2014 GE Assessment Report – Campus Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Not Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will develop well-reasoned arguments.</td>
<td>564</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will identify, analyze and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and others' work, and;</td>
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<td>Number of courses = 15</td>
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**Critical Thinking**

Based upon these assessment data, what changes might you make if you were to teach this course again?

Based on peer-reviewed education research, the basic concept I am testing is notoriously difficult for students, even graduate students in science fields (The concept is the ability to solve problems that involve distinguishing rates of sources and sinks of carbon from effects on atmospheric concentrations of CO2). Formative assessment earlier in the semester might be one thing to try to improve student understanding. Streamlining course topics (depth vs. breadth of topics) to focus more on this particular set of skills might be something else I will consider.

Based on the difference in results there is some suggestion that the amount of time that students are exposed to material impacts their understanding. In the future, I may identify another major theme of the course that I can thread throughout the semester.

Develop more meaningful ways to engage more students in the conversations and arguments about the universe and elicit more discussion surrounding the unknown.

I need to better integrate writing assignments into the course. Usually I assign papers around two to three readings, yet I need to develop a way to engage students to develop arguments about concepts in better ways. Instead, it might be best to develop paper assignments around simulations, which require students to actively engage concepts and arguments with other classmates. Writing assignments based on simulations would enable them to reflect on those concepts and develop arguments based upon them.
I would continue my use of primary sources in classroom. I would also continue to stress the fact that the practice of History is essentially presenting well-reasoned arguments supported with solid evidence.

I would have more in-class writing exercises with immediate feedback and class discussion about studies. I would also do the assessment later in the semester (instead of at the very beginning) as these are skills that are repeatedly stressed throughout the entire course.

Increasing the time allotted for student discussion, guided, not directed by the instructor, would allow the students to explore their ability to critically analyze developing arguments. Discussions with open-ended goals would allow for follow-up, independent self-reassessment and the refining of logical arguments.

NO Change for an approach that has given most successful results! I taught 2 sections of this course in Spring 2014 semester. Compared to any other time that I have taught this course, these 2 classes have truly succeeded in mastering the key concepts, set by the course objectives. One of the 2 students who did not approached the expected standards did not take the final exam (NO TOOL for assessment in her case.) The student was not marticulated.

Perhaps a change in primary source material.

The challenge that I encountered was that often students didn't pay enough attention to the detailed rubric that I had outlined and explained that they follow. Clearly, detailed instructor feedback on each draft of every written assignment would help students--many students didn't ask instructors for help with their individual drafts.

To rewrite the assignment to make more explicit the requirement that students present an argument from the text.

**Please describe what you learned from your assessment:**

Based on this assessment, I learned that students are able to meet standards for developing arguments, but less successful at exceeding them. I make this judgment based on the larger number of students who exceed standards in identifying arguments compared to developing their own arguments (which I judged solely using their scores on writing assignments).

Based upon a difficult text, students were able to identify, analyze, and evaluate the target argument.

I think the class has done an excellent job mastering the course objectives for learning outcome. Frankly, I learn from the data I am submitting how well the class has done.
I was actually more happy with the results for the first objective, for which I was assessing common misconceptions about natural selection. We started this topic at the very beginning of the course and we talked about it throughout the course of the semester. The topic that I used to assess the second objective showed up much later in the course, very near the end.

It is difficult to assess accurately an entire course's worth of performance based solely on a timed final exam. Students generally did worse on these standards on the exam than they did in a recent term paper, for which they had more time for thought and revision.

It is not always easy to bring students into conversations that they do not feel comfortable about entering. Although many more voices could be heard by the mid-semester mark, I need to strive to better engage all students. Unexpectedly, 30 out of 30 students passed the final (one student recorded in the numbers never attended class) exam with an 80% overall success rate on all critical thinking/argument questions.

It would be useful to circulate exams among faculty teaching same principles of economics courses and to have discussions on grading and teaching.

Most students have learned to identify, analyze and evaluate arguments very well. Most students also have learned to develop well-reasoned arguments. Both of these skills are essential to the discipline of History.

My curriculum can be improved in the context of analysis and evaluation of ideas synthesized from content in my curriculum.

Students performed better on this assessment item than in past years. An in-class problem solving exercise (4 separate but related problems) was the main preparation for the exam question I used for this assessment. The problems are quantitative and tend to be very difficult for most students. In the past, students worked in groups on all of the in-class problems. This year, I made all students attempt two of the four problems on their own, and then work in groups. I also assigned a homework that addressed the basic concepts tested. I believe that making the students attempt the problems on their own rather than in groups was beneficial and improved the outcome on the final exam question I used for this assessment.

