QUALITY MATTERS

IN THIS ISSUE

QUOTE OF THIS ISSUE

When the cook tastes the soup, that is formative; when the guests taste the soup, that is summative. Stake,R.(2004)

This newsletter is published every three months by the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) of St. Mary's University (SMU). The objective of the newsletter is to inform the SMU community as well as the business and industry, government and non-governmental stakeholders and others who might be interested to know about the activities and accomplishments of the institution in fostering quality education and research in the Ethiopian Higher Education Setting.

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Assessment is a means of documentation our achievement. A systematic, ongoing cycle of setting goals, measuring accomplishment of those goals, and using the results to make informed decisions is essential to nonstop improvement. According to www.assessment.tcu.edu, assessment data provides information that is necessary to inform good decision making about what we should do in the future to enhance our effectiveness as an institution. Good assessment practices can promote quality development at all levels of the university by providing us with the necessary facts to guide valuable decision making in many areas: including programmatic changes, classroom teaching modifications, support service adjustments, policy or procedure revisions, campus climate improvements, and structural reorganizations.

Thinking in these terms, it is easy to understand the three key purposes of assessment: (www.assessment.tcu.edu).

• **To improve** – This evaluation is formative. Assessment activities provide a feedback loop to help shape or form better programs and services.

• **To inform** – Assessment activities can show a clearer picture of what is really happening in a program or unit and can inform others of contributions the program or unit makes.

• **To demonstrate** – This evaluation is summative. Assessment activities provide evidence to sum up what a program or unit is accomplishing and providing in a way that can be persuasive to students, faculty, staff and the larger community.

According to model for assessment and quality enhancement of TCU (2012) each department and unit are part of a much larger effort; every unit within the university is involved in this implementation and assessment of institutional effectiveness as TCU works to write expected outcomes, establish criteria for success, assess performance, view assessment results and effect improvements.

It is also obvious that assessment can improve learning. According to Black, p. & Wiliam, D.(1999), Improving learning through assessment depends on five, simple key factors. These are: the provision of effective feedback to pupils; the active involvement of pupils in their own learning; adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment; a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning; and the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve;

Assessment serves a number of purposes (QAAHE, 2012). For example, the main purpose of summative assessment is to measure student learning in a way that recognizes it through the award of credits or equivalent (the combination of which can then lead to a named qualification). However, of equal importance is the recognition that assessment should also be an integral part of learning, or that summative as well as formative assessment can, and does, facilitate student learning. Beyond this, the importance of the purpose of assessment may differ according to conditions (QAAHE, 2012).

For the student, individual pieces of assessment provide a source of motivation for study; they promote learning by providing feedback on performance and help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

For the lecturer, assessment provides an opportunity to evaluate the knowledge, understanding, ability and skills attained by different students. The overall profile of student performance offers useful information for assessing the effectiveness of course content and teaching methods, thereby facilitating improvement.

For the institution, assessment provides information upon which decisions as to students' progression and the receipt of awards may be based. The assessment process enables the institution to ensure that appropriate standards are being met, in accordance with nationally agreed frameworks, such as subject benchmark statements and the frameworks for higher education qualifications. Information generated by assessment, such as mark or grade distributions, forms a valuable tool for quality assurance and enhancement.

Other stakeholders also have an interest in the assessment process. Employers use an individual's assessment record as a means of assessing their educational achievements and suitability for employment.

When we come to St.Mary's University assessment practices, the university believes that assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in higher education. St. Mary's uses assessment as "a catalyst for progress and reform" in its educational practices. It thus established a Testing Center which is entrusted with ensuring the effective implementation of assessment methods that enable to meet the intended learning objectives of the university's programs and result in continuous improvement in its system and practices. Informed by the university's guidelines and regulations, the Center coordinates and oversees the preparation of test blue-print for each course and the development of standardized assessment tools in light of the test blue-prints. It also conducts item analysis and shares with pertinent bodies the results of the analysis. In addition, the Center carries out need-based training to instructors on a regular-basis. Comprehensive degree exit exam, which students write upon completion of all courses, was introduced years back to make the teaching learning more effective and ensure that assessment standards are met. Criterion-based assessment has also been instituted to make the learning outcome practical. The aforementioned structures and frameworks are the causes for the effective assessment of the university.

This newsletter focuses on assessment and quality in higher education.

Enjoy reading it.

