

The Role of Classroom-Based Assessment

In the Age of Standardized Testing

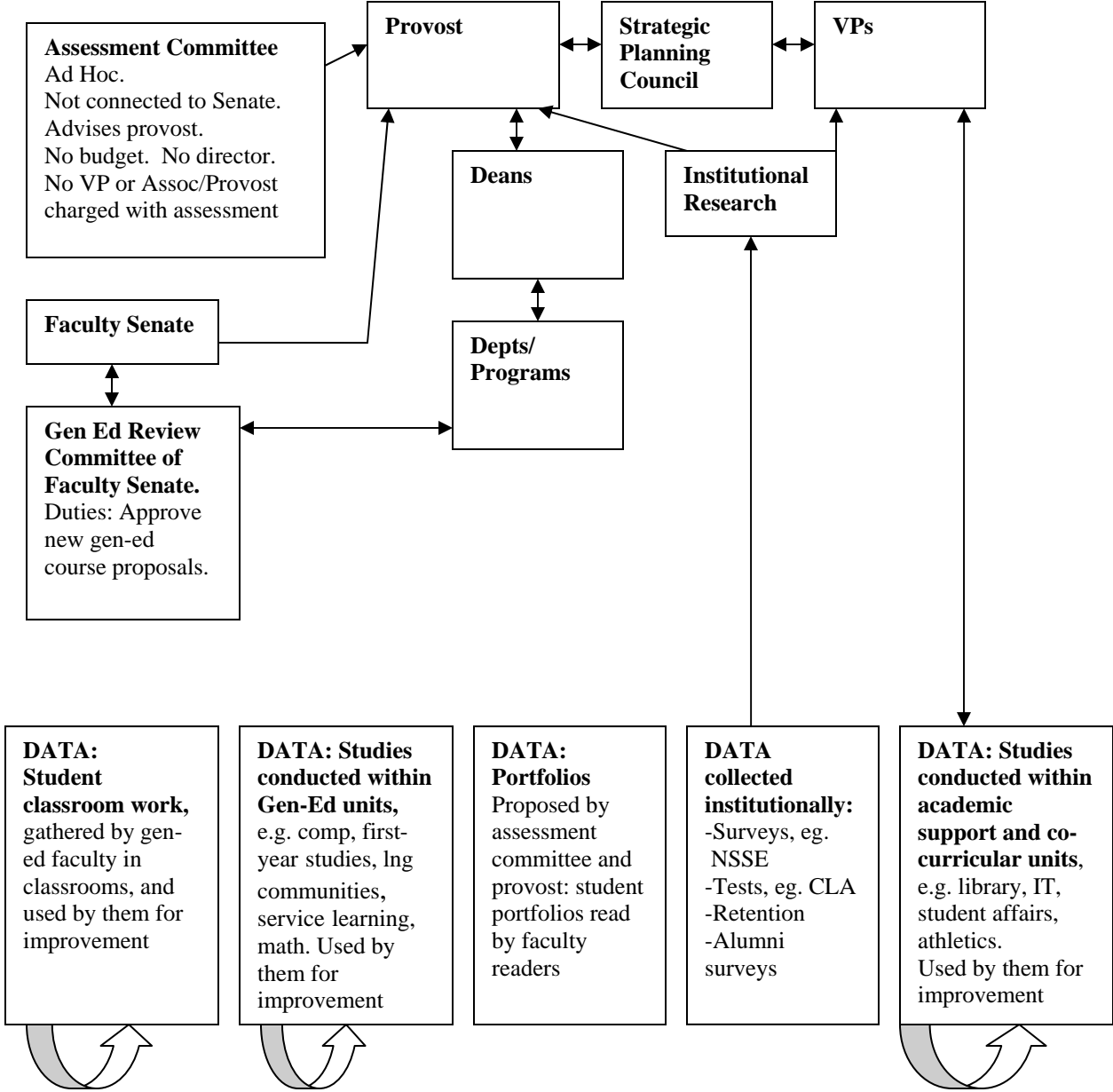
By Barbara E. Walvoord, Ph.D.
Professor Emerita
University of Notre Dame, IN

