

Memorandum from Institutional Research

Date: 2/4/2005

TO: Curriculum Committee

CC: Scholarship Action Group

Subject: This memo is in response to the question of interpreting the data tables in the What We Have Learned (09_04) document.

The tables (Table 1, 3 and 5) show the results from the scoring of artifacts for outcomes Communications, Critical Thinking, and Cultural Perspectives, respectively. The tables give the percentage of student work that was scored as sufficient or above in each level of the outcome. The data are given semester by semester, however we do not necessarily expect to see continually higher percentages as time goes on across the rows in the table. This is because in each semester the sample of artifacts includes work from students at different points in their college-level learning experience and exposure to the general education outcomes.

Therefore, these tables alone will not tell us if indeed we are seeing continuous improvement in the learning of or teaching of the outcomes.

What we can look at are the areas in which the percentages are lower in any given semester. The areas with lower percentages show that our students are weaker relatively in those areas. Longitudinally we can see if the same area always has the lowest percentage of students performing sufficiently. As pointed out in the What We Have Learned document, there are no real trends.

We use two other assessment instruments to help make clearer what is going on with the artifact results. Together, the results show that the ability to express ideas using standard language (Level 1) could be a potential target area for improvement. Within Critical Thinking the ability to consider alternative solutions (Level 2) could be a target area for improvement. These recommendations are supported by additional in depth analysis of the Fall 2003 artifacts (September 28, 2004), in which the data demonstrated that our near-graduating students (52 credits or more) were weakest in Level 1 of Communications and Level 2 of Critical Thinking. The latest analysis of the Fall 2004 artifacts (Outcome Performance Analysis (Fall 2004 Artifacts)(February 1, 2005)) presents the same conclusions.

In the future, a more robust sampling method will increase our ecological validity, which will help us be able to generalize to the appropriate populations and help us see whether real improvement in the teaching and learning of the outcomes is taking place.