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www.assessment.tcu.edu (817) 257-7146 (Assessment and Quality Enhancement for Institutional efEfectiveness at TCU)

PERSPECTIVE

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING AND QUALITYIN HIGHER EDUCATION: VIEWPOINT

Melaku Girma (PhD),
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"Assessment" means different things to different groups. In most cases, the word may refer to the assessment of student learning or it may refer to the evaluation of programs. It is often understood as testing.

In its broader sense , assessment can be defined as a process for obtaining information that is used for making decisions about students, curricula, programs, and educational policy. Decisions about students include managing classroom instruction, placing them into different types of educational programs, assigning grades to them, guiding and counseling them, selecting them for educational opportunities, and credentialing and certifying their competence. Decisions about curricula and programs include decisions about their effectiveness (summative evaluations) and about ways to improve those (formative evaluations).Decisions about educational policy are made at the local level, the state level, and the national level.

When we say we are "assessing a student's learning" we mean we are collecting information to help us decide the degree to which the student has achieved the learning targets. A large number of assessment techniques may be used to collect the information. This include formal and informal observations of a student; paper-and-pencil tests; a student's performance on homework, lab work, research papers, projects (individual and group), and during oral questioning; and analysis of a student's record.

In this small writing, I say that continuous quality improvement in higher education depends upon well-conceived approaches to assessment that have both summative and formative functions. If we understand the curriculum better, then we can better understand the formative and summative purposes of assessment and significance of the arrangements for the assessment of student learning for continuous quality improvement in higher education. A quality program in higher education should be characterized by assessment system that has the following features.

- the intended curriculum aims should be clearly defined;

- the expectations attached to each learning aim need to be clearly expressed, which is to say that both staff and students need to understand the assessment criteria that will be applied;

- a range of learning outcomes, both subject-specific and generic, should be assessed;

- assessment methods should fit for the purpose, that is they should be valid measures of the intended learning outcomes;

- multiples program aims demand multiple assessment methods;

- there should be evidence that students get useful feedback on their work through interaction with teaching staff;

- assessment data should feature in university decision-making processes, reflecting academic staff's professional and ethical responsibility to identify what works. Likewise, assessment data should be used in program review and resourcing decisions;

- it follows from the foregoing points that the collection and use issues require that summative assessment data be centrally stored in a form that is readily accessible to authorized staff and which can be readily analyzed us

- ing standard statistical packages;

- similarly, universities should consider establishing offices for student assessment, whose officers should be professionals trained in psychometrics, in educational enquiry, and in interpersonal and management skills.

Moreover, to enhance improvement, universities need to develop and disseminate a clear assessment policy, cease using norm referenced assessment, establish, and implement transparent and robust mechanism to ensure that students are graded fairly and in relation to course objectives and develop practices that can assure continuity of standards.

In most universities in Ethiopia grades are primarily determined by using the norm-referenced system where students are evaluated in relation to one another rather than the criterion-referenced grading that measures how well an individual student does relative to pre-determined performance levels. I believe that such a system is not appropriate to maintain standards between different cohorts of students. A norm-referenced assessment system is essentially unsatisfactory for the maintenance of standard, and hence an assessment system must allow for all students who satisfy the criteria for a grade to be awarded that grade irrespective of the performance of other students.

Thus, in order to transform quality successfully, universities need to navigate the difficult space between letting go of old patterns of assessments associated with norm- referenced and grabbing on to new ones by focusing on criterion referenced.

Virtual Links

Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) www.anqahe.org

Asian Pacific Quality Network (http://www.apqn.org)

ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) www.mqa.gov.my/oqan/

Association of African University (www.aau.org)

Association of Quality Assurance Agencies of the Islamic World (AQAAIW) www.mqa.gov.my/aqaalw/index01 .cfm

Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) www.canqate.org

Central and Eastern Europe Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CEENQA) www.ceenetwork.hu

Central Asian Network for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (CANQA) www.canqa.net

Center for International Research on Higher Education (http://bc_org/avp/soe/cihe)

Ethiopian Ministry of Education (http://www.moe.gov.et)

Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN) www.eaqan.org

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (http://www.enqa.eu)

European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education (EQANIE) www.eqanie.eu

Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (www.higher.edu.et)

Institute of International Education (www.iie.org)

International center of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education (THE-ICE) www.the-ice.org

International Council for Open and Distance Learning (www.icde.org)

International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (http://www.eric.ed.gov)

International Network for Higher Education in Africa (NHEA) (http://www.be.edu)

International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE) http://www.inqaahe.org

Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE)(www.allbany.edu/eaps/prophe)

Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia (http://www.qsae.org)

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK) (http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Talloires network (www.talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu

INTERVIEW

This column features interviews of people including government officials, policy makers, top management of universities or colleges, instructors, experts, as well as students on quality related issues. In this edition of the newsletter, Quality matters interviewed Dr Wubishet Shiferaw who is the director of St. Mary's University Testing Center regarding assessment roles for quality enhancement in higher education. Dr. Wubishet Shiferaw worked for more than two decades in the Ministry of Education at Department of Teacher Education, National Examination Board and later at General Education Quality Assurance and Examination Agency at different positions. Furthermore, starting from August, 2008, Dr. Wubishet Shiferaw has been working at St. Mary's university as an assistant Director of Testing Center and From Feb 2015 on. working as a Director of Testing Center.

Dr. Wubishet Shiferaw,
Director of Testing Center, SMU

Quality Matters: What is your office doing in regard to the development and maintenance of up-to standard and quality of education in SMU?

Dr. Wubishet: Quality of education is a general concept which refers to quality of human and material resources available for teaching, quality of teaching practices and quality of results. In this regard the SMU Testing Center is working towards enhancing quality and maintaining the required standard and excellence. The center works in collaboration with pertinent bodies of SMU towards

the consolidation of Criterion Referenced Assessment in SMU, provides training to academic staff on measurement and evaluation and pedagogical issues, conducts items analysis and provides feedback information to instructors and concerned organs of the university aimed at improving skills of instructors, and hence improving instruction. Moreover, the Center prepares up to standard exams based on exam blueprint to all College of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) courses, conducts research works closely related to assessment and pedagogical issues, conducts entrance and exit exams and examines and achievement results which could be used for decisions

Quality Matters: What is the role of assessment of learning for continuous improvement of quality in higher education?

Dr. Wubishet: Formative assessment is essentially feedback to the teacher and to the learner about present understanding and skills development in order to determine the way forward. Assessment for this purpose is part of teaching; for real learning depends on it. Similarly, summative assessment has a purpose to describe learning achieved at a certain time for the purpose of reporting to all interested parties. It has an important role in the overall educational progress of learners. The two purposes are central to using assessment to improve educational standards.

Quality Matters: These days there is a shift from norm-referenced assessment to criterion-referenced assessment approach. What are the differences between them? And, what is special about criterion- referenced approach in regard to quality enhancement?

Criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments more precisely describe kinds of test score interpretations than type of tests. Norm- referenced assessment is used when students' scores are inter

preted with reference to a particular group usually referred to as the standardization or norm group. The emphasis is on the relative standing of individuals rather than absolute mastery of content. A goal in the development of norm- referenced assessment is total score variability toward distinguishing or ranking the examinees. The norms that are used must provide comparisons that are relevant and accurate in terms of purpose for which the test was administrated.

To the contrary, when students' scores are interpreted with reference to a well defined skill, the assessment is criterion - referenced. In criterion- referenced measurement the emphasis is on assessing mastery of specific, clearly defined and relevant behaviors. Tests are specifically constructed to support generalizations about an individual's performance relative to the specified domain of instructionally relevant tasks. Here score variability is not essential as it is with norm-referenced testing. The validity and interpretation of criterion- referenced test scores are contingent up on the precision of the definition and specification of the domain. Once the domain has been well-defined, the test and item specifications can be devised. Then items can be evaluated for item-objective congruence and the ability to differentiate between masters and non masters, plan remediation accordingly; and then students' skill level can be defined. These benefits make it possible to monitor skill acquisition at the individual, classroom, school, community and system levels and to identify meaningful trends in educational achievement

Quality Matters: What does standardized testing means? And what are the mechanisms to establish standardized testing in higher education?

Dr. Wubishet: Standardized test refers to a test that has been expertly conducted, usually with try out, analysis and revision; includes explicit instructions for uniform (standard) administration and scoring; and provides tables of norms for score interpretation purposes, derived from administer-

ing a test in a uniform fashion to a defined sample of persons. Most precisely, test or measures that have been standardized provide the means for making score comparisons among examinees who attempt the same tasks under the same testing conditions and time constraint, and whose responses are scored with the same procedures. Without standardized tests, the achievement and abilities of students cannot be assessed with common yardstick.