The value of discussing assessment amongst faculty in general but particularly among faculty teaching different sections of the same course. Our discussions about the assessment of critical thinking were particularly useful when they evolved into how we each interpreted critical thinking in economics.

While 93% of the class submitted essays for the first objective, and 83% of these essays met or exceeded standards for analyzing and evaluating others' arguments, there appears to be a meaningful decrement in both participation (84%) and meeting or exceeding performance standards (70%) for the ability to develop their own arguments.

**What suggestions or feedback do you have about the assessment process at New Paltz?**
The particular research examples used in the essay questions that were available for this assessment were poorly-written and did not reflect the major concepts that are traditionally covered in lectures and readings about research methods. I mentioned this to my departmental assessment person before I gave out the assessment assignment to the class. Next time, I would make up my own study to be evaluated.

This assessment process does not take into account that there are foreign students who have very limited writing abilities in English. GE courses also have first year students who were admitted under special circumstances and who are at a serious academic disadvantage in reading and writing. For these groups of students, I do not understand what is supposedly being assessed."

I must admit that I don't see its value for enhancement of teaching. I do it mechanically to provide the data the GE Board wishes to have. Also, I am surprised that ONLY my section of my course is selected for this round of assessment. I DO NOT mind it myself, but assessment was suppose to be instructor-blind (by collecting data about a course, instead of one section that one instructor teaches). So, I am surprised that for Principles of Microeconomics ONLY one section was selected from several sections the Economics Department offered this spring.

By the way, the enrollment for this course includes Was! That is why the number of students who DO NOT meet is 4 instead of 2, I mention in question #2 above."

More on the instructional end, engaging students in active learning in all areas can bring about a higher comfort levels of engagement in classroom conversations and argument abilities. Student experiences in participating in classroom discussion, especially argument, cannot develop without use.

N/A

none

The process worked very well. I have no suggestions at this time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Not Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will demonstrate knowledge of the conventions and methods of at least one of the humanities in addition to those encompassed by other knowledge areas required by the General Education program.</td>
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<td>143</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>Number of courses = 6</td>
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</table>

**Humanities**

**Based upon these assessment data, what changes might you make if you were to teach this course again?**

The problems identified in 1 above are difficult skills to learn. Because of this, and because they were better at it in the section that was not assessed (in which they presented their own argument), I am not alarmed at the number of those who only approached and did not meet on this assessment. Also, previous sections of this class have been generally better at these skills than this particular section. In future sections, I plan to address this by explicitly re-introducing, just before the paper is assigned, a worksheet on evaluating arguments that they completed at the start of the semester. A second written discussion of argument evaluation may prove more effective than verbal reminders of the principles explained on that worksheet.

In future sections, I plan to revise the paper instructions to explicitly request that they clearly number the premises for both their own argument and their presentation of the arguments from the text."

**Itemize the term paper assignment**

2. List of potential topics to include those covered late in the semester

I will have them do written close readings earlier in the semester, of both assigned texts and of TV texts of their choosing. I will go back to them presenting/leading discussion of assigned articles rather than choosing one that will help them with their final paper. While the discussions of their chosen articles were lively, it didn't help most of them with their critical analysis in the final paper. Some became too dependent on the article, despite
my emphasis that they weren't doing a review of the literature. I will also give them more practice at more formal writing that keeps the audience and "you" out of it.

I would like to find a way to take attendance during each class period that was not time consuming so more people would consistently come to class.

I would spend more time engaging in the writing process in a methodical manner--some students simply struggle too much with basic writing and composing tactics.

Some of the students in the class were unprepared for this level and I am going to be more careful in the future to make sure they have the prerequisites for the class. I will also discuss changing the prerequisite from FRN202 to FRN301 to ensure that students are sufficiently prepared to undertake subject matter work in the language.

Please describe what you learned from your assessment:

Students have some difficulty distinguishing between describing a view and providing an argument for that view, but also difficulty distinguishing between giving an evaluation of an argument and giving an evaluation of a view. Even for some who were able to present a clear argument for Ethical Relativism, when asked to evaluate that argument, they instead turned to a discussion of weaknesses of Relativism itself.

