The Office of Institutional Assessment and Evaluation (OIAE)

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From the Desk of the Director:
Honoring a Culture for Evidence of Students Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

Institutions of higher learning that value a culture of evidence use multiple strategies and tools to collect information about important student outcomes. These outcomes focus not only on students’ knowledge and skills, but also on students’ dispositions – that is, their attitudes, interests, beliefs, needs, and even behaviors in a variety of contexts.

The Office of Institutional Assessment and Evaluation (OIAE) focuses primarily on collecting and analyzing data about student learning – that is the extent to which students have achieved established levels of proficiency in the knowledge domain or attained prescribed levels of performance in the skills domain. These outcomes are assessed every year; however, data on dispositions, like students’ needs are collected only every other year. The data on student needs are collected using an instrument developed by the American College Testing (ACT) titled the College Student Needs Assessment Survey (CSNAS). By answering the questions, students assist University personnel – deans, faculty, advisors, financial-aid officers – in identifying and developing programs and services that will better address their educational and personal needs. The OIAE gives feedback to the schools and colleges about their freshman students’ self-perceived needs. Research shows that many of these self-perceived needs are important factors that are related to retention and graduation rates, among some underrepresented groups in higher education (Palmer, Davis, Hilton, 2009).

In Fall 2010, OIAE administered in CSNAS during freshman orientation week and later in the semester when two of the undergraduate schools and colleges individually organized mandatory meetings for freshman students – one of which was a celebration of the conclusion of the freshman seminar course. The OIAE prepared for and expected to obtain nearly 800 completed surveys from the freshmen; however, in the final analysis, only about 300 surveys were usable. What happened?

Although OIAE had communicated with one of the colleges about the importance of the survey, after the surveys were distributed and the IRB instructions were read to the students, one of the administrators who was in charge of the program gave the signal to turn off the lights and show a video. Apparently, the administrator did not listen to the instructions that were being read and just imagine what the students must have been thinking (about the survey) as they tried to fill out the survey in the dark! Throughout the program, OIAE staff observed students signing an attendance sheet and then leaving; while others continuously talked among themselves while administrators and faculty were at the podium. At the end of the program, the OIAE staff found literally hundreds of surveys and pencils on the floor and in the chairs.

The point – if University administrators and faculty do not demonstrate by their behavior that they value the role of assessment in providing evidence about students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions, including their needs; then, can we expect students to behave otherwise?

Gerunda B. Hughes


What are student perceptions of their leadership and teamwork skills?

Results for the 2010 undergraduate student graduating student exit survey revealed…….

- 78% of undergraduate respondents were satisfied with their teamwork skills
- 90% of undergraduate respondents were satisfied with their leadership skills.

Leadership and teamwork skills are important to cultivate in preparing students to enter the workforce.

Source: 2010 Howard University Undergraduate Graduating Student Exit Survey (N=945)

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Workplace Readiness and General Education Skills

Workplace readiness skills and General education skills are important as students prepare to enter the workforce. Workplace readiness and general education skills include, critical thinking and analysis skills, verbal and written communication skills.

The graphs on the left display the 2010 undergraduate and graduate student satisfaction of workplace readiness skills. The information represents the extent to which students were satisfied with their preparation for workplace readiness and general education skills.

- Undergraduate and graduate respondents were both satisfied with the extent to which their programs developed critical thinking and analysis skills.
- Undergraduate respondents were slightly more satisfied with the extent to which their programs developed verbal communication skills.
- Undergraduate and graduate respondents were both satisfied with the extent to which program developed written communication skills.
- Undergraduate respondents were the least satisfied with the extent to which their program increased their knowledge of mathematics.

Source: 2010 Howard University Undergraduate Graduating Student Exit Survey and 2010 Howard University Graduate and Professional Graduating Student Exit Survey.

Cultivating a Culture of Evidence

Cultivating a culture of evidence in higher education includes the implementation of a model of accountability that focuses on improving student learning and achievement. An important step in cultivating a culture of evidence in higher education is to effectively involve stakeholders in identifying intended learning outcomes.

- Schools and Colleges clearly define learning objectives.
- Evidence-Based decision making
- Aspects of student learning that are important for students to know and be able to do.
- Many schools and colleges fall at different points along the assessment continuum.
Did You Know?