Treatment of standardized instrument in higher education in the areas of achievement and cognitive ability could be achieved by establishing a clear and uniform assessment policy and guideline which helps to realize important pedagogical activities such as planning for integrating assessment and instruction, managing uniformity in course coverage, application of variety of test formats, adequacy of test items and time, balancing weight age for formative and summative assessment, checking reliability of test scores, monitoring uniform assessment procedures etc…

Quality Matters: Can you tell us the differences between formative and summative assessments?

Dr. Wubishet: Formative assessment assists in making decisions that need to be made during/throughout the instruction process to insure that educational goals and objectives are met. It provides immediate and continuous feedback on student's performance and learning activities pre- or during instruction. It is given at frequent intervals aimed at testing specific skills, concept and/or objectives and identifying specific gaps in ongoing instruction /diagnosis/ in order to help the instructor to improve instruction. To the contrary, summative assessment is the process of collecting information at the end of the program or project to determine to what extent the goals and objectives were met. It tests students' performance to

determine their final overall assimilation of course material and/or overall instructional method effectiveness. It is infrequently given throughout the year after instruction is complete usually at the end of a large amount of instruction. It tests samples from general skills, concepts and terminal objectives aimed at determining

Students' grades and report them. It is used as a base to revise and/or redesign a course and determine its effectiveness.

Quality Matters: Is there assessment guideline/ policy in SMU? If so, what are the elements incorporated in the guide line/ policy? In addition, what types of tests are being used in SMU?

Dr. Wubishet: Yes, there is student Assessment Policy in SMU. The main elements incorporated in the policy document are policy statement, description of assessment i.e. (procedures, forms, concepts, speed and timing, marking, moderation, examination) purpose of assessment, grading principles, roles and responsibilities of the university, faculties and departments, course co-coordinators, academic staff, students, the Testing Center and quality assurance in assessment.

The types of paper and pencil tests that are being used in SMU are both supply and selective type. The supply type includes case, essay, short answer, completion, problem solving etc… The selection type includes multiple choice, matching and alternative response questions etc... Tests of practical nature/hands on tool/ and other testing procedures such as individual and/or group work are among the testing mechanisms which allow students independent work.

Quality Matters: What should be the practice look like in establishing transparent and robust mechanisms to ensure that students are graded fairly in relation to course objectives?

Dr. Wubishet: I suggest that the following general strategies could help to develop clear and fair grading practices.

- Clearly stating the grading procedures at the beginning of the semester and informing students in

- writing (introducing the grading policy of SMU).

- Grading on the basis of students' mastery of knowledge and skills and eliminating the use of non academic factors as a base of grading.

- Recording results numerically rather than as letter grades and keep whenever possible so that students can be motivated to improve performance.

- Keeping accurate records of students grades, keeping students informed in their progress and dealing directly with students who have doubts about their grades.

- Checking grade distributions with similar course in the same department for the purpose of moderation.

Quality Matters: Do you have any other tips to add with regard to assessment in higher education?

Dr. Wubishet: I think I have said enough

Quality Matters: Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts.

RESEARCH CORNER

Seeking Quality in Criterion Referenced Assessment

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Background

The strengths of criterion referenced assessment

Norm and criterion referenced assessments are two distinctly different methods of awarding grades that express quite different values about teaching, learning and student achievement. Norm referenced assessment, or 'grading on the curve' as it is commonly known, places groups of students into predetermined bands of achievements. Students compete for limited numbers of grades within these bands which range between failure and excellence. Criterion referenced assessment has been widely adopted in recent times because it seeks a fairer and more accountable assessment regime than norm referencing. Students are measured against identified standards of achievement rather than being ranked against each other. In criterion referenced assessment the quality of achievement is not dependent on how well others in the cohort have performed, but on how well the individual student has performed as measured against specific criteria and standards.

Criterion based pitfall

Although both methods are commonly used in higher education, criterion referenced assessment is successfully supplanting norm referencing as the preferred marking scheme in many universities. Yet for academics that are making this transition, it is not proving to be easy. On a practical level, criterion referencing requires considerable negotiation to arrive at agreed criteria and standards, not only amongst academic colleagues, but also with industry bodies, professional associations and other educational institutions that may have a stake in the learning outcomes.

Assessment criteria and standards

The establishment of appropriate criteria and standards for student achievement are far from clear among academics. According to the available literature, policies have changed to criterion referenced assessment in many instances before academics have embraced the new concepts or - in many cases - even understood them. Some of the issues concern how to write clear and appropriate criteria and whether criteria and standards are synonymous terms or whether they need to be separated conceptually and in practice (for example Carlson et al 2000; Barrie, Brew and McCulloch 1999; Brooker, Muller, Mylonas and Hansford 1998).