Students were better at presenting their own argument than at presenting the arguments from the course texts. One likely reason is that the assignment required that they clearly identify the premises of their own argument (and number them "Premise 1", "Premise 2", and so on), but did not explicitly require it for the part assessed, in which the student was to present and evaluate the arguments of others. The instructions were such because, in the past, students have been worse at presenting their own arguments than at presenting those of others.

I feel that having a smaller class makes for better learning. In the past my History of Jazz class has been between 90 and 100 people, and this semester there were only 70. I feel in general the students who came to class every day were brighter and more knowledgeable about the subject matter than in past classes.

I need to supervise students' crafting their term papers by breaking the large task into specific assignments.

It is very difficult to get students who start out as poor writers to improve substantially, particularly if they don't make strong efforts to closely read the texts (written and televised). Their analytical skills in writing are also similar to their in-class participation (or lack of). They all need more practice at close readings and writing more formally.
Most of the students had a fair understanding of how history can inform literature, whether in terms of context or style. In the future, however, I would perhaps break apart the goals stated on the rubric into smaller, more focused areas. I think (having provided a copy of the rubric for students to look at) the one they worked with this time around might have felt a little overwhelming.

The number of students exceeding and meeting the standards was higher than I had expected. The one student who did not meet was a surprise as he participated in class and has a high level of reading and writing ability in French and a high average going into the exam, perhaps it was senioritis.

**What suggestions or feedback do you have about the assessment process at New Paltz?**

I think having students work on a particular assignment geared toward GE Assessment can be quite helpful, as it aids in them understanding the general relevance and importance of a well-rounded Liberal Arts education.

I think it works, as it gives me a chance to assess the students' writing abilities on a deeper level.

I wonder how different my planned changes would be if I hadn't done formal assessment. I suspect they would not change. Grading can indeed be different than assessment, but what is indicated that needs to be improved can be the same and result in the same plans.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Sciences</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Not Meeting</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>and data collection, experimentation,</td>
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</table>

**Natural Sciences**

Based upon these assessment data, what changes might you make if you were to teach this course again?

After a detailed explanation, students can understand how to use the data collected to accept or reject the hypothesis. But they are weak at the relationship between a question and a hypothesis. Different questions could lead to different hypotheses. I will emphasize the relationship on a question and a hypothesis.

"First, I would add another homework/lab exercise to give a better demonstration of computation of standard deviation from a _subset_ of a dataset and the use of that as an error bar. Most students got the idea in general by the time of the final exam, but not as many understood it for the data project. I have a working idea for how this would be structured, with students cutting straws to specific lengths to produce a given pitch, but then passing them to other students for measurement, but I'd have to work out the details."
I would also try to put more opportunities on the rubric for "exceeds expectations", which I'm afraid I didn't allow for much at all this time around (I was much more focused on what constituted meeting/approaching/not meeting)."

Give students a handout with an overview of how to use Excel to create appropriate graphs.

I base changes, which I make on an ongoing basis, on the data described in the previous question.

I would spend more time discussing these concepts in the lecture portion of the course, instead of emphasizing them primarily in lab.

I would spend more time on SLO#1 type topics to insure better learning outcomes for this category.

I would start my work on the process earlier in the semester.

More emphasis on data and analysis, especially graphing and visualizing data.

More questions and discussion about how the concepts learned in class apply to novel problems.

My selected task for assessment was a fairly right or wrong type of exercise, which effectively gave me good feedback on students who were able to succeed and those who couldn't succeed at this task. I may try a different exercise for assessment in the future but, overall I am pleased with the course. I had a large proportion of hard working students this semester and I think the distribution of the grades in this course reflects this better than the assessment data. See comment on assessment below

Teach the scientific method, how to setup a study and to interpret the results. Many students feel that the results formulated in a lab testing one variable are the same results that would occur outside of the laboratory where all variables come to play.

There should be a math course pre-requisite for this course so students will have the necessary math basics before entering this course. Also, I highly recommend lots of time be spent doing examples.

**Please describe what you learned from your assessment:**

I learned that with some students who had difficulties with some of the material overall they still did better than I expected on this subset of the course. I was pleasantly surprised.

It is difficult to be involved in the process as an adjunct teaching one class in the semester
Logistics of exam administration may have affected student performance. This was my first time conducting a formal, standardized assessment and the "rollout" was not met with enthusiasm by the students. Also, for expediency, I used a nationally standardized exam and am still contemplating its application in assessment as opposed to designing my own questions like many of my colleagues do.

Most students do come in to the class with a basic understanding of how to collect data and display results in the form of graphs, charts, and tables.

