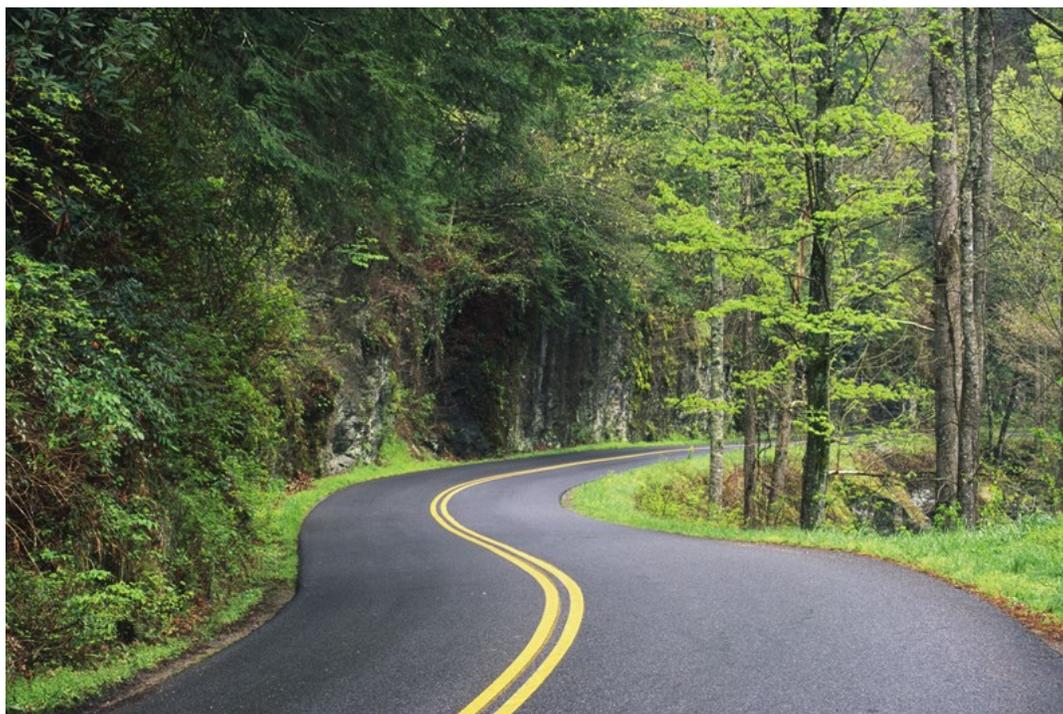




GASP! Get a Student Pondering

Brought to you by... the QEP & General Education Committees



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The Journey to Better Assessment

As Hemingway reminds us, the journey to our destination is just as important as reaching where we are trying to go. As an institution, we are placing more emphasis on good quality assessment and the use of those results to make improvements in student learning. On our journey towards that goal, we have an opportunity to engage in the reflection of what we are already doing, to share with our colleagues our successes and near misses, and to apply critical thinking skills to determine what is and what isn't working. In this edition of *GASP! Get a Student Pondering*, we bring you a number of articles that focus on using assessment wisely and the application of critical thinking in teaching. Enjoy the reading and the journey!

**“It is good to have an end to journey toward;
but it is the journey that matters in the end.”
- Ernest Hemingway**

The Entrepreneurial Educator for the 21st Century.

By Warren Smith

Today's employers are seeking students who have the ability to think critically. With the down-sizing and streamlining of many of today's businesses, students must demonstrate a level of leadership ability from the time of the interview through their entire career. College professors play a very important role in developing these required skills in their students and preparing them to join the workforce of the 21st century. However, this means professors are charged more than ever to deliver and teach at a more challenging level to assure that their students will gain the needed skills to become employable and productive.



I believe an **Entrepreneurial Teaching Style** can help students develop core institutional assessment outcome skills such as communication and critical thinking. This will however, require professors who embrace an entrepreneurial approach to teaching.

So what is an **entrepreneurial teaching style**? Can students really learn through this method of teaching? Yes, I believe that students can gain great communication and critical thinking skills, if their instructor approaches the classroom as an entrepreneur rather than a manager.

First, let's look at some key skills and attributes of very successful entrepreneurs. Why are they successful? There are many reasons aside from pure luck. Most entrepreneurs are intentional and passionate in their behavior. They develop plans and aggressively implement those actions to get the results that they seek. In other words, they perform the activities that will assure successful results.