- 33% of respondents from the 2010 undergraduate exit survey reported they attended professional conferences.
- 21% of respondents reported that presented research in a conference or a meeting.
- 50% of respondents did not participate in an undergraduate research opportunity.
- 86% of respondents reported that they were satisfied with the extent to which their academic programs increased their knowledge of African-American culture.

*Source: 2010 Undergraduate Student Exit Survey (N=945)

Innovative Assessment Tools

Innovative assessment tools are being used to evaluate student learning and progress:

- E-Portfolios can be utilized to monitor and evaluate student learning and progress. This tool will be useful for professors and students. Dr. Wallace attended a workshop that focused on the use of E-Portfolios in higher education sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) in San Francisco, CA in January 2011.
- Clickers are formative assessment tools that are used to evaluate student learning in class. Clickers provide bi-directional feedback to professors and students in order to improve teaching and learning, respectively.

Activities and Announcements

The OIAE will engage in a number of activities in the upcoming months including the following:

- The OIAE is working with the Student Quality of Life Assessment Sub-Committee and the College/School Assessment Sub-Committee to address issues surrounding outcomes both inside and outside of the classroom.
- The OIAE is using the standards outlined by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) to assess Student Quality of Life and in assessing School/College assessments.
- The OIAE presented at a webinar hosted by the graduate school on December 8th that discusses applying to graduate school. The webinar will also include a discussion of the new Graduate Record Examination (GRE).
- The OIAE recently began collecting data from institutions of higher education for the Thurgood Marshall Graduation Rates Study.
- The OIAE is creating an assessment dashboard that contains graphical information about Howard University student outcomes (e.g., graduation rates, student engagement). The dashboard also contains a special section that focuses on academic advising.
- The OIAE will begin to focus on assessing problem-solving and scientific reasoning skills.

This article discusses effective instructional strategies that lead to college student persistence in higher education. A major component in the vision of Howard University consists of increase of excellence in teaching and learning. In cultivating a culture of evidence of student outcomes, it is important to assess instructional strategies that lead to positive outcomes.

### Effective Classroom Instruction

Student perceptions of classroom instruction have been correlated with student perceptions of teacher behavior. These behaviors include instructional clarity, course organization, and preparation. Other effective classroom instructional strategies include teacher expressiveness and the amount and type of feedback given to students. Meta-analytic reviews that have examined the effects of effective classroom instruction have found that:

- Perceptions of classroom instructional practices are multidimensional
- Perceptions of classroom instructional practices are reliable and stable
- Perceptions of classroom instructional practices are positively correlated with course achievement (grades and exams)

### Exposure to Effective Instruction and College Persistence

Researchers have suggested that exposure to faculty organization and instruction for the extent to which students socially integrate into their respective college environments.

- Students who are more socially integrated into the college environment are more than likely to persist at that institution.
- The purpose of the this study was to examine if student exposure to faculty organization and preparedness will increase student enrollment during the second year of college.

### Methodology

- A web-based survey was administered to the students at four time points amongst a group of students at a large University in the Midwest. The first time point was administered at the beginning of the 1st year and collected demographic information and academic preparation. The second, third, and fourth time point collected data during the 1st academic year and 2nd academic year and assessed student college experiences and student engagement in campus activities and programs.
- Exposure to effective classroom instruction was measured based on student perceptions of faculty organization and preparedness. College satisfaction was measured based on a single-item that assessed their overall satisfaction with the education they have received. College persistence was measured based on student enrollment at the University in the second-year.

### Results

- Results revealed that overall exposure to organized and clear instruction significantly impacted college student persistence in the second year above and beyond race, ethnicity, ACT scores, cumulative 1st year GPA and graduate degree plans.
- Results revealed that the effect of classroom instruction on college persistence at the same institution was mediated by overall satisfaction with that institution.

### Conclusions

- In addition to learning outcomes and achievement, exposure to effective classroom instruction at the collegiate level influences student satisfaction with the institution and student retention.
- Universities can create a culture that emphasizes excellence in teaching and learning through professional development activities and programs that are designed to improve teacher effectiveness.

### Implications

- OIAE works closely with CETLA (Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Assessment) in host professional development activities for faculty members at Howard University to help faculty members implement effective classroom instructional strategies.
- Howard University can utilize innovative assessment tools to monitor and evaluate student learning and progress.
- Increase knowledge of the effectiveness of instructional strategies on student learning and achievement.
- Assessment of effective instructional strategies on student learning and persistence will be an important component in the creating a culture of evidence-based decision making.
- Faculty members play a critical role in improving student retention.