeks to improve assessment results. • Not connected to improvements in curriculum or learning activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not used.

Learning Opportunities Matrix for [Insert Program] Created/Updated: _____

Categories:

0=	Not applicable
1=	
2=	
3=	

Coursework	Program Outcomes							
	Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3	Outcome 4	Outcome 5	Outcome 6	Outcome 7	Outcome 8
Required 1								
Required 2								
Required 3								
Required 4								
Required 5								
Required 6								
Required 7								
Required 8								
Other 1								
Other 2								
Other 3								
Out of Class Learning Experiences (LE)								
LE 1								
LE 2								
LE 3								
LE 4								

Renewing Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Process Worksheet

Program: _____

Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Year(s) Reviewed: 1st _____ 2nd: _____ 3rd: _____ 4th: _____

Score and Categories

0: Unacceptable

1: Marginal

2: Acceptable

3: Best Practice

Process Element	Comments	Score
Learning Outcomes		
Criteria		
Strategies		
Report		
Use of Results		
	Total Score:	
	Average:	


Strengths and Weaknesses

Use the space below to identify strengths and weaknesses based upon the rubric and the comments above.


Suggestions for Improving

Use the space below to identify follow-up actions needed.

Action Plan Form

Program:		Contact		
Learning Outcome:				
				
Priority	Task Steps	Faculty or Staff Champion	Start Date	End Date
Notes:				
Resources Needed:				

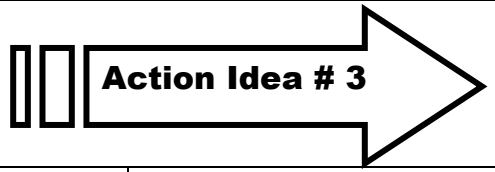
Action Plan Form

Program:		Contact		
Learning Outcome:				
				
Priority	Task Steps	Faculty or Staff Champion	Start Date	End Date
Notes:				
Resources Needed:				

Action Plan Form

Program: _____ **Contact** _____

Learning Outcome: _____



Priority	Task Steps	Faculty or Staff Champion	Start Date	End Date

Notes: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Resources to Consider

Books and Monographs

- Banta, T. W., Jones, E.A., and Black, K. E. (2009). *Designing effective assessment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Maki, M. (2004). *Assessing for learning: building a sustainable commitment across the institution*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Middaugh, M.F. (2009). *Planning and assessment in higher education: Demonstrating institutional effectiveness*. Jossey-Bass higher and adult education series. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.
- Popham, W.J. (1993). *Educational evaluation*. Needham Heights, MA: Simon and Schuster.
- Rhodes, T.L. (2010). *Assessing Outcomes and Improving Achievement: Tips and Tools for Using Rubrics*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges and Universities.
- Stevens, D.D. and Levi, A. (2005). *Introduction to rubrics: An assessment tool to save grading time, convey effective feedback, and promote student learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Volkwein, J. F. (2010). *Assessing student outcomes: why, what, who, how?* New directions for institutional research: Assessment supplement. San Francisco, CA US: Jossey-Bass.
- Walvoord, B.E. (2004). *Assessment clear and simple: a practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Newsletters

Assessment Update (Jossey-Bass)

The Teaching Professor (Magna)

Follow-Up Discussion Items

Address the following items with your colleagues to continue the conversation to renew your program level assessment of learning outcomes.

- 1. How might you include others (colleagues, administrators, students) in the assessment process?**

- 2. What did you learn from the checklist or the rubric? What are your primary internal strengths and weaknesses? What external challenges may hinder your renewal of your program level assessment process? What external opportunities might you be able to call upon to support the process?**

- 3. What process does your program have for regularly discussing results from student learning outcomes assessment?**

- 4. Reflecting upon successful strategies or processes in the past that resulted in improvements may help you identify strategies to enhance your assessment program. Consider prior experiences when answering the following questions:**
 - a) What changes to the curriculum have been implemented as a result of program-level assessment of student learning?**
 - b) What changes have you made to your learning outcomes, assessment strategies?**
 - c) What changes to other program aspects, such as advising, pedagogy or co-curricular opportunities for students are a result of your program level assessment?**
 - d) What resources have been reallocated as a result changes made from the process?**
 - e) How have your assessment findings informed your planning process?**