Some behavioral traits displayed by entrepreneurs are: self-directed, self-disciplined, self-nurturing, action-oriented, highly energetic and willingness to tolerate uncertainty.

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Successful entrepreneurs bring great vision to their venture and that's what will make an entrepreneurial classroom distinct. As educators, we can bring vision, excitement, creativity, flexibility and energy into our classrooms, to reach the endgame of measurable student learning.

As entrepreneurial teachers, we must recognize that all our students represent undiscovered opportunities. Our job is to bring out the diamonds in the rough. We must discover the possibilities and potential within each individual. This will require the ability of teachers to assess students' strengths and weaknesses in exactly the same way as entrepreneurs do with their ventures.

Today's students want to be challenged. Yet, they must believe that the information / knowledge they are learning can be applied for today and tomorrow's opportunities. If the information appears too abstract, students will lose interest quickly. Students are not willing to let a teacher enter their world unless they see value. They want to be engaged on their terms. They want to share their thoughts, but only if they believe that the teacher is listening.

Economics is a subject that is based on many theoretical concepts. Many of these concepts have been around for hundreds of years and students do not see the relevance in studying economics. Because there is much contradiction in economics, students find themselves in a quandary trying to figure out how to express themselves in a subject area where there is so much material and so many opinions.



How to Identify the Characteristics of High Risk Learners in Higher Education

By Dr. Kristy Taylor

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The relationship between students and faculty is the corner-stone of student success and retention rates. For faculty, it is important to develop relationships with students early on because generally students will only be in the class for a short period. Faculty must be able to recognize the characteristics of high-risk learners and offer the proper interventions to help them. When dealing with high-risk learners, faculty should be willing to communicate and make referrals to advisors and other college resources as appropriate.

A high-risk learner is a student who may exhibit several of the following characteristics in the classroom:

- signs of low self-esteem
- feelings of alienation, as if they do not belong
- struggling with reading comprehension
- struggling with writing skills
- a lack of organizational skills
- language barriers
- dealing with home life issues (difficult family life, single-parent, death, abuse, etc.)
- trouble focusing
- insufficient communication skills
- lack of respect for authority figures
- troublesome, disruptive attitudes
- tardiness and absenteeism
- learning difficulties
- not challenged by the curriculum (students may become bored as a result)
- completely unresponsive



If a student exhibits the characteristics of a high-risk learner, faculty should be proactive in communicating with the student to identify the underlying causes of the issue. In some cases, it may be easy to identify an issue right away in order to make the appropriate rec-

ommendations, while others may be more difficult. Students who have a language barrier, for example, are easier to identify than those who are having trouble focusing in class due to issues at home. In both cases, it is important for the faculty member to communicate with the student directly as a means of intervention.

The root cause of issues associated with high-risk learners, may stem from a variety of factors such as: previous academic difficulties, family life, demographics, economics, educational expectations, and behavioral standards. Students may need access to tutors, advisors, counselors, and other on-campus services to complete the course successfully. While faculty can help students by making referrals, the student must also be willing to seek help as necessary to ensure their success in the course.

At the collegiate level, a student's success is deemed as a partnership between the learner and institution, so the student has a responsibility to utilize the resources available to them. In addition, all members of the institution should seek to build a relationship with students that allows the students to feel comfortable asking questions and accepting recommendations or referrals. As the landscape of post-secondary education changes, identifying and encouraging high-risk learners to take advantage of on-campus support resources will play a vital role in their success.

Meet Dr. Kristy Taylor

Dr. Kristy Taylor is a Professor of Health Science and American History and has worked in the field of education for more than 10 years. Prior to her work at Palm Beach State College, she was an Air Force military training instructor, and has long been interested in healthcare and healthcare management. Dr. Taylor is interested in research related to topics that promote or improve culture, health education, student engagement, and historical analysis; she holds a Doctorate in Health Science – Global Health from A.T. Still University. She has been a valued member of the QEP Implementation Team since 2010 and serves as department chair on the Belle Glade campus.



Juggling Questions

By Dr. Ana Porro

Why assessment? Are we aiming to improve our General Education program or validate it? Are the students learning the most important things we want them to learn? Are we getting better at facilitating student learning? If not, what are the stumbling points? How might we change what we are doing to help them learn more effectively? Might revisions to curriculum, new pedagogies, and/or new technologies help



improve student learning? Would new or increased funds help students learn more effectively? Where and how would those funds have the greatest impact on student learning?