Walvoord@nd.edu

Increased Pressure for Standardized Testing

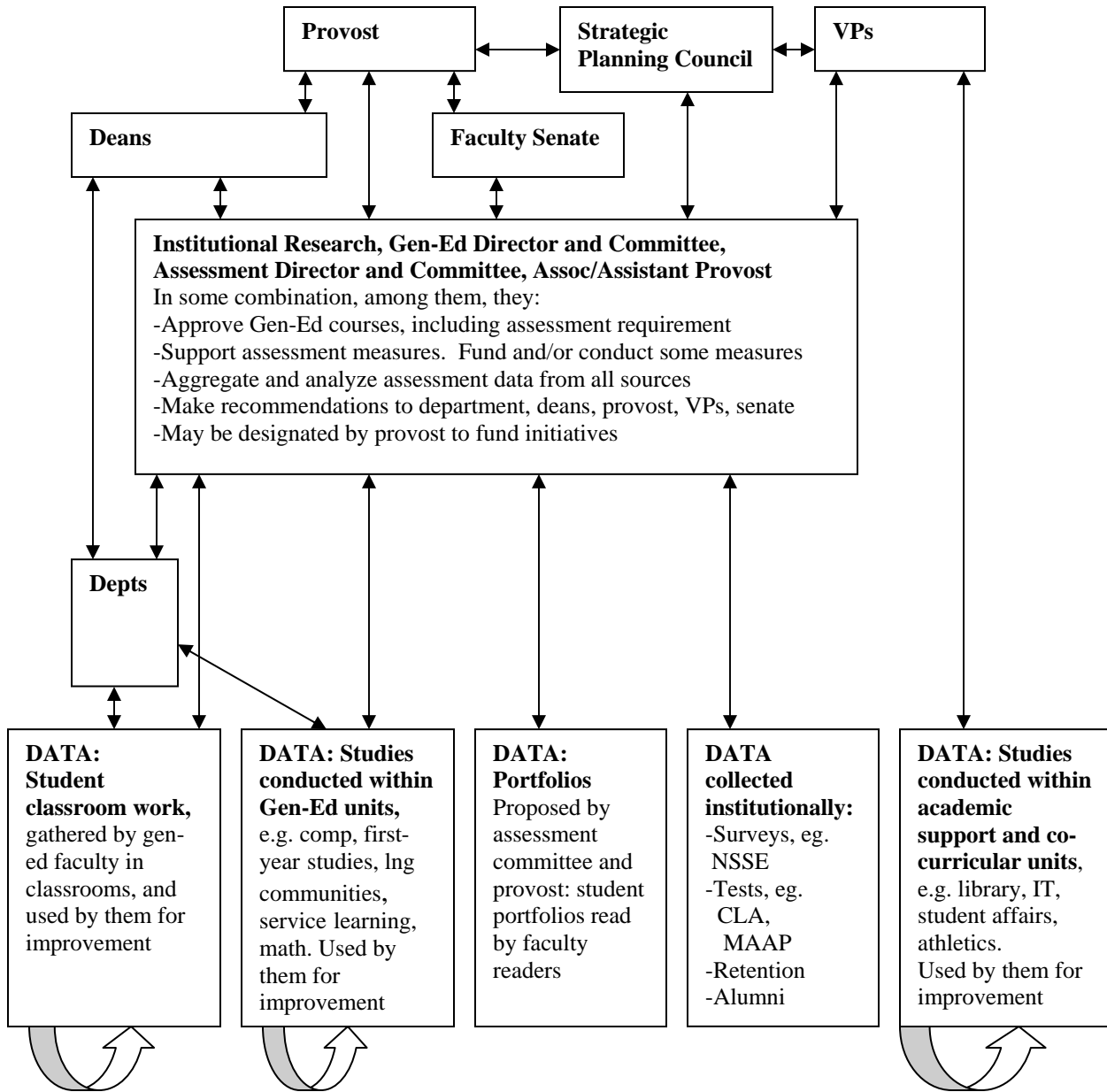
- Spellings Commission
 - U.S. Dept. of Education “Commission on the Future of Higher Education” Report issued September 2006
 - Higher education lobby and supporters fought back proposals to
 - Set minimum standards of student achievement for all colleges and universities
 - Generate measures of learning whereby colleges could be compared to one another
 - Abolish regional accreditation agencies in favor of a single federal agency with career evaluators rather than faculty/administrators acting as peer reviewers
 - 2008: Congress clarified that colleges can establish their own unique missions, BUT they MUST assess student learning—that part remains strong and unchanged, with bipartisan support. (“Colleges Emerge the Clear Winner in the Battle over Accreditation.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Feb. 1, 2008, p. A19).
 - Mix of direct and indirect, qualitative and quantitative measures
 - Institution must use information for decision-making
 - Accrediting bodies can ask for follow-up reports, visits
- The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)
 - Launched by American Assn. of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and National Assn. of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). Attempt to take control rather than have it done to us.
 - Institutions who volunteer to participate agree to publish, in a common format:
 - Information traditionally available, e.g. graduation rates, cost
 - Scores on measures of student engagement (National Survey of Student Engagement: NSSE)
 - One of three direct measures of learning: Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), or Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)
- NSSE releases scores to *USA Today*
 - More than 250 schools agreed to release their scores, out of 1200 that have administered NSSE since its debut in 2000
- Univ. of Phoenix publicizes its scores in comparison to national averages