ACADEMIC Leader

JUNE 2010
VOLUME 26, NUMBER 6

THE NEWSLETTER FOR ACADEMIC DEANS AND DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

How Chairs Help Departments Become Great

By Jane S. Halonen, PhD, and Eman M. El-Sheikh, PhD

Being an effective chair has always been a challenging task. However, lately the game has intensified. Assorted higher education rating rituals have fueled competition that has many presidents scrambling to lay claims for distinction. The pressure trickles down to the sometimes hapless chair, who can no longer settle for doing merely a good job but must now try to achieve greatness and must guarantee that others in his or her charge are achieving greatness too.

Collins (2001) argues in *Good to Great* that the transition involves making conscious choices about enacting behaviors that will achieve distinguished performance. He compares the journey to a well-executed bus ride; in this case, department chairs are in the driver's seat. Our goal in this article is to reflect—from the vantage point of a dean's office—about some specific characteristics and behaviors that can help chairs and their departments make the leap from goodness to greatness.

- **Real strategic planning.** It is difficult to embark on a high-quality journey without a map. Great chairs collaborate with department members to produce a focused and memorable mission statement that leads the way, promotes buy-in from all constituents, and adheres to the characteristics of the host institution. Great chairs regularly revisit strategic plans to keep

them on course without being prompted to do so by external forces. Distinguished departments can attain the status of a “signature” unit for the university based on their success in strategic planning.

- **Effective operations.** Management of a complex enterprise requires attention to myriad details, deadlines, and constituents. Great chairs navigate the demands gracefully and punctually. They avoid many common operational pitfalls by developing proper guidelines and promoting adherence to them. Great chairs interact with their staff and faculty regularly, communicate departmental issues clearly, and delegate tasks to promote harmonious follow-through and develop leadership skills among the faculty. They emphasize equity in distributing the workload, but make judgments that allow department members to make contributions from areas of individual strengths whenever possible. Not only do great chairs understand and manage budgets deftly, but they demonstrate entrepreneurial strategies to build resources to reduce their dependence on the host university.
- **Enhanced educational quality.** Great chairs embrace assessment as a tool that can generate evidence in support of their department's distinction. Assessment activities represent a genuine departmental commitment to helping students apprentice within

their chosen disciplines. Distinguished departments demonstrate exemplary performance and impact through the achievement of multiple, sturdy benchmarks. Where departments achieve greatness, their students perform beyond expectation on nationally normed tests, compete successfully in relevant student competitions, and often have multiple career opportunities waiting upon graduating. As alumni, former students demonstrate their appreciation by remembering the department in charitable activities. Periodic program reviews by objective external assessors confirm that the department is functioning optimally in relation to its resources and constraints.

- **Targeted enrollment management.** Great chairs know how to situate their programs to attract and retain students. They challenge the faculty and existing students to be active in recruiting qualified students. They

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In This Issue

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- 7 Higher Education: Exporting Middle-Class Dreams



PRESIDENT: William Haight; whaight@magnapubs.com

PUBLISHER: David Burns; dburns@magnapubs.com

MANAGING EDITOR: Rob Kelly;
robkelly@magnapubs.com

E-mail editorial comments or questions to
Rob Kelly, or call him at 608-227-8120.

CREATIVE SERVICES MANAGER: Mark Manghera

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Kina S. Mallard – Gordon College
(kina.mallard@gordon.edu);

Thomas R. McDaniel – Converse College
(Tom.McDaniel@Converse.edu);

Col. Mike McGinnis (mcginnism@usma.edu);

Michael Murray (michaelmurray@depaul.edu);

Gwendolyn S. O'Neal (oneal@humec.ksu.edu);

Gerard Rossy – California State University – Northridge
(gerry.rossy@csun.edu);

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Keys to Effective Program-Level Assessment

By Rob Kelly

Effective program-level assessment requires faculty investment in the process because it's too large a job for one person and because individual faculty members have knowledge and insights about their courses that others don't have. Part of getting faculty buy in is making the process meaningful to them and reminding them of its benefits. "If faculty can find a use for assessment results in their classes and in their interactions with students in their programs, it has more value to them," says Lisa Shibley, assistant vice president for institutional assessment and planning at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. In an interview with *Academic Leader*, Dr. Shibley outlined the following ways to make program-level assessment more meaningful and effective:

Do something with the results. "So often assessment is focused on improving student learning, but there's also an opportunity to showcase what a department or program is doing as well. It could be used to help improve the learning opportunities, learning experiences, and curriculum for students. It could also be used to promote the program to students," Shibley says.