Most students have a general idea of what the exercise is aimed at, but only a few had the knowledge to apply what they learned in this exercise to other scenarios.

Most students have a hard time to develop a hypothesis, Probably it is because hypothesis should be related to a question.

Students do not really understand the scientific model and its application. They understand numbers but not in the overall context of the study.

Students need additional help in understanding and working with the concepts that were utilized for this assessment.

Students struggle with some of the concepts taught in this class - especially when it comes to the application of an equation to a problem to solve for power generated. Several students had trouble setting up the problem to solve simple linear equations. Students come in with little interest in physics or engineering, however, I found by the end of the course some even expressed interest in taking some engineering course, their problem solving ability was significantly improved.

Surprised at the disparity between fact retention (reasonably high) and ability to apply methods, reasoning and facts to synthesize.

That almost two-thirds of my class performed fairly well, i.e. they met or exceeded the "standards". A third of the class however, did not do well on the assessed component of the class, although overall scores on assignments and exams showed a better performance. I think this is due to the nature of the exercise selected for assessment.

Very little. I give 10 quizzes, 20 homework assignments, 3 exams, 1 final every single semester. That is what I find useful in determining what students are learning.

**What suggestions or feedback do you have about the assessment process at New Paltz?**

"Attempting to submit assessment data was an interesting experience. I'm not sure about the effectiveness of assigning criteria like 'Exceeding/Meeting/Approaching Standards'. It is a bit hard to quantify what these mean. It may be more useful to assign quantitative number ranges but, even so this may not be applicable universally across disciplines and to all types of exercises selected for assessment. For example, a score of 75%
may indicate 'meeting standards' in a descriptive exercise or paper but, a similar score may be classified as 'approaching standards' in a quantitative exercise where the answers are either correct or incorrect. Further, how meaningful is it to assess learning outcomes just based on one class exercise or one paper? I think using overall course grades that reflect performance throughout an entire semester may be a better way to assess student learning outcomes.

Evaluating assessment is very time consuming, but this mynewpaltz portal for submitting data (rather than compiling an arbitrarily designed or rigidly proscribed report) is great!

I suggest a general meeting to go over sample assessments since this was a first time experience.

It would be nice to have a mechanism for doing something other than an experiment for this exercise, but I was essentially forced to do an experiment during the approval process. Hazard science, like climatology, is more of a statistical science than an experimental science, one reason that climate change is so easily misunderstood and distorted.

Need to better assess critical thinking

None at this time.

Overall I feel it is important but should be done less frequently.

Self-assessment is good, so even though it's a bother to have to do this after grades have been submitted, it's worthwhile effort, and good to have a structure set up for it.

It's important to remember that the numbers only reflect one narrow aspect of the overall experience. (That's true for student grades as well.) This is not the whole picture, but it's a part of it. ("It's not just numbers and equations" is a message I've tried to get across in this course.)

This form shows "177%" [sic] next to the number of students assessed. It should probably show 100%. The other percentages seem to be correct, so this is a minor bug in the form. Oops, my mistake. This is only asking for assessment data from one section, and I entered data for both sections. So since we are collecting data, why not collect data for all sections instead of a subset?"

The assessment process is all right. But the exercise used to assess students could be improved and simplified. It takes time and efforts.

The percentages above are somewhat misleading. You count 54 enrolled, but several have officially withdrawn and that is not reflected in the count. Several others never show up.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Not Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will demonstrate knowledge of major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences.</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will demonstrate understanding of the methods social scientists use to explore social phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical and interpretive analysis.</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of courses = 11

Social Sciences

Based upon these assessment data, what changes might you make if you were to teach this course again?

Change several of the test questions on the final, or discuss the concepts specifically in class and get a feel for what students have missed.

Due to the number of students who failed to relate their findings to already-existing models, I realize that we need to spend more time looking at, studying and criticizing existing theories, specifically those in relation to their final topic: Technology’s effect on human relations. We did discuss and analyze already-existing models, but they were studies on the effect TV had on its audiences (when prime time TV still existed), a study that is a bit outdated. In future semesters, I will spend more time on contemporary studies and spend time building our own opinions as to what worked about the study and what did not, instead of just reading the criticisms from external sources. During this particular semester, a significant amount of our time was spent assessing their own experiences with the media, which is not bad, but I think I need a greater balance.

enhance educational performance through greater emphasis of student learning styles
Focus more on elements that address the scientific method.