Example: A Problematic Assessment Process



Questions: How could classroom data and data collected by Gen Ed Units be used? Who could aggregate and interpret those data? How could data collected at the institutional level be better distributed and used? How could the assessment committee function more effectively? What power would it have to have? Are the proposed portfolios a good idea for this institution? What are the pros and cons? What information about student learning does the strategic planning process need? How could that information be provided?

Providing for Aggregation, Analysis, and Use of Gen-Ed Data.



What happened?

1. Institutional Research, Gen-Ed committee, and Assessment Committee acquire additional resources/personnel. They work together to oversee gen-ed assessment, aggregate and analyze gen-ed data from all sources, disseminate information, and shape recommendations.
2. Departments play a stronger role in collecting, analyzing, reporting, and using gen-ed data from their own gen-ed programs.

How to Use Classroom Work for Gen-Ed Assessment

Decide Which Classes will be Sites of Assessment

- **Key required courses** (e.g. composition, languages, math). Assessment leads to:
 - Changes in those courses
 - Transfer of information/recommendations to appropriate decision-makers
 - What are the most salient strengths and weaknesses of the students?
 - What factors appear to help/hinder learning?
 - What issues need to be addressed beyond the course level?
- **All Gen-Ed courses**

At point of acceptance and/or periodic review, department that sponsors gen-ed course must:

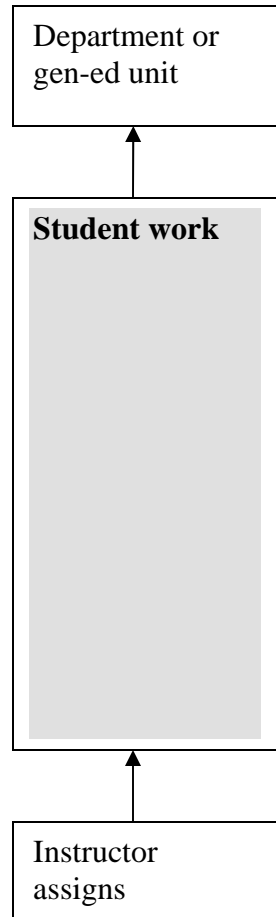
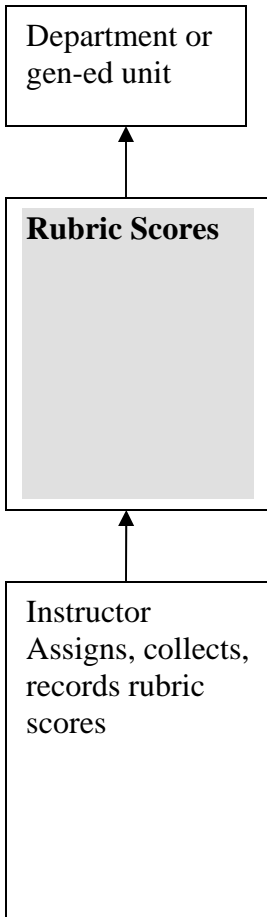
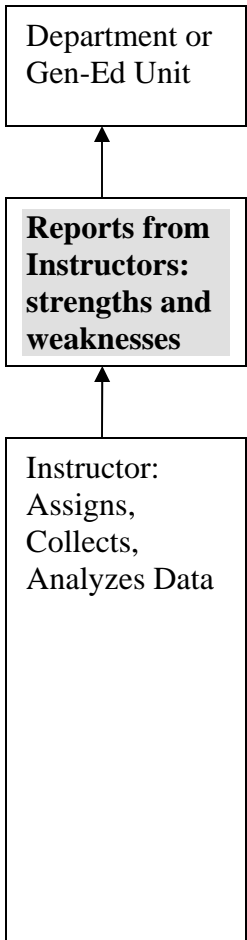
 - State course learning goals consonant with Core/Gen-Ed goals
 - State the types of assessment (tests, exams, assignments) that test the goals
 - Describe how the information is used by the faculty member(s) for improvement in the course
 - Describe how the department will ensure reasonable consistency and quality across multiple sections of the course
 - Describe how aggregated classroom information will inform departmental decisions about the gen-ed course
 - Describe how the department will submit reports and data about student learning in its courses
(see Appendix B for sample departmental proposal):
 - **Reports from gen-ed faculty** based on their own analysis of students' work
 - All faculty, or a sample of faculty, turn in short reports
 - What goals/objectives did I measure?
 - How did I measure them?
 - What were two strengths and two weaknesses of student work?
 - What do I recommend for my own teaching and for institutional action?
 - OR Faculty turn in rubric scores using software package
 - Reports/scores may be turned in to a gen-ed group (e.g. all those teaching writing-intensive courses), to the Gen-Ed office, or to a department (e.g. all history gen-ed courses). Departmental or gen-ed group reports and recommendations go to other decision-makers
 - Example: case study of Raymond Walters College in Walvoord, *Effective Grading* (Jossey-Bass, 1998).
 - **Portfolios/samples of student work**, read by faculty or other readers external to the course(s)
 - Selected faculty volunteer to turn in student responses to an assignment, which are scored by a group of readers using a rubric (for example of a rubric, see Appendix C)
 - Gen Ed Committee may give guidance, or require, a type of assignment or rubric
 - Example: Johnson Community College, Kansas. Jeff Seibert.
 - OR selected students are asked, rewarded, or required (usually in a gen-ed capstone course) to submit portfolios

Decide Where Analysis Will Occur: Instructor? Department? Other?

	Establish Criteria	Collect student work	Analyze student work	Recommend action or further inquiry	Act
Model #1: Instructor reports to dept or gen-ed unit, based on instructor analysis of student work	Instructor (perhaps working with dept.)	Instructor	Instructor, Dept/Institution (Instructor generates rubric scores and/or analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Dept/Institution analyzes reports from instructors)	Instructor, Dept/ Institution (Instructor may make recommendation to dept or gen-ed unit, as part of his/her report)	Instructor, Dept/ Institution
Model #2: Student-collected portfolios analyzed by a faculty committee	Dept/Institution	Dept/Institution	Dept/Institution	Dept/Institution	Instructor, Dept/Institution
Model #3: Student work from a sample of intact classes, analyzed by a faculty committee	Dept/Institution	Dept/Institution	Dept/Institution	Dept/Institution	Instructor, Dept/Institution
Model #4: Instructors report individual student rubric scores via software, to Institutional Research	Dept/Institution	Instructor	Instructor	Dept/Institution	Instructor, Dept/Institution
Model #5: Groups of instructors read each others' student work, report to dept or gen-ed unit	Instructor	Instructor	Instructors in small groups	Instructors in small groups	Instructor, Dept/ Institution
Standardized test	External Body	Institution	External Body	Institution	Instructor, Dept/ Institution

- Goals:
 - Test what is taught (validity)
 - Evaluate student work accurately and consistently (reliability)
 - Encourage instructors, departments, and the institution to act on the information