Define learning outcomes collaboratively. "I think it's important that faculty work collaboratively with their colleagues to define learning outcomes so that they're all on the same page," Shibley says. "And I think that's a great faculty development opportunity. Sometimes with assessment initiatives, just having the conversation is of value. It helps [faculty] realign how their courses are connected to the overall program. I think at another level it may help faculty help students understand why they might need a particular course as part of a program.

I also think that by having faculty involved in the discussion of learning outcomes, they're able to provide their input and share what they think is important. Even within a program faculty are going to come from different sub-specialties within the discipline, and it enhances understanding of each other's perspective."

Include assessment of direct evidence of student learning. Although indirect measures such as student satisfaction surveys and graduation rates can give some indication as to a program's effectiveness, assessment needs to include direct evidence of student learning—the skills, abilities, knowledge, and attributes do students exhibit as a result of participating in the program. Direct evidence could come from embedded test questions, portfolios, or standardized tests.

Use a systematic and cyclical approach. "Whatever the cycle is, if that can be defined then I think it's going to set some boundaries in terms of what the faculty are able to do within a given period of time. It also gives them a framework to shoot for in terms of when they want to be using that information to help make program improvements or to promote the program," Shibley says.

Use multiple strategies for assessing student learning for each learning outcome. "Direct and indirect evidence goes hand in hand. As long as you have some direct evidence you could also use indirect evidence. This evidence can be qualitative or quantitative. Faculty need to understand that sometimes qualitative assessment can have as much value as quantitative assessment," Shibley says.

On July 22 Lisa Shibley will lead Magna Online Seminar "5 Steps to Renew Program-Level Assessment." For information, see www.magnapubs.com/calendar/442.html. ▼

The Dangers of Dry Promotions

By Jeffrey L. Buller, PhD

It is not uncommon in higher education for personnel costs to amount to approximately 95 percent of the budget. In other words, only about 5 percent of the budget is available for equipment, supplies, travel, utilities, maintenance, and the other types of expenditures that are essential to the modern university. In times of severe fiscal constraint, therefore, it's all but impossible to build a workable budget without affecting salaries and benefits. Any but the most modest level of budget cuts lead to layoffs, hiring freezes, benefit reductions, and furloughs. But institutions sometimes try to preserve morale in times of crisis by promoting faculty members without increasing their salaries. These **dry promotions**, as they are called, began to be widely discussed as early as the 1950s [see, for example, Harris (1952) 103, Whitehill (1955) 186, and Yoder (1956) 602]. In 1963, a writer under the pseudonym of "Hamilton Waring" (the names taken from two popular brands of household blenders) warned prospective faculty members against working for any college or university where dry promotions have been common. (Waring (1963) 145.) Nevertheless, during the recent financial crisis, some institutions once again reverted to this practice, perhaps on the assumption that an increase in rank (which may also include the receipt of tenure) could serve as its own reward. Usually, however, a dry promotion serves as something like an institutional IOU: It promises that a raise will be granted at a later date, once the financial picture has improved. Of course, if that promise is made in writing, it becomes legally binding. But since dry promotions almost always occur in a time of severe economic constraint, it is usually impossible to know when, or even if, additional resources will be available in the future. In these more

common cases, no explicit promise is made except perhaps for a vaguely worded oral commitment to "try to find" some additional funding in the future. As a result, the dangers of dry promotions can be significant, and academic leaders are well advised to engage in this practice only if they're fully aware of the risks involved. Let's consider, therefore, five possible scenarios and some of the dangers resulting from each of them.