A confounding feature of criterion referenced assessment concerns varying definitions of 'criteria' and 'standards'. Sometimes the terms are used interchangeably, or the word 'criterion' includes both what is to be assessed and how it will be measured. Conceptually, the terms are complementary but they have separate meanings. A criterion is a characteristic by which quality can be judged, and a standard is a statement about the degree of quality to be attained. Barrie, Brew and McCulloch (1999) for example, found a diversity of understanding and some confusion about the elements of criterion referencing in the academic literature, and they identified seven qualitatively different approaches to writing assessment criteria. Although criterion referenced assessment is now widely adopted, academics tend to confuse the meanings of the two terms, making it difficult to make standards explicit to students. Carlson et al (2000) found that academics have more trouble defining standards than they do writing assessment criteria.

One of the advantages sought by supporters of criterion referenced assessment is that it depends fundamentally upon criteria that are clear and appropriate. But if academic staff have difficulty with the concepts and practice, students are likely to have even more difficulty. Sadler (1987) spelt out some of the difficulties of achieving explicit assessment criteria, many of which continue to challenge academics today. Sadler argued that vagueness in verbal descriptions of criteria comes from the capacity for different interpreta

tions of their meaning and from problems articulating where the boundaries of standards lie. He identified assessment criteria and standards as being 'sharp' or as having 'matters of degree' (1987:198).

In this vein, O'Donovan, Price and Rust (2000) found that students have difficulty with vague criteria where the matters of degree are not made explicit. Alternately, Brooker, Muller, Mylonas and Hansford (1998) identify a reductionist approach to writing 'sharp' criteria that can become little more than checklists and do not provide much formative feedback to students. However, the extent to which criteria should be precisely specified in advance depends upon the type of learning outcomes being sought and this is where disciplinarity comes into play. Professional judgment of the 'I know good work when I see it' kind has been overturned not the least because the current environment of accountability and quality assurance has required assessment decisions that are able to be justified.

Linking assessment criteria and learning objectives

For many authors it is important to see assessment as an integral part of the learning process (Carlson et al 2000:108). Black and Wiliam (1998) go further to argue that formative assessment is vital to learning processes. Notions of authentic assessment and constructivism are helpful here, particularly when issues about the reductive nature of criterion referenced assessment are taken into consideration.

The idea of authentic assessment

Taking the idea of assessment criteria being used to guide learning, Cumming and Maxwell (1999) argue that the trend towards criterion referenced assessment has led to two considerations. They are (1) the use of learning outcomes as indicators of learning and (2) the notion that learning and assessment need to be meaningful for students because learning depends on context and motivation. The push for the close alignment of a syllabus to assessment tasks (Biggs, 1999) is consistent with this thinking and also with the aims of 'authentic' assessment that promotes the practice of directly assessing students on 'worthy in-

tellectual tasks', as opposed to assessment that makes inferences about students' abilities through indirect assessment. Authentic assessment mirrors real contexts and ill-structured challenges (Practical Assessment and Evaluation online, accessed August 2002). Authentic assessment tasks help students to focus on demonstrating their ability to discern critical knowledge and to act effectively in situations that make sense in their future professional contexts. Authentic assessment goes beyond the concept of validity; it is holistic and professionally valued.

Constructive learning

Linked to the notion of authentic assessment is the notion of constructive learning. In this perspective people make their own meaning to construct learning outcomes. This idea contains several assumptions: that learning is a result of constructive activity by students; that social and cultural contexts and communities influence learning and that learning is a social and collaborative activity. Within this framework, teachers support the construction of learning and provide an environment where learning is able to take place. The model of constructive alignment specifically links learning outcomes to assessment tasks and assessment criteria.

How clear is too clear in criterion referenced assessment?

Although constructive alignment and authentic assessment practices are student-focused and enable students to make their own meanings, there is a view that by their very nature pre-set criteria may not allow students to push the parameters of existing knowledge. There may not be room for unexpected learning outcomes, especially if, as Carlson et al (2000) argue, university teachers have difficulty articulating assessment standards. To better understand how university teachers might develop competence and confidence in criterion referenced assessment, it is necessary to direct our attention to disciplinary differentiation in undergraduate assessment, grading criteria and achievement standards.

