

**Assessment of General Education  
2004 Faculty Debriefing  
March 11, 2004 3:00p – 4:30p**

**Discussion Notes**

In Attendance:

Kathleen McCluskey-Fawcett  
Deb Teeter  
Carrie Towns

Daniel Bernstein	Center for Teaching Excellence
Naima Omar	African and Afr American Studies
Jean Peterson	Social Welfare
Barbara Romzek	College
Dennis Rosen	Business
Steve Sanders	Physics and Astronomy
Tim Shaftel	Business
Jack Weller	Sociology

Kathleen: 90 students said they would come; 7 did not show. Want to decrease the probability of no shows. Higher than we would like, because it means you all are sitting around. Deb has some insight.

Deb: Students are not reading their email because they don't trust e-mail's validity. When Deb questioned the students about tagging it with the Chancellor's name on it or with \$30, they still feel like it's a scam.

Kathleen: One student even emailed the Chancellor back, did not know if it was actually from him.

Deb: Also has another survey out that has the chancellor's name but is actually from someone else, so there are a lot of things out there. However, the students felt like the assessment opportunity was worth it for \$30. Many of them asked how they were selected. This is based on the demographics of the school. We draw a sample and choose students representative of their class. One strange thing that happened this year was that a student participated in assessment last year too. This happened because he was in environmental studies and architecture.

Dennis: Did he have any insights from one year to the next?

(He had the answers to the questions – laughter)

Deb: I often asked them: what questions were particularly interesting or challenging to you? The one about life on Mars and Antarctica, the energy question, and the political questions peaked the student's interests.

- Steve: The energy question is relevant to the architecture school. They all have energy and architecture in mind because it is relevant to a class they recently took.
- Kathleen: Maybe it was the non-architecture students who found the energy question hard. They said, "I didn't know what to answer for the energy question."
- Deb: Most of the students really liked having a conversation.
- Kathleen: Most of the professors who have done this in the past have found it to be an interesting experience. If anyone ever has any ideas on how to best contact the students, let us know. We talked about having the dean do it next year. In the professional schools it seems more likely that a message from the dean would be opened.
- Deb: The architecture students made it very clear that they would have responded more quickly. They were very aware accreditation was going on. They signed up faster because they knew this was happening. But in general, students said they would be more likely to respond if an email came from their dean.
- Kathleen: We used to go to classrooms and say that they might be getting a letter about this. But I just don't know how time consuming that would be in terms of a return because we don't know where these students are. We are supposed to have 90 students
- Carrie: We didn't receive responses from 90. We received responses from maybe 45, and then we exhausted the list and then we made cold calls. In the past we would send out paper letters through federal mail and we got better responses. Sending out 150% of what we wanted was enough then, but it isn't enough now. We need to rethink our process.
- Dennis: We should put the return address down so they know it isn't spam
- What about postcards so they wouldn't even have to open the envelope? They would automatically see the \$30 reward for participating.
- Kathleen: They say they would open the University envelopes. You think they would just out of curiosity. Maybe it would be their grades or a refund check or something. They are probably like the rest of us... just overwhelmed with stuff coming in.
- Carrie: Once we get a hold of the students they are willing to participate. We didn't have to convince them it was a good idea to participate.
- Kathleen: It's finding them.
- Carrie: It's getting a hold of them.

Kathleen: Last year Todd Little (?) in psychology asked if he could use our data for research participants. We didn't have any subjects to be used as research, so the answer was no, but we have that from this year forward, if we have any students or faculty interested in mining that data for any particular reason, it could also be used as analysis research data, not just internal. We could code it by school with no names on it. It's a shame we didn't think of this years ago. People can analyze it but can't publish it. If anyone wanted it for a thesis it would be available.

(Conversation about faculty members looking at students work.) University lawyers want the university to be more restrictive, but it isn't the law itself that requires it.

Kathleen: Logistics: We used to do the interviews at 7, 8 and 9 but we moved it so we would be done earlier. Is that better?

Barbara: Earlier interviews, like 4:00 and 5:00.

Kathleen: With a break for dinner?

