

Performance assessment: what does it look like?



"In-basket": Students Maureen McDevitt, left, and Gwendolyn Bland pore over the materials they receive for the first part of the simulation experience, in which they must respond in writing to constituent letters, memos and phone calls.



Oral presentation: After examining information on controversial issues of book selection for high-school classes, each student chooses a topic, takes a position, and prepares a speech aimed at persuading other members of the council to adopt her position.

Photos by Sue Bartfield

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Readers may wonder what shape assessment actually takes at Alverno College. One clue lies in the Latin derivation of the word, "assess," which means "to sit beside." Alverno faculty often refer to this when explaining assessment. For several

reasons, the Integrated Competence Seminar is a good example of the college's approach to assessment.

First, the Integrated Competence Seminar makes use of all the components that go into effective performance-based assessment:

- Student performance in individual and group situations, which are videotaped and reviewed by assessors;
- Criteria clearly established by

faculty and known by the student in advance of the assessment;

- Self-assessment by students;
- Assessment by faculty, staff or external assessors;
- Feedback aimed at helping the student recognize how she has integrated the abilities into her life, and how she can further refine her abilities.

Second, the seminar focuses on skills that are generic to a college



Group discussion: Members of the council meet to set priorities and agree on a set of guidelines the school board can use in deciding which books are appropriate to the high school curriculum.

Self-assessment: Each student reviews her own use of the abilities and the work of the group. This written self-assessment goes to the assessors, along with all other materials.



education. Students in all majors take the assessment. It requires them to apply what they have learned in their course work. In the simulation activity, students act as citizens.

Third, the assessment demands collaboration among faculty designers, the Assessment Center and external assessors. Students taking the assessment must work collaboratively.

In the assessment, students take the roles of members of a Citizens Advisory Council. Their ultimate task is to make recommendations to

the school board about the appropriateness of using various controversial books in the high-school curriculum.

These are the steps in the assessment.

1) "In-basket": The individual student must respond to memos and telephone calls, both for and against controversial books, from various "constituents" — teachers, parents, elected officials and students. The responses are written or recorded.

2) Oral presentation: After receiving and studying a packet of information about controversial issues regarding book selection, each student must choose an area of

concentration and take a position. She prepares and gives a speech, designed to persuade other members of the council to adopt her position. The speech is videotaped.

3) Group discussion: After examining still more information, the group must work together to prioritize the issues and formulate general guidelines which the school board can use in deciding which books should be used in the curriculum. The discussion also is videotaped.

4) Self-assessment: When the activities are completed, the student reflects on and evaluates her own work and the work of the group. Her



Assessor review: External Assessor Tom Cassini and Staff Assessors Pam Leintz and Marion Davison view videotapes of their students' speeches and group discussion. Leintz coordinates the Integrated Competence Seminar. Davison is the former director of archeological rescue and chair of the education section at the Milwaukee Public Museum. Cassini recently retired as general supervisor of employee services at AC Rochester in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.



Assessor consensus: The assessors review all the written materials, including each student's written self-assessment. Then they work toward a consensus on how effectively each student uses her abilities to meet the criteria, and areas in which she can refine her skills.

written evaluation is added to all the other materials, and turned over to staff assessors.

5) Assessor review and consensus: Staff assessors and community professionals meet to view the videotapes, and examine and discuss the materials. They work toward consensus on feedback to be given to the student. A written report is prepared, describing what is effective about the way the student showed her skills and what she could refine.

6) Feedback: The external assessor and one of the staff assessors spend about a half-hour with the student. They give her specific

examples of what is effective about the way she showed her skills, and what she should refine.

7) Documentation: The assessors' written report stays in the student's file. The student receives a copy, and her department gets a copy. This report provides one source of guidance for the student and her advisor in planning her advanced-level work.

Integrated Competence Seminar was developed several years ago because Alverno faculty felt they needed an activity that gave students

an opportunity to demonstrate their progress in mastering all of the eight abilities. Faculty wanted the activity to take place midway in the students' education. That way, students have had time to develop some sophistication in the abilities, but there still is time to further develop areas that need refining.

The seminar is required, but it is a non-credit activity. It is used exclusively as a diagnostic tool, and helps students and their advisors to plan the student's advanced work.

Lasting for four-and-a-half hours, with a follow-up feedback session several weeks later, the



Feedback: Several weeks later, one staff assessor and one external assessor meet with each student. They give her a written report of their findings, using specific examples from her performance to point out strengths and areas that can be improved.



seminar is designed to accomplish several things. It evaluates the student's ability to act responsibly in a situation that is new to her. It calls for an integrated application of abilities the student has developed. In addition, it simulates the time pressures of life as realistically as possible. Students are asked to demonstrate the following integrated skills:

- Taking a position;
- Considering alternative ideas/showing awareness of multiple

perspectives;

- Contributing to/leading in group problem solving;
- Communicating with awareness of audience;
- Thinking through and organizing ideas;
- Defining problems and planning for solutions;
- Taking appropriate action, and
- Showing some understanding of and placing some value on aesthetic work.

"The assessors identify the characteristic ways the student shows her skills," said Pam Leintz, one of eight staff assessors and coordinator of the Integrated Competence Seminar.

"The thing I love about this assessment is that it really shows how Alverno tries to get at what is unique about each student." ▲