Assessing with competence and confidence: the im

portance of academic disciplines

Angelo and Cross (1993:4) argue that "...A defining characteristic of any profession is that it depends on the wise and effective use of judgment and knowledge..." However, professional judgment, when it comes to setting assessment criteria, can vary across settings. Sadler (1987) argued that precisely defined standards could be 'sharp' or they could be 'matters of degree' where precision is not called for. This distinction is perhaps best explained by a disciplinary perspective on professional judgment, which, as Becher (1989) has shown, is shaped by the nature of its knowledge base.

The disciplinary groupings of hard, soft, pure and applied fields of knowledge derived by Becher (1989) from the work of Biglan (1973a; 1973b) and Kolb (1981) point to very different kinds of professional judgment based on different characteristics of knowledge. Exercising professional judgment in undergraduate assessment concerns measuring students' knowledge and skills in matters considered significant or important in the field.

Making judgments: hard pure disciplines

Hard pure knowledge (which may be exemplified by physics and chemistry) is typified as being cumulative and atomistic in structure, concerned with universals, simplification and a quantitative emphasis. Knowledge communities tend to be competitive but gregarious: joint or multiple authorship is commonplace (Parry, Neumann and Becher 2002). Professional judgment relies upon a concrete knowledge base that is shared by the knowledge community. Answers to assessment tasks tend to be either correct or incorrect, with little or no room for interpretation. They are therefore more likely to be low inference tasks where criteria are concrete. They are also more likely to be specific, closely focused examination questions or multiple choice questions (Neumann, Parry and Becher 2002). Marking and grading may be confidently undertaken with sufficient command of the knowledge base, and in any case, there is less likelihood in hard pure fields that judgment will be questioned. Warren Piper, Nulty and O'Grady (1996),

for example, found that professional judgment was less likely to be questioned the more mathematical the discipline.

Making judgments: soft pure disciplines

Soft pure knowledge (of which history and anthropology are worthy examples) is in contrast reiterative, holistic, concerned with particulars and based on interpretation. Unlike hard pure fields, knowledge seeks to provide new insights into existing phenomena. Scholarly enquiry is unlikely to be a collective endeavor because researchers tend to pursue individual interests at a deep level. Competent professional judgment in these settings is more likely to be conferred by the knowledge community and based upon familiarity with expectations, conventions, values and theoretical influences in the field. Ultimately, professional judgment is sophisticated, complex and subjective; assessment tasks are likely to be high inference. In these settings, undergraduate assessment is more likely to be a continuous process that highlights the student's intellectual development. Consistent with these features, Warren Piper, Nulty and O'Grady (1996) found that essays, short answer papers and project reports were the main assessment tasks and that guides to marking criteria in criterion referenced assessment were relatively more common and this is consistent with the high inference nature of assessment tasks. In addition, examinations are relatively less common because undergraduate students need to learn how to develop and shape an argument, so continuous and formative assessment are more prevalent (Neumann, Parry and Becher, 2002).

Making judgments: hard applied disciplines

Hard applied knowledge (such as in engineering and the technologies), is concerned with mastery of the physical environment and geared towards products and techniques. Knowledge is purposive and pragmatic, producing know-how via hard knowledge. Hard applied knowledge communities, according to Biglan (1973b), are also outgoing, with multiple influences and interactions on both their teaching and research activity. In these fields, the emphasis in assessment is likely to be on problem-solving and prac

tical skills, and there is a strong value placed on the integration and application of existing knowledge (Smart and Etherington, 1995). Furthermore, Parry, Hayden and Speedy (2000) found that assessment tasks in hard applied fields were more likely to involve project work and simulation once the initial knowledge building blocks are established early in the degree program.

Making judgments: soft applied disciplines

Similarly, soft applied knowledge (such as education and management studies) is dependent on soft pure knowledge, but given expression through professional practice. Here, too, as in soft pure disciplines high inference assessment tasks predominate. In addition, however, there is a focus upon protocols and procedures, with the aim being the enhancement of professional practice. Like hard applied fields, assessment tasks emphasize knowledge application and integration, usually in essay or explanatory form (Neumann, Parry and Becher 2002).

Implications for setting standards and making judgments

Becher (1989) has shown how fields of study, like their parent disciplines, are constantly changing, evolving as new knowledge is made. In disciplines centered on hard pure knowledge that is competitive and cumulative, the pace of knowledge production is rapid so that competent judgment about achievement criteria in assessment depends to a considerable degree upon a thorough knowledge of the field, including recent developments. In soft pure fields which are interpretive, reiterative and individualistic, knowledge production is slower and less competitive. Competent judgment depends less upon keeping up to date with very recent developments, and more upon having a deep and sophisticated knowledge of theoretical developments in the field and how to build an argument that provides new insight into existing phenomena (Parry 1998).