Options



Appendix A: Sample Application from a Department for a Gen Ed Course

Department: English

Course Title: Introduction to Literature

Learning objectives for this course, related to Gen-Ed learning goals

General-Education Learning Goals This Course Will Address	Course Objectives	How is Student Achievement of the Objective Measured?
#1 Students will think critically and analytically about an issue, idea, or problem	Students will write an essay using literary critical techniques to establish and defend an interpretation of literature, and will address counter-interpretations.	Students in all sections will write at least one literary-critical essay in which they establish and defend an interpretation of literature and address counter-interpretations.
#2 Students will communicate effectively orally and in writing to various audiences	Students will express their ideas about literature in written essays. The writing will be well-organized, clear, and consonant with Edited Standard Written English (ESWE)	Faculty will evaluate students' organization, clarity, and use of ESWE
“	Students will participate effectively in class discussion of literature	Faculty will evaluate student work for this aspect.
#5 Students will follow ethical principles for academic work	Students will appropriately cite sources for their work. They will avoid plagiarism.	Faculty will evaluate student work for this aspect.
#6 Students will demonstrate appreciation for cultures different from their own	Students' interpretations of literature will demonstrate appreciation for the cultures, contexts, and literary conventions from which the literature arises.	Faculty will evaluate student work for this aspect.

Q: How will classroom evaluations be used for classroom decision-making? Departmental decision-making?

Each semester, faculty teaching general-education courses will submit to the department a report on students' strengths and weaknesses measured against the objectives. The faculty will meet to share their own plans for change and to recommend changes to the department as needed. The department will act as needed to address difficulties. The department will keep minutes of these meetings and records of its actions based on classroom assessment.

Q: If more than one faculty member is teaching the course, how does the department assure that all sections follow the guidelines explained above?

Annually, the department distributes to all its gen-ed faculty a copy of the objectives and guidelines for assessment. At the annual meeting, faculty share their findings about student strengths and weaknesses, and exchange ideas and best practices.

Q: Will the department be willing to submit an annual report to the General Education Committee reporting (in the aggregate) its faculty's findings about students' strengths and weaknesses, and its own actions?

Yes

Appendix B: Sample Rubrics

Rubric for Literary-Critical Essay

Note: such a rubric may be developed for use by all faculty teaching the gen-ed literature course, or faculty may be free to develop their own rubrics, perhaps using this as a guideline, or faculty may be asked to incorporate one or two common items into their own rubric.

5	4	3	2	1
<p>Thesis: The thesis of the paper is clear, complex, and challenging. It does not merely state the obvious or exactly repeat others= viewpoints, but creatively and thoughtfully opens up our thinking about the work.</p>	<p>The thesis is both clear and reasonably complex.</p>	<p>The thesis of the paper is clear. It takes a stand on a debatable issue, though the thesis may be unimaginative, largely a recapitulation of readings and class discussion, and/or fairly obvious.</p>	<p>Thesis is relevant to the assignment. It is discernible, but the reader has to work to understand it.</p>	<p>Thesis is irrelevant to the assignment and/or not discernible.</p>
<p>Complexity and Originality: The essay is unusually thoughtful, deep, creative, and far-reaching in its analysis. The writer explores the subject from various points of view, acknowledges alternative interpretations, and recognizes the complexity of insider and outsider issues in literature and in life. Other works we have read and ideas we have discussed are integrated as relevant. The essay shows a curious mind at work.</p>	<p>The essay is thoughtful and extensive in its analysis. It acknowledges alternative interpretations and recognizes complexity in literature and in life. Some other works are integrated as relevant.</p>	<p>The writer goes somewhat beyond merely paraphrasing someone else=s point of view or repeating what was discussed in class. AND/OR the essay does not integrate other relevant works we have read.</p>	<p>Writer moves only marginally beyond merely paraphrasing someone else=s point of view or repeats what was discussed in class.</p>	<p>The paper is mere paraphrase or repetition.</p>
<p>Organization and Coherence: The reader feels that the writer is in control of the direction and</p>	<p>As for A5" but sub-points may not be fashioned to open up the</p>	<p>The reader feels that the writer is in control of the direction and</p>	<p>The essay has some discernible main points.</p>	<p>The essay has no discernible plan of organiza-tion.</p>