I am still undecided about whether I may want to give more attention to teaching about methods. On the one hand, it would be nice to have the assessment results mirror each other for both objectives. On the other hand, I imagine that if I take away from the focus on the sociological perspective and transfer some of this time to teaching about methods then this may affect the learning outcomes for objective 2. I am not teaching this course next semester but when I do teach it again I will consider teaching strategies and approaches that do not necessarily make this trade off between objective 1 and objective 2 a zero-sum game.

I may consider spending some more time on research methods, making sure that students have ample time to apply what they have learned to hypothetical research projects, as well as evaluate empirically-based sociological articles. In a similar vein, I may consider having students do a collaborative in-class activity where they can work with their peers in identifying and evaluating the major sociological theory and concepts used in an empirical article.

I will put more emphasis on research methods and the steps involved in the research process during the course as we discuss different topics. I already discuss these aspects quite a bit but I will do so more frequently.

I would give even more time in class for students to discuss the assignment among themselves so as to bring more specific questions to me regarding the assignment

I would have them do more applied work in the field of economics

to spend a little more time teaching specific section in order to ensure students fully grasp the content

Please describe what you learned from your assessment:

From this assessment, I learned that most of my students are able to identify major concepts and issues in the social sciences, specifically the changing relationships among humans in the digital age. Most of the students were able to form and articulate a thesis based on their own experience with the media, backing up their thesis with case studies that they conducted over the course of the semester. They were equally able to tie their argument into an analysis of the movie Her, which we watched and discussed in class. However, a lesser number were able to relate their findings with findings of other scientists.

I have learned to better evaluate my students, as well as establishing better interactions with my colleagues. Also, I have learned new strategies on how to evaluate my students; and, I had the opportunity to share mine with my colleagues.
I have one question that a large number (78%) got wrong, and although it seems like an easy question, and typifies the discussion that we had in many classes, I believe I will have to reframe it.

I was not too surprised by what I found. Students in my class seemed more comfortable identifying and applying the sociological imagination than they did with identifying and analyzing sociological methods. The majority of this class is spent on helping students see the world through a sociological perspective. One of my main objectives is to have them leave the class thinking like sociologists so that they can apply this perspective in their everyday lives. This assessment suggests that I seem to be doing an adequate job in this regard. I do not spend as much time discussing the methods that sociologists use and so the patterns that evolved in the assessment were not unexpected. Students were not as sure about identifying research methodologies. Still, I was gratified that that majority of students had a basic understanding of the methods and that none of the students was completely lost (not meeting standards) in this regard.

Students had a good knowledge of the concepts and models used in sociology. These are reinforced each week in the readings and lectures. There was good understanding of the research methods but not as many students exceeded the standards as they did for the concepts.

Students were able to integrate their understanding of theories into their writing, but I wonder whether or not the assessment really evaluated their understanding of the scientific method (as it is written above in the objective).

That, as in previous terms, most students did well with the given instructions and class discussions carried out prior to the assignments

the continued importance of realizing multiple intelligences during application of teaching methodology is imperative

There are specific topics I would like to spend more time on to ensure students capture the material

While students generally seemed to have a good handle on the major research methods and sociological concepts driving the work they were evaluating and analyzing, they had some difficulty discussing more specific methodological points and placing the work within the larger theoretical tradition and debates. This may be due to the fact that the assessment was carried out at the midterm point and many students had not yet developed a comfort with the knowledge and skills necessary to be as successful as they might have been at the end of the semester. Additionally, this assessment was a part of a midterm exam, and the stress of this major test and the test taking environment in general, may have impacted some students’ ability to fully express what they had learned.
What suggestions or feedback do you have about the assessment process at New Paltz?

GE Assessments should not be something required of adjunct faculty. This extra service should either be compensated or should be required of full-time faculty who are paid more appropriately. Adjunct faculty are already underpaid and have to do too much reporting as it is, especially if we are teaching Intro level classes which attract many students requiring midterm reports. The mid-term reports essentially require doing a complete grade book on all students, not just the ones we report on, because we need to compare student performance to the whole group. Adding all the work for a GE assessment on top of a teaching classes and completing mid-term reports is ridiculous and inconsiderate.

Have it due a week after final grades are due!

I have stated my opinions about the assessment process at New Paltz on previous iterations of this form so I don't think I need to repeat myself here but here is another problem: my form just got kicked back to me because my answer to question 1 was too long! Really? I'm trying to take this process seriously and offer thoughtful reflections and it's being rejected! My answer was not even that long.