1. Raises are eventually granted, but they are not made retroactively.

Several years after a dry promotion, some institutions will finally grant the faculty member a salary increase, but make it effective only with that year's contract. The employee doesn't receive any back pay, and no adjustment is made to his or her retirement account. Because of the effect of compound interest, both the faculty member's salary and retirement income then lag behind those of people who were promoted a few years either earlier or later, and the individual can never make up the difference. As a result, the "lost years"—the years that occur between the dry promotion and the eventual raise—create a significant inequity based not on merit or potential but solely on the date he or she happened to be evaluated for promotion.

2. Raises are eventually granted, and they are made retroactively. As problematic as it can be for faculty members when they do not receive cumulative raises for dry promotions, it can be even more problematic for the institution when it tries to correct this situation. If even a few years have gone by since promotions were last funded, the number of faculty members who are owed these increases and the total amount they are owed are likely to be substantial. For an institution that is just coming out of a financial crisis—and which probably also addressed this challenge by defer-

ring maintenance, leaving key positions unfilled, reducing student aid, getting by with outdated equipment, and failing to meet a number of other needs—the cost required to fund past promotions could well bring it back to the brink of financial insolvency. At the very least, its recovery will be forestalled for several years, making the institution more likely to resort to dry promotions again in the future.

3. No effort is made to reward merit that occurred during the "lost years."

If a faculty member has worked at a high enough level to deserve promotion, he or she is likely to continue this record of productivity once the new rank has been conferred. Articles and books will still be published. Innovations in teaching will be explored. Grants will still be won. And contributions to service will remain strong. In most systems, these accomplishments would result in merit increases if the budget allowed for them. Since merit increases are usually given as a percentage of the faculty member's salary, a raise for a promotion has a "ripple effect" every time a merit increase is made. The effect on motivation and morale can be devastating when this impact is eliminated because of dry promotions. People soon realize that those who produce the bare minimum (or even nothing at all) are no worse off than those whose achievements are excellent, and the quality of work performed across the college or university is likely to decline as a result.

4. An effort is made to reward merit that occurred during the "lost years." When salary increases are not possible, administrators frequently claim that the next time raises are given, they will be based on multiple years of achievement in order to reward accomplishments that took

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Trying Times and Departmental Cohesiveness

By Rob Kelly

Cheryl Stevens had been chair of the chemistry department at Xavier University of Louisiana (in New Orleans) just two weeks before Hurricane Katrina struck. The storm seriously disrupted operations, damaged equipment, and displaced faculty and students. Maintaining the department was seriously challenging proposition. Here's her story and her advice on getting through (hopefully not so) challenging times.

For six weeks buildings on campus were flooded with four to five feet of water. The chemistry department is on the third floor, so its equipment and facilities weren't as badly damaged as they might have been had the department been located on the first floor, but with the environmental control system out, mold was an issue. Because the majority of students and faculty had no homes to return to and because of the damage to campus, the university administration decided to renovate campus and postpone the fall 2005 semester until January 2006.

During that time, some faculty were able to conduct research at other institutions with funding from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Stevens worked at the University of Virginia for four months, but for many faculty it was an unproductive period that had a large number of faculty deciding whether or not to return. "As a newly elected department chair I was responsible for finding faculty who were willing to come back. You've got to realize that 80 percent of the homes in New Orleans were flooded, and so there was the issue of who was going to live where. You had to have a place to live. You had to have a school to send your kids to. You had to have health care. People were coming back to the city with blind faith that this was going to be ok," Stevens says.

Some faculty lived in FEMA trailers on campus, and others stayed with friends.

One-third of the chemistry faculty did not return. Of the 18 who did return, 16 did not have a home to return to.

The administration anticipated that half of the students would return when classes resumed in January. In fact, 75 percent returned, creating a situation in which faculty had to teach additional courses on top of everything else.

The fall 2005 semester began in January 2006 as planned, followed by the spring semester in May and just a two-break before classes resumed in fall. "There was no summer. There was no chance for faculty to do their research, regroup, or whatever. It was a very stressful time," Stevens says.

