

MIDDLE STATES TALK
December, 2004

Thanks to MaryAnn Baenninger – Middle States; and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation – Major Grants

I. LIBERAL ARTS ASSESSMENT: DISTINCTIVE PROBLEMS/DISTINCTIVE SOLUTIONS

- A. Faculty Gut-Level Dislike of Assessment – Good Reasons
- B. At Hamilton, We Want to do Assessment Right
 - 1. Good Social Science – Academically Legitimate
 - 2. USEFUL – Make College Better
 - 3. True to Mission of Liberal Arts

II. WHAT MEANT BY LIBERAL ARTS? (OUR ALUMS, FACULTY)

- A. Basic Skills – Write/Speak/Critical Analytics
- B. Disciplinary Content NOT Crucial
- C. NOT Job Training in Narrow Sense
- D. Long-term Results (Not First 5 Years)
- E. Uncertain Results – But Successful!

III. MELLON PROJECT

- A. 5-Year, Longitudinal, Multi-method, Comprehensive
- B. Panel, Writing, Surveys, etc.

IV. FOUR LESSONS ABOUT LIBERAL ARTS ASSESSMENT

- A. Students' View \neq Ours
 - 1. We Like “Innovation” – But for Them, EVERY Course is New
 - 2. We See All Departments/Courses – They See What They Take
 - a. Bad Profs Don't Have to Matter
 - b. Department Has “Rigor” in Courses – But no Students!

B. Mistake to Rely Solely on Course or Program-based Assessment

1. Students Don't Enroll in Major – Enroll in College
2. Departments can be Good but Irrelevant
3. Program Assessment Encourages “Externality”
 - i. Small Classes Great – if you get in
 - ii. Science Research (Susan Biochemist)

C. Flexible Multi-Methods are Key.

1. Advising
 - Surveys - 1st Year Bad; 4th Year Good
 - Interviews - Different Meaning of Advising (So: Training 1st Year Advisers)
 - Archival (Registrar) - Course Availability

Same Time,

2. “Registration” Complaints – Went to Online Registration, No Change!
Really About Availability, Faculty Resource Allocation

D. Can do Assessment Cheaply

1. Goal Isn't “More Assessment”, New Offices, Budget, etc.
2. It's Best Assessment for Least Effort

Several Ways to do it:

- i. Faculty Research (Best)
- ii. Use Student Assistants Lots
- iii. Targeted Focus Groups of B&B Students, 80% of Best Info

V. OVERALL:

WHAT MATTERS IS RESULTS, OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS (Build Around That)