I like this format for submitting assessment data.

I would have my students do more independent research regarding what articles to analyze, instead of providing them with the articles..

It is regrettably not very helpful in eliciting information useful enough to improve this course. Students from different terms are too variable in terms of overall preparation, commitment to the course, and other aspects. I would suggest dispensing with the exercise altogether or find ways to account for the sometimes great diversity that each group of students brings every term and that makes for a lack of comparability between terms for the same course.

meet with students individually at mid-term to discuss classroom performance and discuss enhancement techniques for learning

none at this time

Please make this assessment process very clear to new adjuncts. The emails I've received about these assessments have been written with the assumption that I've done these before, so it was very confusing. I would never have known that there was more to do beyond submitting an assessment plan, and I also would not have known where to go to provide the results of that assessment if further clarification wasn't given today.
While it at first seemed like it was going to be extremely tedious, I found the process to be straightforward and useful for evaluating part of what I hope students are getting out of Introduction to Sociology. That said, perhaps providing some best practices for conducting assessments or other appropriate guidance and advice would have been useful to those of us who are newer to assessment.
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**Western Civilization**

**Based upon these assessment data, what changes might you make if you were to teach this course again?**

I will be looking for additional material to stress more the objective

I would do this activity (on a smaller scale) more than one time during the semester. Students might present on different nonwestern contemporaries of the authors on our syllabus throughout the course.

I would very likely shift focus in the assignment from creation accounts (handled too early in the term) to something like a comparison of biblical parables to comparable forms in non-Western culture (e.g., zen koans).

I'd offer more historical background for the systems of ideas within each culture.

See #1 and #3. In addition to the assessment data, the reading of the essays makes me see a need for "tightening up" the assignment.

While the data set is too small to generate any specific conclusions about teaching methods, the exercise has generated a desire to formalize direct comparisons between the subject matter and non-western philosophy. I intend to continue this line of thought in Modern and other WEST courses.
Please describe what you learned from your assessment:

I always see the need to refine my assignment (see #3) so the students address the objectives in a more comprehensive way, in addition to aspects that I want them to cover.

It was very interesting to trace how students comprehend the material and were able to present their thoughts answering the question.

Overall, I found that the comparative element came more readily to students, but that a sense of specific historical context(s) was significantly lacking. I would attribute this chiefly to the fact that there is no substitute for knowledge content (i.e., knowing something about the actual, specific events and details of history, cultures, societies, etc.) to be found in the mere rudiments of rhetorical argumentation (i.e. sight reading, argumentation, etc.). It supports a vigorous pursuit of the traditional humanities that suggests--to me, at any rate--that historical content and context must be taught actively, reinforcing what students have read in textbooks to make sure it is (1) accessible to thought and (2) understood reasonably well (i.e. accurately). "Skills" are wonderful, but "content" is key.

Students are doing better than I expected.

Students have not read many nonwestern texts before college, so they have trouble coming up with texts to compare to Western Civ's Great Books. I had to provide them with a list of examples so they could begin their research. Many students do not seem able to describe differences in genre. Every text on our syllabus gets called a "novel," and students make similar over-generalizations about works from other cultures.

This semester, assessment caused me to evaluate how I integrate comparisons to non-western philosophy into my WEST classes. For Modern Philosophy that is a bit of a challenge, since a theme of that period is starting philosophy over from scratch. Philosophers in that period tried to avoid being influenced by their own cultural heritage, let alone non-western cultures. However, I found various ways in which the topics we cover relate thematically (if not causally) with topics in other philosophical traditions. Highlighting this for the students has been an overall improvement in the course.

What suggestions or feedback do you have about the assessment process at New Paltz?

I discovered it might be useful to compare this year's data to the last time I conducted this particular assignment/assessment to the last time I completed he same. I was curious to see how the multi-year results would compare. (I know I have those earlier materials somewhere in my possession, but didn't have them at the time of assessing this year's assignments.) Is there anywhere on campus that these multi-year results are meaningfully brought together and compared? Just curious.
The process is good. It is making me review the assignment, as to specificity of the elements that are included. I believe I need to assign points to various aspects to make sure that "distinctive features" and "regions of the world" are emphasized. I don't know where to put this, but 3 students did not complete the course, neither did they drop. I assessed them at midterm, thinking that their advisors would make recommendations to them; so I didn't follow through with that myself.

The standards for meeting goals may need to be a bit higher to helpful.