Adding to the stress was a change in academic leadership, including a new dean, associate dean, and senior vice president. "Having leadership changes is always stressful because new leaders come in with different expectations, different rules" Stevens says.

As she reflected on this experience, Stevens identified collegiality, cohesiveness, and a sense of belonging as factors that helped get the department through these trying times. "After the fact, I looked back and said, 'Wow, look what we did. We've become this really cohesive department. We've recovered. We've grown. How did we do that?'"

Here are factors that helped the department emerge intact from this period and can help any department weather lesser storms:

- **Define the department's mission and goals.** "I think you have to know who you are and what you're trying to do. We have a department where we've defined the mission and goals—to provide a high-quality educational experience and to prepare students for professional and graduate programs or employment. That's broad, but everybody understands that those are the goals of our department. I don't think we ever articulated these goals before [Katrina], but we did articulate them

afterward," Stevens says.

- **Understand students' needs and expectations.** "Our students are different from Ivy League students. We have students coming with academic weaknesses who may need more academic support, may need more structured courses. Part of it is taking the students who need the extra support at the beginning and then allowing them to compete after they leave here because they've learned how to do that. What they need is not just academic support but a sense of belonging to the department, such as a sense of social engagement or professional engagement in the department. So we have the usual department clubs, seminars, speakers, receptions, and discussion groups that bring a sense of community and cohesiveness," Stevens says.
- **Find ways to engage students.** Students who feel like they are part of the department hang around more. They do research. They feel a sense of belonging. And they go to graduate school, Stevens says.
- **Create a congenial working environment.** Stevens recommends having social and professional events to bring faculty together such as weekly lunches, parties, and seminars.
- **Think carefully about committee assignments.** Not every faculty member will have the time, interest, or skills to serve on every department committee. For example, Stevens would not put junior faculty members on a committee to review another department. "It just wouldn't be a good use of their time." On the other hand, she has found young faculty who are interested in serving on the student recruitment committee. "That's good. Students can relate to them. But if they're not contributing, moving forward the way I think they ought to, I talk to them

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TRYING TIMES...

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about it,” Stevens says.

- **Identify strengths and interests of faculty.** “If you identify the strengths and interests of the faculty in any situation, in any department, then everyone can contribute in things they are good at so everybody’s appreciated for what they contribute. If everybody understands what they’re working toward, they contribute in ways that they’re strongest. You have to be observant. Find out what people enjoy. You’re not going to make a researcher out of somebody who really isn’t interested. You’re not going to get tenured faculty

who have been here a long time who are really into service to work in a research lab. Yet when things come up, those are the people I ask to take care of certain university responsibilities. I really try not to ask people to do stuff that is not in line with where they are in their careers,” Stevens says.

- **Provide lots of mentoring for faculty** so they understand what you’re doing and why and how they can contribute. “Watch them very closely to make sure they’re moving along like they should,” Stevens says.

All these measures can encourage cohesiveness, but “you can’t force cohesiveness,” Stevens says. “You can’t walk in

and say, ‘We’re going to be cohesive now. We’re going to vote as a bloc and that’s going to make us cohesive.’ You really have to develop relationships and identify what you’re about and what you’re trying to do. If people buy into that, you can form a cohesive group. I came to the understanding that cohesiveness had nothing to do with the storm. Any department can create cohesiveness. [Leaders] can engage faculty, mentor faculty and students, set goals, and develop personal connections in their department. Anybody can do that.”

Contact Cheryl Stevens at cklein@xula.edu. ▼

DRY PROMOTIONS...

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place during the budget crisis. These promises are easy to make; they’re extremely difficult to honor in any meaningful way. Universities are rapidly changing environments, and professors are receiving new recognitions every year. It can be challenging enough to provide a reward for those who excel in any given year; rewarding those with a record of achievement that extends over three to five years can be all but impossible. Faculty members end up saying such things as, “All those books, all those grants, and all those teaching awards ... for what? An additional 2 percent five years later? It’s not worth it.” Because salary increase pools are frequently too small to begin with, efforts to reward past merit usually end up being counterproductive: Their limited size makes high productivity a disincentive for the very people they were created to encourage. Even worse, many accomplishments may accidentally be overlooked in a multiyear evaluation, and the resulting morale problem will soon escalate into a genuine morale crisis.