Schedule challenges: activities within the departments, students might like it because they wouldn't have to come back to campus. Some people might have family obligations if we hold the interviews that early.

Kathleen: Everything went okay with parking? No problems here.

Steve: Why did you schedule during the basketball game?

Deb: The game was scheduled after assessment was already planned

Steve: I had to run down to the parking facility that afternoon and move my car. It took him 20 minutes to get from Lindley to the Union on game night. Why can't we reschedule around basketball games.

Deb: We plan this a year in advance to reserve the Union and it has to be done a week or 2 before spring break. Its hard to reserve 10-12 rooms at the Union.

Carrie: We only had one no show on Wednesday

Kathleen: And the space worked okay? –yes What were people's impressions?

Some of the faculty were confused about the reasons for assessment and the processes used, especially which questions are supposed to be used. Are the questions just suggested and not mandated? What kind of validity will you get if people don't ask the questions on the cards? The interviewers need a set of guidelines on paper to list what their expectations and obligations are. It is important to stress to the interviewers that you don't have to ask each and every question, it is the goals that you are to be striving for.

Carrie: We had a third of the faculty not got through the training session this year and it seems that the more the faculty backs away from the training, the more this becomes an issue.

People need a better understanding of what their responsibilities are.

Kathleen: Cards are color-coded: make it clearer that the goals should be the focus. And the questions are suggested ways to start a conversation about the goals.

Steve: Some people are very rigid in their use of the questions.

We often asked a variation of the questions. Instead of a mission to Mars we might suggest another mission or a different project. But the questions are very helpful. The more questions provided the more likely the interviewers will find questions that they feel comfortable asking. We didn't have too many problems.

Steve: It was nice you could start out with the questions but then go on from there. I liked writing down what questions were used to determine where people were working from. Sense that we were covering different areas. Some people might revise them but we had a sense that we were covering the different goals.

It's a necessary part to pull answers out of the students. I saw that my teammates saw this very differently. Some people pulled very hard and others didn't.

Kathleen: What we are trying to do is get their best response.

For different students, it takes different techniques to get the best performance out of them.

Jack: If we are asking about different issues, maybe some issues are not very good for a particular student. I asked a student about race and he had nothing to say about it, but then gave a fairly impressive response to a question about another issue. I was happy to pick a question that I felt comfortable asking, but I happened to pick one that the student wasn't comfortable answering. It just struck me that if the other member of the panel would have not come to the rescue then we would have had a very wrong idea about the students ability to talk about contemporary issues.

Kathleen: Right, when you ask a question that is not suited for that particular student, you assume that's the student's best performance in that area.

Jack: It was like the student did not feel comfortable talking about race issues.

Are you suggesting that if a student doesn't perform well to structured questions we should try to open it up and explain that we are trying to understand what you have learned out of your education? I was wondering if we could state the goals to the students and let them know that we want to discuss with the student these issues and ask if they can discuss an issue that is relevant to the goal. Then give them some examples.

- Kathleen: The students have just seen the goals on a survey before the interviews. It's not a secret.
- Some questions deal with diversity. Some students have a good sense of diversity.
- Tim: To provoke conversation link transcript information. Ask about study abroad or Internships. Could we get a resume to look at?
- Carrie: Provide additional things for them to fill out when they get there?
- Naima: Talk about hobbies, interests and activities to provoke conversation. Talk about yourself, asking open-ended questions can confuse student. Some students get stuck on general questions. They don't understand what we need or want from them.
- Dan: It helps to have a sample of their written work because we could get richer questions from it. Perhaps we could contact students a little earlier so they could keep an archive of written samples. Just something written for class
- Kathleen: We used to do that. We didn't do the archive notion and we didn't know what to do with them once we got them because sometimes they were a friend's or a math paper. Even just a recent paper would be good.
- There is a tradeoff between what is convenient for us and what might allow us to have a meaningful conversation.
- I think it's a convenience problem for them, that they couldn't find a paper. It is short notice, so if there was some way to identify them ahead of time before they threw away the stuff from last semester.
- Dennis: What would be the problem with giving them a set of questions that represent the 6 areas? And ask them to pick an area they would like to discuss and feel comfortable with. Which would they like to discuss? Then we wouldn't have to guess which questions they feel comfortable with. Looking at the students you can see them freeze. They don't know what to expect and then all of a sudden they are supposed to discuss nature vs. nurture. That's an intimidating situation. But if they had the questions even 15 minutes ahead of time, they could pick some they liked.
- Naima: We want the students to feel comfortable, but life is not always comfortable.
- Dennis: But that is a separate measurement. We want to know what they know.
- Jean: My concern is that if we only let them choose the ones they feel comfortable with we aren't getting any information about how well they are able to generalize. I thought we were measuring their ability to think about a variety of issues.