Good assessment is one whose results are used to improve teaching and learning and assist in planning and budgeting decisions. It helps students and teachers understand what is working and what is not working. Assessment feedback also helps students understand their strengths and weaknesses. Today faculty and staff increasingly follow a learning-centered paradigm. The paradigm draws on significant research demonstrating that students learn more effectively when they are actively involved in self-directed learning while the professor functions as a guide moving the students through this process.

It is clear that the primary function of assessment is to provide useful information for decision-making. Should we continue to do what we are doing? Should we change or modify what we are doing? Should we drop or eliminate what we are doing? In addition to this decision-making function, assessment also provides information for accountability. The results of assessment also inform both the public and college audiences of the quality and value of a program. Taxpayers and the public at large look at assessment results to answer

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their questions. Is the college worthy of their investment and support? Is the college operating efficiently? Is the college effective in achieving its goals? Are students successful?

When general education clusters meet on professional development day, we will be discussing the results of our own assessment. We need to keep in mind that every assessment strategy is imperfect and inaccurate (Suskie, P.299). As we discuss results, we want to consider questions regarding the student learning outcomes, the curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment strategies and tools. Do we have too many learning outcomes? Are they appropriate or should we revise them? How well is the curriculum addressing each learning outcome? How long does it take students to achieve these learning outcomes? Are your students engaged? Do they have good study habits? Is the assessment a good match for the learning outcomes? Should the assessment be revised? In conclusion, good assessment is a perpetual work in progress. A perfect assessment does not exist.

Suskie, Linda. "What is Assessment?" *Assessing Student Learning*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009: 3-17.

Meet Dr. Ana Porro

People often wonder how I've been teaching at the College for 25 years, when I am only 40. These are the type of real life applications my students learn to solve, always asking whether the answer could be true or if it makes sense. I love teaching math at any level. Currently I'm teaching algebra and calculus.

I often find myself juggling students, college work, family, community involvement, and the beach. Emphasis on the beach! Needless to say, my favorite week of the year is summer. Next would have to be Spring Break, but that is only because Math Awareness Week is just around the corner.

As a member of the General Education (Gen Ed) committee I often think of GE, a nickname I received when I was juggling babies, family, work, community volunteer and graduate school. What the Gen Ed committee has really taught me is to ask questions throughout every step of the process. And sometimes the answer to a question is just another question.



What is Embedded Assessment?

By Robin Fiedler

Assessment is a process, an endless process with several goals including improving teaching methods and evaluating the degree to which students achieve institutional learning outcomes on multiple levels from the course level to the general education level to the degree and/or program level. This article's scope will focus on embedded assessment based on Linda Suskie's "What is Assessment?" Chapter 1 from *Assessing Student Learning*. Embedded assessment is a task that PBSC's General Education committee is currently asking faculty to review and improve before the end of the spring semester in preparation for the fall 2014 second embedded assessment go around. Faculty interested in a more comprehensive overview of the multiple-level assessment model, please attend my break out session on development day, March 26.

Embedded assessment happens on the course level. The process is a cyclical 4-step ongoing event: faculty set learning outcomes for a course, and then provide learning opportunities for students. Faculty administer an assessment tool, such as a multiple choice test, short answer test, and/or a writing or research project. The students' submissions are graded, and then faculty analyze the results to improve the learning experience for students in the course by improving curriculum, assessment tools, and pedagogy (Suskie 4-5). Sounds simple. Not.

Collaborative assessment, among students, faculty, advisors, tutors, administration in unison, is encouraged over individual bubbles of teaching successes. Suskie emphasizes, "When students can see connections among their learning experiences, their learning is

Faculty interested in a more comprehensive overview of the multiple-level assessment model, please attend my break out session on Development Day, March 26.

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deeper and more lasting” (5). Suskie’s call for deeper learning stresses that students need to sense that core curriculum is interconnected and progressive. In order to achieve the interconnected sense, assessment should start with embedded assessment disclosure in the classroom. Students should be aware of a course’s learning outcomes and the tools that will be used to assess their competency, as well as the significance of those competencies’ ‘carry over value’ to other courses and eventually the ‘real’ world.