- 5. **There is a change in administration.** Perhaps the worst danger that colleges

and universities face by granting dry promotions results from a loss of institutional memory. Department chairs, deans, provosts, and presidents change positions all the time, and the commitment made by a previous administration to provide a retroactive salary increase may not be binding on its successors. Even where administrators feel a moral obligation to honor the obligations of their predecessors, they may do so only to a limited extent. After all, those achievements were made “on someone else’s watch,” and new administrators are usually more focused on what they’ll accomplish in the future, not on what was achieved in the past. All too often a predecessor’s commitment simply “slips through the cracks” because new academic leaders arrive with new priorities and see little benefit in devoting scarce resources to recognize something that took place years before they arrived.

The only way to avoid the dangers of dry promotions is to take the step that most institutions find extraordinarily difficult to take: build the budget, even during a time of retrenchment, by funding promotion and merit pools first. No one likes to be in a situation where some employees are laid off or have their hours reduced in order for others

to receive raises. On the other hand, adding additional lines or expanding hours is easier to achieve once the crisis has passed than is solving the problems caused by dry promotions. It may be contrarian to argue for salary increases during a meeting about budget cuts, but failure to do so can lead to irreparable harm within a very short time.

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Jeffrey L. Buller is dean of the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College at Florida Atlantic University. He is the author of The Essential Department Chair: A Practical Guide to College Administration (2006), The Essential Academic Dean: A Practical Guide to College Leadership (2007), and The Essential College Professor: A Practical Guide to an Academic Career (2010). All are published by Jossey-Bass. ▼

HOW CHAIRS HELP...

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work diligently on strategies for engagement and retention that are effective both in and out of the classroom. They know how their own enrollment patterns compare to other programs of comparable size. And they can brag about attracting more students than their counterparts, especially when such achievements run counter to national trends.

- **Active community building.** In distinguished programs, chairs exert great care in getting the right kind of people “on the bus.” Rather than committing lines to achieve a particular mix of discipline specializations, chairs concentrate on producing an environment rich in talent, experience, and diversity. They recognize that generations of faculty within the department tend to promote the greatest health. They promote connections across the faculty, seek ways to include students in departmental governance, and enact other strategies to connect both to the surrounding geographic and disciplinary communities. Great chairs also make a point to organize celebrations that bring their faculty, staff, and students together to recognize their accomplishments. Great chairs plan the crucial legacy of a smooth transition of leadership to ensure that the gains made under their leadership will not vaporize when they move on to pursue other goals.
- **Facilitating faculty prominence.** Great chairs foster an empowering atmosphere in which faculty can achieve their full potential. Substantial achievements that place the majority of the department’s faculty among the most prominent of their disciplinary peers can be evidence of the great chair’s influence. A great chair conscientiously works to help faculty in

every stage of their development, from creating a targeted research agenda to selecting service missions that will allow the full development and expression of the faculty member’s values. Faculty distinction transpires in high grant capture, high citation impact indices, or other discipline-appropriate criteria. Great chairs advocate for high-profile service activities to help their faculty achieve wide recognition and facilitate smooth passage for tenure and promotion decisions. To facilitate emergence in regional and national recognition, chairs proactively nominate their faculty for awards and honors. Faculty generally experience the environment as one that facilitates and promotes their best work.

- **Vigorous public relations.** Great chairs work proactively and effectively with development and marketing to enhance the opportunities their faculty can pursue. They strive to have “talking points” about proud achievements handy, and regularly share these accomplishments with the higher administration, public media, and external communities. Ironically, the more smoothly run the department and the higher the level of accomplishment, the more readily the great chair will attribute credit to the investment and involvement of the department and the administration. Great chairs glean satisfaction from the accomplishments of their faculty and students without needing to be at center stage.
- **Healthy conflict resolution.** Complex human enterprises will be fraught with the potential for differences of opinion. That tendency is exacerbated when the people involved have all had the experience of being the “smartest kid in the room” until they get among their talented peers in a discipline-based entity. Inevitably, academic enterprises will have substan-

tial opportunity to conflict.