- Dennis: I agree, but if they were to see the questions before hand you could avoid the shock factor. They would have some preparation, you could still probe and ask them to relate that to other areas. You get over that initial bump as opposed to the shock.
- Kathleen: When we contact them, we don't tell them what the goals are. That would be one thing to tell them what they are and tell them they will be asked to have a conversation. Clearly they don't understand what they are going to do even though we tell them in a letter. We could give them the goals and explain how this works. We address these various things and that gives them at least time to think about it.
- Carrie: Or scare them off.
- Kathleen: We could try a pilot next year. Send out different things to different kids and see how many of them come.
- Barbara: Originally I thought as faculty we would get the 6 goals and we were supposed to come up with questions about the goals, but when I found they had already given us questions I thought it made it easier. I felt better once I saw the questions to start with. The students might feel more comfortable seeing some questions too.
- Kathleen: We could give them some sample questions so they know what type of things they could be asked.
- Carrie: Maybe in the same way we teach them how to prepare for an interview in general. Give them something so they have something going in under their belt. Feel prepared. You say they feel unprepared. When we schedule them they ask how to prepare. If we could tell them how prepare they might feel more comfortable.
- Daniel: If you tell them at the time you recruit them, I could see them running to the Internet and digging up all sorts of information to prepare and that's not what we want to do. But if you gave them the questions as part of a packet so they had 10-15 minutes to look at it.
- Carrie: When they come in to check in
- Kathleen: Well the goals are public information and so we could send those ahead of time It would be hard to go to the Internet and find specific information.
- A sample question would be helpful just so they know the type of questions to be asked.
- Carrie: The sample question I give them when I talk to them on the phone is "What process would you go through if you were going to buy a musical instrument. How would you make that selection, what would be important to you, how would you make that choice." And then they are thinking that there is no right or wrong answer but how to weigh a decision, and that's not scary.

Do most people start these off with an explanation to the students about what we are doing?

- Deb: When the students come out of it a couple say it wasn't at all what they were expecting but that it was okay. And maybe its because they can leave and can walk out and get the money, but its rare that someone is really upset by it. Some feel bad about their answers.
- Kathleen: They don't get any immediate feedback and so they don't know if the faculty perceives that they did well or not.
- Deb: They don't know what this is about and they often think it is going to be about how they feel about the university.
- Carrie: We do our best not to answer any of those questions and we do our best to talk around them. That is the question I have given them as an example and I think it makes them comfortable.
- Dennis: How many opportunities do they have in their four years at KU to be asked those types of questions? Are they accustomed to being asked questions?
- Deb: Over the years the students have said they have not had those types of conversations and they would like to have more of them. In the past some faculty have been influenced by this experience to ask their own students these types of questions and to list the goals on their syllabuses. I think we should be asking the students if they have seen these goals before and where.
- Daniel: Do you do any measure of consistency? That is what I find challenging, deciding what answer is a 2 or 3 or 4. What is average? I mean, a C used to be average but it isn't any more. If I had a better idea of what a 3 means ...
- Carrie: The faculty agree with each other on what average means when we do the data. They agree with each other, and over 90% will be within one point. It is a very high correlation.
- Dennis: Maybe we should discuss that as a group.
- Tim: If people rate every person consistently it will be perfectly correlated. If I say a 2 and you say a 4 it works out well.
- Kathleen: Did anyone use the sample/experimental question? The one on the different cultures? We always try to refresh the topics.
- Carrie: We need to gather some people together to have a closer look and review these questions, do some rewriting and work on what constitutes a strong answer on some of these. Work on what is a strong and average and weak answer. Especially if you want to open things up and work with a more general question instead of something so specific. For standardizing purposes.