5	4	3	2	1
organization of the essay. The essay follows a logical line of reasoning to support its thesis and to deal with counter-evidence and alternative viewpoints. Sub-points are fashioned so as to open up the topic in the most effective way.	topic in the most effective way.	organization of the essay most of the time. The essay generally follows a logical line of reasoning to support its thesis.		
Evidence, Support: The writer=s claims and interpretations are backed with evidence from the literature, works we have read, secondary sources, and sensible reasoning. The writer assumes the reader has read the work and does not need the plot repeated, but the writer refers richly and often to the events and words of the novel to support his/her points.	As for A5" but the writer may occasionally drop into mere plot summary	The writer=s claims and interpretations about the works are generally backed with at least some evidence from the works. The writer assumes the reader has read the work and does not need the plot repeated.	The writer=s claims are sometimes backed with evidence. The paper descends at times into plot summary.	The paper is primarily plot summary.
Style: The language is clear, precise, and elegant. It achieves a scholarly tone without sounding pompous. It is the authentic voice of a curious mind at work, talking to other readers of the novel.	The language is clear and precise.	The language is understandable throughout.	The language is sometimes confusing. Sentences do not track.	The language is often confusing. Sentences and paragraphs do not track.
Sources: The essay integrates secondary sources smoothly. It quotes when the exact words of another author are important, and otherwise paraphrases. It does not just string together secondary sources, but uses them to support the writer=s own thinking. Each source is identified in the text, with some statement about its	As for A5" but sources may be quoted with no contextual explanation AND/OR writer may use direct quotation and paraphrase in less than optimal ways.	The essay does not just string together secondary sources, but uses them to support the writer=s own thinking.	The essay strings together secondary sources.	There is no use of secondary sources.

5	4	3	2	1
author; there are no quotes just stuck into the text without explanation.				
Grammar, Punctuation: There are no discernible departures from Standard Edited Written English (ESWE)	There are a few departures from ESWE	There are no more than an average of 2 departures from ESWE per page in the critical areas listed below.	There are more than 2.	Some portion of the essay is impossible to read because of departures from ESWE.

Critical Areas:

- Spelling or typo
 - Sentence boundary punctuation (run-ons, comma splices, fused sentences, fragments)
 - Use of apostrophe, -s, and -es
 - Pronoun forms
 - Pronoun agreement, and providing antecedents for pronouns
 - Verb forms and subject-verb agreement
 - Use of gender-neutral language
 - Capitalization of proper nouns and of first words in the sentence
-

Rubric for Journals in English Literature

Assignment: Journals are to record students' questions about the literature and to consider how the literature relates to their own lives and values.

To achieve a C or above, the journal must be handed in on time, must contain the required number of daily entries, and each entry must be at least 250 words.

The faculty member collects and grades the journal entries periodically throughout the course; thus each grade reflects a number of journal entries.

The faculty member grades the journal entries on only two criteria: posing questions and connecting the literature to the students' own lives and values.

Posing Questions

1. The journal entries do not pose any questions
2. The journal entries pose only factual or obvious questions
3. The journal entries pose a few questions that address larger issues of the work of literature, beyond what is factual or obvious.
4. The journal entries pose a number of questions that address larger issues.
5. The journal entries pose a number of questions that address larger issues, and when a question is posed, the student almost always muses in creative ways about the question, extending it to related areas, bringing in other readings, noting underlying assumptions, or in other ways deepening the inquiry, showing a curious mind at work.

Connecting literature to students' own lives and values

1. Journal entries merely summarize the literature OR merely reflect on the student's own life and values
2. Journal entries summarize the literature AND reflect on the student's life and values, but make little or no explicit connection between the two
3. Entries use the literature in a very simple way to draw "lessons" to apply to the student's own life
4. A few entries make thoughtful links between the literature and the student's own life and values. They use the literature as a vehicle for pushing and exploring the student's own life and values. They recognize the complexity both of the literary work and of life and values.
5. All of the entries do as in 4 above. The students' musings are rich and deep, showing a thoughtful, reflective mind at work.

Resources

- Banta, T.S., ed. 2007. *Assessing Student Achievement in General Education.: Assessment Update Collections*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Bresciani, M.J., ed. 2007. *Assessing Student Learning in General Education: Good Practice Case Studies*. Bolton, MA: Anker.
- Walvoord, B. E. *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Walvoord, B.E. and V. Anderson, V.J. *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.