In both hard and soft applied fields, there is the need for grounding in pure knowledge but an emphasis upon integration and application. For this, a strong understanding of the values and expectations of the profession concerned is vital. In applied settings, university teachers must draw upon very different kinds of expertise in making professional judgments about student assessment. The capacity to set appropriate learning aims and assessment tasks depends upon the assessor's knowledge of values and conventions in the field. Whether assessment tasks are low or high inference by nature is also important. Where tasks are high inference, the assessment criteria are likely to evolve over time marking the same task (Nulty, accessed online 2002). Where there are multiple markers, the process is even more problematic. The assessor's expertise in the values and conventions of the field is confounded by the dynamic nature of academic disciplines too, because knowledge is constantly evolving.

A second and pervasive consideration is that many, if not most disciplinary conventions, values and expectations are inexplicit and are learned by tacit means (see, for example, Gerholm 1990; Parry 1998). Competent student assessment depends on a sound knowledge of those inexplicit norms such as writing style, citation and acknowledgement, structure of argument, positioning with the audience and command of the tacit knowledge of the field (Bazerman 1988; Parry 1998). Not only is it essential for assessment criteria to relate explicitly to learning aims and what is taught, but undergraduate students need to know what is expected of them, including any implicit expectations such as writing style or citation practices.

Making expectations clear and explicit is problematic in soft, interpretive and applied fields where grading criteria cannot be too precise or they will constrain student performance. Not surprisingly, it is in these settings that exemplars of good work such as projects and portfolios are most likely to be used to inform students about how they will be assessed (Parry, Hayden and Speedy 2000). Art history, or in the applied domain, clinical aspects of nursing, are likely to be taught this way with criteria leaving room for individual interpretation, application and performance. While Carlson et al (2000) identified the difficulty many academics have in establishing clear achieve

ment standards, they did not take into account the constraints of disciplines and in particular of the inherent fuzziness in soft disciplines.

There is much work to be done on effective assessment within the context of particular disciplinary settings. Many of the issues and concerns associated with criterion or standards based assessment cannot be addressed until more empirical studies are undertaken and academic departments make collective, course-wide decisions about the kinds of values they expect to see embedded in their students' assessment tasks.

Concluding comments

This paper has highlighted some key concerns about achieving quality in criterion referenced assessment practices: that academics are slow to change their attitudes to a positive view of criterion referenced assessment and may, therefore, default to norm referencing when in doubt; that the intensive level of negotiation required to formulate criteria and standards is difficult and time consuming and that academics find it hard to clarify and articulate assessment standards. In addition it explains how and why assessment tasks might not be appropriately authentic or enable students to construct their own meaning. It also explains why academics need to be able to characterize the nature of their field of knowledge because these characteristics constraint the extent to which assessment criteria can be sharply defined (low inference) or are interpretive (high inference). This kind of understanding is needed to properly inform effective assessment, but it remains an area where there is a scarcity of empirical research.

This paper emphasizes the necessity for academics to be reflective and to recognize that assessment is always a problematic activity.

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"If we always do what we've always done, we will get what we've always got."
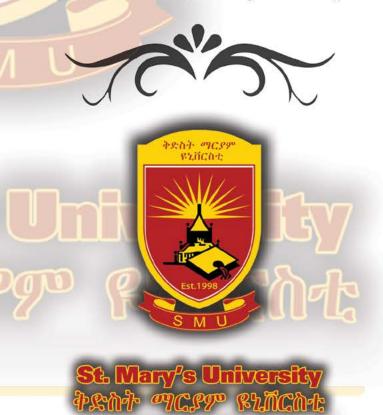-Adam Urbanski

"We plan. We develop. We deliver. We assess and evaluate the results of the assessment. We revise, deliver the revised material, and assess and evaluate again. Perfection is always just out of reach; but continually striving for perfection contributes to keeping both our instruction fresh and our interest in teaching piqued."
-E.S. Grassian

"The important question is not how assessment is defined but whether assessment information is used…
-Palomba & Banta

St. Mary's University
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NEWS

1. Training Held for St. Mary's University Academic & Administrative Staff

Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) has organized and held training on:

- Overview on quality.

- Contribution of different stakeholders for enrichment of quality.

- Different practices of Quality Assurance and

- The glimpse on the concept of planning with regard to strategic plan of SMU.

The training sessions were held on April 25/2015 and May 2/2015 at Mexico Campus Multipurpose Hall.