Steve: You don't have to state an answer, but what you are looking for in an answer. One student said when he would research to purchase a car, he would get on the Internet and black in the color he would want. That was it.

Kathleen: Since we wrote down the questions this year we can go through the data and see what types of answers received a 5 or 4, etc. That might work, or the ratings may be all over and there might not be enough data. When I grade I ask how well did the student think aloud: how good is the quality of their impromptu answers? How verbally skilled are they?

Jack: After one interview, after we filled out our score sheets and the interview was over, we had a discussion to debrief ourselves. One person said he did not score the student as high because he failed to give the specific response he was looking for. Is it right to be looking for one specific answer and grade someone down for failing to say that?

Daniel: We had something similar to that. We scored someone higher than another because they were looking for a specific answer.

Kathleen: Did anyone think there are certain gaps in KU students' education? Are there things they aren't learning very well or we aren't teaching them very well?

Race in America, they couldn't discuss it, had no appreciation for the history of it in terms of the internal context.

Current events, hard to talk about what is going on in the world. Didn't even recognize some things as an issue.

Deb: Some students came out and they knew they were unaware of current issues

Kathleen: Student Senate has the newspaper readership fee so students have access to great newspapers but they don't read them.

All have Internet access, don't read NY times.

4 out of 6 students I had were very inarticulate about world and national issues and problems. It was very discouraging.

Kathleen: They are supposed to be educated citizens. I thought they would all like to read the newspapers but they don't.

Students have no idea what is happening in their world. They only have answers to questions they are interested in or that pertain to their major or they have taken a class in.

We want students to acquire the skills to learn about these things, not the specific information.

Daniel: I found it frustrating that students would provide comments to their questions but they wouldn't use anything they learned in college to answer the questions. No reflective analytical tools to answer and analyze. We aren't giving them an opportunity to practice that, we aren't working that into our classes. We need to incorporate current events into our classes and curriculums.

This isn't the student bashing session.

Kathleen: A lot of classes that students take in their first 2 years are TA taught. We need to work with the TAs to model and provide examples to students. Work with them to teach the undergraduates how to be in touch with current events. How what you learn in Freshmen English correlate with psychology or Spanish class.

Tim: It's not an easy way to teach.

Kathleen: No, it's a lot of work!

Tim: A lot of my students come to me when they want to get a job and they ask me how to get a job, what a job is like, what they can do to prepare to get a job. They have the research skills needed for the job search, but they can't apply it to other things.

I think we need to have some sort of a feedback session. What does this mean about how we teach, the processing session, what are faculty members saying about our students over the past 5 years.

Deb: Students have awareness on how well they are doing on these various goals. Students' assessment of themselves correlates with how faculty members rate them. They might be slightly higher, but there isn't a huge difference. There is usually at least one goal that the faculty will rate a student higher than he or she rate themselves. There is not a huge disparity.

Kathleen: We are going to take a year off before we start the cycle again. We need to really think about some of these kinds of issues. We prepare for the interviews, we do the interviews, we analyze the data, then its time to prepare for the interviews again. Also Debs office is doing senior survey, which is very time consuming.

Dan: Have students gather and present a portfolio they created over their four years. Other Universities have students do that. They use them to have conversations; it would be a relatively low energy way for evidence to compliment the oral performance. A know some people who have been involved in doing this. A small catholic college in Milwaukee is way in to it, they are having the students assess themselves on all sorts of categories. We're not going there, but it would be interesting for a big place to do it. Even if a student had a few pieces of their best work it would give concerned persons something to look at. Part of their graduation is they have to represent themselves and that's clear when they arrive

Deb: I think that would be interesting to experiment with. Initially when starting this we had freshmen English classes collect an assignment. We kept them to analyze but we had a challenge getting those student back in four years. We tried to do a portfolio but we weren't quite sure what to do with it once we obtained it. It would be great to rethink some of that. We could start next fall, Dave has asked for a current writing sample and we are going to have conversations about that.