Assessment at the course level is based on an objective test or written work that is calculated into the students’ course grades; it is not the students’ final grade in the class. It may seem contradictory, but final grades typically include credit for attendance, participation, and/or extra credit, none of which assess students’ competencies in “key learning goals” (Suskie 6). Thus, there is the need to create an assessment tool, test or writing assignment that singularly assesses several crucial learning outcomes for the course.

If the course is taught by only one professor college wide, then embedded assessment is simplified, but if the course is taught by multiple professors, each creating their own individual assessment tools with varying grading standards, students do not benefit, especially if the course is a prerequisite and essential to transfer or necessary transferable career skills. Common core courses, such as the Gen Ed courses, require common learning outcomes and common embedded assessments for the success of the students’ learning experiences. Those common assessments must be meaningful and rigorous in measuring students’ competencies.

‘Teaching to the test’ is not the goal of common embedded assessment; that’s why the assessment tool should be meaningful enough not to lend itself to such a limited model. As well, “Teaching to the test gets a bad name when tests measure something other than what we value, either because someone else has told us what to assess or because our own tests



measure relatively trivial learning” (Suskie 12). Course assessment tools should be created by the faculty teaching the course and made complex enough to measure a wide range of criteria that students learn on the subject matter of any specific course.

If there are common learning goals and common assessment tools for common courses, what happens to academic freedom? Individual professors preserve academic freedom by creating “additional goals of their own choosing beyond this common core” (Suskie 6-7). Embedded assessment focuses on the crucial and essential learning outcomes for a common course, not all of the learning outcomes although it could cover all, such as a capstone project. For more meaningful Gen Ed embedded assessment results, faculty who teach the course should collaborate and decide on the essential learning outcomes for competency on the core subject. Preserving academic freedom is an important reason why embedded assessment is not solely determined by students’ final grades in any given course.

Analyzing the results in relation to faculty evaluations are even touchier subjects of embedded assessment. If students fail to meet the benchmark ‘score’ on the embedded assessment tool, then does that mean the faculty member has failed to teach? No. Again, allow me to bring back the endless process of embedded assessment; the journey is a progression towards continuous improvement, not an unrealistic linear upward ascent of success. Instead, it is an exercise of reflection to devise new strategies. Suskie recommends using assessment results for a threefold evaluation of students’ level of achieving learning outcomes, strengths as well as weaknesses in teaching methods, and “teaching-learning strategies” (12). And the endless process all sounds well in good in theory, but even Suskie concedes, “. . .most faculty and staff lack the time and resources to design and conduct rigorous, replicable empirical research studies with impartial distance” (13). The answer? Suskie calls for a collaborative effort, not just among faculty but institutional collaboration, in designing common assessment tools that measure results across multiple course sections to give more meaning to the embedded assessment results.

More specifically, at PBSC we have the help of our assessment team: members of the Gen Ed committee, Helen Shub, Assessment Director, Jennifer Campbell, Executive Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, and Karen Pain, QEP Manager. They have the resources and time to help faculty design assessment tools, collect results, and evaluate the

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results for meaning. They are your embedded assessment support. Use them to your advantage.

Linda Suskie is a vice president at the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, an accreditor of colleges and universities in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Suskie, Linda. "What is Assessment?" *Assessing Student Learning*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009: 3-17.

Meet Robin Fiedler

Associate Professor Robin Fiedler joined Palm Beach State as an adjunct instructor in 2008 and was hired as a full-time English and Literature faculty member in 2012. She previously taught at Santa Monica College, Cal-State LA, Pasadena City College, the American University in Cairo, and Florida Atlantic University. Her service at PBSC includes English Cluster Chair, General Education Committee member, POLO committee member, and Strategic Planning Committee member for a fully online AA degree. Her professional interests involve new media communications, phenomenology, dramatic literature, video and film. She contributed to Gen Ed's video *Rotten Riting* and POLO's video *POLO: Revolutionizing Educational Cyberspace*. Her short video *The Phleas* was screened at the Treasure Coast Film Festival in 2010, and her current project *The Atonement Tablets* is in the editing stages. She is currently in the early stages of her dissertation on *Ontological Shifts and Technology* at the European Graduate School.



Spring 2014 Development Day

Don't miss out on the opportunity to learn from and to interact with your colleagues from all areas of the College.

March 26

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This is the very reason why economics is a great critical thinking subject--because it can provide students with vast landscape to express their opinions.