The first presenter was Ato Adugnaw Alameneh and the title of his presentation was "Overview on Quality, Contributions of Different Stakeholders for Enrichment of Quality and Good Governance" and the second presenter was Dr Melaku Girma and the title of his presentation Was " Different Practices of Quality Assurance" . Participants were from academic and administration divisions and were actively involved in the interactive sessions . The training assists in fostering quality education and rendering of other quality services to the university community and other stakeholders.

Training Participants

The 13th International Conference Held

The 13th International Conference on Private Higher Education in Africa was held at the UN-ECA Conference Center here in Addis Ababa on August 22, 2015. Seventeen research papers, whose topics covered, among others, internationalization, community services, access and equity, were presented. Organized and sponsored by St. Mary's University, the day-long event had paper presenters from Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Mozambique and attracted close to 250 participants. Welcoming remarks were made by Won

Dr. Aklilu Hailemichael, Director General of Ethiopian Education Strategy Center (Guest of Honor)

Wondwosen Tamrat (Assoc. Prof), The President of St. Mary's University

Conference Participants

dwosen Tamrat (Assoc. Prof), President of St. Mary's University, and Dr. Aklilu Hailemichael, Director General of the Ethiopian Education Strategy Center delivered opening speech. The Ambassador of India to Ethiopia, Ambassador Sanjay Verma, gave remarks on Private Higher Education in India, while Mr. Tom Healy, Fulbright Board Member, USA, made brief remarks on Private Higher Education in the USA. The Keynote speech was given by Dr Temechegn Engida on behalf of the Director for UNESCO-IICBA. It is to be recalled that the University organized three other annual national research conferences recently

The 7th Multidisciplinary Seminar Conducted

The one day seminar organized by Research and knowledge Management Office of St. Mary's University was held July 15, at the University's Multipurpose Hall. Research papers from St. Mary's University, A.A. University, Wollo University, Woldiya University, Dilla University, Mizan Tepi University, and Madawalabu University were presented. The Seminar Was opened by Associate Professor Wondwosen Tamirat, the President of St. Mary's University, who underlined the essence of research for innovation, which provides practical solutions to societal problems and policy inputs to national and regional agendas. During the event, 17 research papers on diverse topics were presented. The sessions deliberated on sen

sitive and key issues of the globe specifically the African Region that Include: Environmental and land management, land use, Environmental scarcity and consequent conflicts, land management and certification practices, Determinants of dividend payouts, the financial sector and their customers and many others.

Seminar Participants

2. **Graduation Ceremony Held**

St. Mary's University Celebrated Graduation Ceremony of its regular students on the 25th of July 2015 at the Addis Ababa Exhibition Center. The ceremony was remarkable and well coordinated that it cannot fed away from the memories of graduates, families of graduates, and the university community who attended the ceremony. The attractive feature of the ceremony started with the announcement by the president of the University, Associate Professor Wondwosen Tamirat that more than 59% of the 1063 total being female graduates. He warmly congratulated the candidates and their families. He also honored Ambassador Zewdw Retta journalist, diplomat and historian

for his presence as the guest of honor.

Finally, the Honorable guest, Ambassador Zewde Retta, made remarks comparing students of five or so decades back and today's generation. However, St.Mary's University community heard the news of his Excellency Ambassador Zewde Retta sudden death in October, 2015. The university community feels sadness on his death. Hence, the community's condolence goes to his wife and family.

1. English Access Students Graduated

St. Mary's University graduated 97 English Access Micro-scholarship Program 2nd cohort students on September 3, 2015 here in Addis Ababa. The graduates, who had two years of in-school and after-school training in the English language, were drawn from ten public senior secondary schools based on their performance in their respective

schools. Funded by the Department of State, USA, the program was run by St. Mary's University in collaboration with the US Embassy in Addis Ababa. At the ceremony, students presented a dramatic piece on stage, and also reflected on their two years experiences at St. Mary's. A student who demonstrated exceptional performance during the two-year period was awarded a laptop, a printer and a scanner from the US Embassy while a few others were recognized for their better accomplishment.

Welcoming speech was made by St. Mary's President and Founder, Wondwosen Tamrat (Assoc. Prof.), and opening remarks were made by Mr. Peter Vrooman, Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy in Addis Ababa. They also gave certificates of completion to the graduates. It is to be recalled that the first batch students of English Access program graduated in August 2013. St. Mary's is to admit the 3rd cohort in the coming academic year.