Unfortunately, smart people can engage in conflict in a manner that can make even the most courageous flinch. Great chairs expect the inevitability of conflict but manage these challenges with civility, compassion, and tact. They recognize that the end result of conflict, no matter how challenging, is often an improvement in conditions. They create formal mechanisms for resolving challenges. Great chairs hold chaos at bay; they take pride in keeping as much incipient turmoil from rising to the dean’s attention as possible.

- **Sturdy high expectations.** A final characteristic of great chairs is maintaining high expectations for what the department and its students will accomplish. Many faculty will rise or fall in accordance with where chairs set departmental standards. Great chairs make their high expectations explicit and work hard to demonstrate the importance of and adherence to those standards. They recognize that the department will only be as good as its weakest link. When disappointed, they do not abandon the expectation, but exploit the challenge as an opportunity for fine-tuning. The fulfillment of great expectations can help chairs and their departments chart and successfully navigate a solid path to greatness.

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Jane Halonen is the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of West Florida. Eman M. El-Sheikh is the associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of West Florida.



Higher Education: Exporting Middle-Class Dreams

By Jeffrey Ross, EdD, and Jann M. Contento, PhD

Many countries are currently considering diversifying their higher education systems by modeling U.S. community college-like institutional designs.

Vietnam and China, along with other nations, are intrigued by, curious about, yet somewhat suspicious of American community colleges—especially in terms of their relationship to universities and higher learning.

How can one distinguish the cultural differences, in general, between community colleges and universities? Certainly one could consider faculty credentials, administrative staff preparation, academics, service focus, student “learning readiness,” institutional missions, vocational training—the obvious and usual. Community colleges do an ample job of preparing students for the next steps in their lives. They provide a valuable entry point for a richer participation in American society—and can potentially accelerate a student’s quality of life, both on the job and in the soul.

However, we believe there is a fundamental divergence in the culture of the community college that has to do with a social or class distinction criterion—we believe that community colleges have aspirations to prepare their students for entry *into* the middle class, while universities have aspired to pull their students *out* of the middle class.

We are not economists, political scientists, nor sociologists. We are simply steady observers of community college riffs and phrasings....

An examination of “class” differentiation mechanisms at American community colleges provides relevant insights about American value systems—and the desperate conformity

magnified and then embraced by so many.

The dialectal response to community “middle class” composite cultural needs, economic needs, training needs—and response to university adjustments in academic articulation matters—keeps community colleges flexible and “organically” (as in 19th century romantic philosophy) reactive.

Community colleges, we believe, have become the protectors of the American middles [we have borrowed the contextual use of this term from the American novelist John Updike]. Although this is not consciously intended, community colleges have evolved into places of great tension—tension between developmental (remediation), academic, and vocational/occupational demands; tension between traditional (face-to-face) and online course offerings—and tension among local “stakeholders” concerning staff salaries, travel expenses, baccalaureate training, and bond elections.

The hopeful middles at the community college, our students, struggle to obtain training, to prepare for further schooling, to live and to love.

The emergence of “workforce development,” supported by ancillary academic programs, appears to be the actual driving force behind community college post-secondary-education “market share” positioning. Is this altogether bad? Poverty is not good. Yet, our notions of the middle class have both material and intellectual undertones.

We sense that 21st century middle-class America cares far more about its material well-being than its intellectual or humanistic self.

Surely, the American middle class is becoming more expansive in its demands for goods and services. Think of the size, configuration, amenities, and prestige of today’s modern

American home. The trickle upward of buying power and the all-encompassing “religion of stuff” appears to be thriving—no matter what one thinks about the economic situation. Available “work” and accelerating salaries have driven the economy.

The idea of the community college [a priori] was certainly poetic, certainly beautiful, a metaphor for entrance into prosperous—and informed—American middle life. The post-WWII individual American experience has centered on the development of a (seemingly) nourished and materially satiated middle class. What do English Language Learning (ELL) training, General Educational Development (GED) training, and massage therapy training have in common? They are all entry-point activities to a better “quality” of life.