Economics is something that all students fear! Why? Because many students believe economics does not apply to their lives, and as a result, they are not as serious as they should be about this subject. I try to settle students' nerves and give them some comfort about the subject of economics, by informing them that they live economics everyday of their lives. Everything they do on this earth involves economics. So, I want them to embrace the concepts, learn the new terms and enjoy the ride and have some fun!

So, I tell my students that it is important that they enter my classroom with an open mind and ask themselves, "what can I learn from economics and how can I apply it to my everyday life? How will this course help me to be successful in my professional career?"

My approach is to develop assignments that will challenge students to learn the concepts and apply them to everyday living. The more the student can actually see the concepts applied to daily situations they are more convinced of its value. This is why I believe that it is important for students to research and analyze the concepts.

When they dig deep into the concepts, critical thinking will naturally arise. **This is why all my assignments have a communication and critical thinking component.**

I have found that a good way to challenge students is to have them form groups of their choice to simulate a real working environment. This structure allows them to teach concepts to their peers. This dynamic component of my classroom really gets students motivated. They don't feel alone! They can help each other to learn material. They can encourage, support and be accountable to each other. When students collaborate, the learning is deeper and more authentic. They must learn to work together and get things done accurately, professionally and on time.

Students always want to look good in front of their peers. So on most occasions they will put in the extra effort so they can be on top of their game to impress the other students. In my *Principals of Economics* courses, I cover a variety of topics that will help students succeed in their future educational, professional, and life goals.

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Prior to beginning my full-time teaching career, I had a successful career in commercial banking. I worked with owners of small to medium-size businesses for 35 years. This “real world” experience aids me in my teaching and has helped in creating my teaching style. I bring a real world teaching philosophy to my classroom and believe strongly that the classroom must resemble the real world, i.e. it must be dynamic and alive.

I want my students to utilize the skills they are learning in the classroom and apply it to real life experiences. Therefore, what they are taught must be practical. I believe the more familiar examples that are used and in which students can relate to, the more this will help them in understanding new material and concepts. For instance, I’ll use music, movies, games, etc. to help get the point across. I am always trying new methods of teaching to make the classroom interactive. Therefore, I incorporate a proactive style. I like to think of my teaching method as entrepreneurial. I try to emulate the style of successful entrepreneurs. I don’t wait for students to raise their hands, I involve them in the conversation immediately. I want them to express their views and opinions on issues to enrich and make the discussion dynamic. I don’t lecture my students, but ask plenty of questions.

I tell my students that they must take responsibility for their own learning. This means that they must read the textbook, complete homework assignments and get to know their peers. I expect them to come to class prepared and ready to participate in discussions. I strongly encourage them to stay current on news and activities relevant to the economy.

Meet Warren Smith

Professor Smith joined Palm Beach State College in 2008 as an adjunct after retiring from a 35 year career in commercial banking. He has since become a full-time faculty member and teaches introduction to business and principles of economics. Professor Smith taught for many years as an adjunct at Roxbury Community College in Boston. In addition, he has taught small business finance, housing and economic courses for the Neighborhood Training Institute and the American Banking Association.

Professor Smith has spent many years working in the areas of economic development of inner city environments and community redevelopment. He loves the entrepreneurial spirit of business development and tries very hard to bring this energy to his classroom. He enjoys the daily stimulation that he receives by engaging with his students to make them as successful as he can and to make them ready for the real world.

When he’s not discussing business and economics, he enjoys reading and listening to his favorite jazz artists John “Trane” Coltrane and Miles Davis. And, oh yes, listening to his wife of 36 years!



*About **GASP!***

Palm Beach State College

The idea behind *GASP!* is pretty simple. We all want students to think! As faculty and staff, we appreciate ideas that will make it easier for us get students thinking, and we want to better understand how assessment can help us know we're on the right track. *GASP!* may come in the form of a single fact sheet, a newsletter, or sometimes perhaps, something more journalistic.

The QEP and General Education Committees want to use *GASP!* as a platform to

- ✓ feature faculty and staff who have or are using strategies that help students demonstrate achievement of any of our general education and institutional learning outcomes, including critical thinking;
- ✓ update readers on important issues related to assessment, accreditation, or the QEP;
- ✓ promote College events related to critical thinking, assessment, or professional learning opportunities for faculty or staff that will lead to improved student learning.

If you have any ideas you would like to have featured in *GASP!*, please contact us!

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