However, most of the “stuff” Americans harbor in their homes and hearts has done little to improve the “core” quality of lives. The entire middle-class-desired “standard of living” system is showing signs of near collapse in respect to current economic conditions (i.e., mortgage default rates, banking industry regulations, automobile industry failures, and credit card restructuring laws). What would one do without cable television, iPods and “smart” cell phones? (Save money, think, and reflect more? Spend less time filling in the bleakly lonely portions of life? Foster altruism?)

The middle class can be a fertile ground for illusions—big dreams and big payments—a life of “gilded” servitude, a standard of living that promises much but increasingly struggles to deliver a wholesome future.

Ah, but for all classes the middle endgame is perhaps, well, a dream-

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MIDDLE-CLASS DREAMS

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scape.

One can take this axiom to the “proverbial” bank: The more things one possesses, the more one is possessed by those things. Sadly, the middles’ intellect seems to be now vigorously centering on Disneyland fantasies, Caribbean cruises, summer blockbusters, and restaurant happy hours (where the “middle” really expands). The creation and maintenance of a standard of living, and making a living, is not mysterious.

Economists have carefully studied the relationships between behavior and the economy. The Institutionalist school of economics, for example, sees behavior as part of a larger social pattern influenced by current ways of living and modes of thought—but knowing how to live may be the greatest secret of all.

Wealth without sensitivity, without reflection, without conscience, creates a kind of tyranny in personal, domestic, and global understanding. What should the middles’ intellectual values reflect? How should vocational, avocational, and intellectual meaning offered by American community colleges trisect for the “ambiguous” middles? How often do community college instructors hear the phrase—“Oh, I’m just taking these classes [English, math, history—insert name of academic courses] to get them out of the way”? Many may nod in gentle agreement, empathetic to the view that coursework of any kind is simply preparation for the world of work and ownership—a rite of passage into the middles. The place where many of us may, too, live and function....

During the last 15 years, the (at times) repressive nature of corporate management models at the community colleges has, perhaps, changed the relationships between students and staff.

Certainly college staff (especially faculty and administration) depends on student enrollment (and fees) to support their own enhanced middle-class aspirations.

We are not hinting at class exploitation so much as we are describing an emerging truth—in the community college formula, faculty and administrators have developed a symbiotic relationship with students. The students’ success stories advertently elevate employee status (and incomes), and by helping more students INTO the middle class, administrators and faculty may—by virtue of their actions—be elevating themselves OUT of the middles.

Even so—those of us who work in academic disciplines at the community colleges should continue our most important task: promoting how to live and how to improve the quality of the intellectual life—not just how to make a living. Poverty of spirit, we believe, is the worst kind of destitution.

What do we hope the newly emerging international models of the community college (and higher education in general) emphasize? What capitalist and corporate accouterments will they convey? How will these institutions improve the quality of their students’ lives?

With the ability to teach globally via online learning systems, community colleges AND universities have limitless opportunities to influence how

[both positively and negatively] our international neighbors perceive American higher education and American values. Let’s be careful of the values system that we export. It may be time to rethink the idiomatic day-dreams we create in the middles and in “middle” education....

Let’s be sure we export the best of the American experience. Let’s convey a learning culture that improves living standards, morality, ethics, and a far deeper sense of life’s meaning beyond apparent economic gains. If American education is viewed only as a “money maker” for all parties involved, then our reputation—deserved or otherwise—as a selfish capitalist nation may persist. Education [in its purest sense the liberal arts tradition] should constitute more than a simple means to an economic end.

Jeffrey Ross is an English instructor at Central Arizona College. Jann M. Contento is an institutional researcher at Estrella Mountain College. They have co-authored various articles on American culture, collegiate curricula development, and the media’s impact on community. Contact them at slipdoc@cox.net or jmcontento@yahoo.com. ▼

In Memory of John N. McDaniel

This issue of *Academic Leader* is dedicated to the memory of John N. McDaniel, dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Middle Tennessee State University. John offered his wit and advice in his “Parting Shot” column. He passed away in May. For more, see www.mtsusidelines.com/news/dean-of-college-of-liberal-arts-dies-1.1471566.