

Daemen College and the Use of VALUE Rubrics

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In 2002, Daemen College adopted a competency-based core curriculum (to replace a forty-five-credit disciplinary distribution model). In 2007, as part of the college's Core Assessment Project, faculty began creating criteria, rubrics, and other tools to assess how well the college was doing in achieving the institutional goals of its new core curriculum. In 2009, the Core Assessment Project and the Core and Interdisciplinary Studies Committees adopted the appropriate VALUE rubrics, following their publication. Where there was substantial similarity between a VALUE rubric and a Daemen core competency—as there was for written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, quantitative literacy, information literacy, ethical reasoning, inquiry and analysis, and civic engagement outcomes—the published VALUE rubric was adopted. In the case of core competencies for which no VALUE rubric existed—contextualization and affective awareness—it was decided to create our own rubrics based on the VALUE template.

Rubrics are used for four purposes at Daemen: (1) to assess student work in order to determine how well the college is meeting its core curriculum goals, (2) to determine the appropriateness of the VALUE rubrics to those goals, (3) to determine whether and to what extent the rubric changes how the competency is defined and practiced, and (4) to provide guidance for faculty in crafting courses, lectures, and assignments that fully integrate course content and core competencies.

We began assessment with a home-grown written communication rubric that was especially useful for attracting faculty interest and participation; more than thirty faculty members attended the assessment sessions each May. Assessment initially focused on essays from the required first-year writing course (CMP101); more recently, writing assessment includes a separate selection of papers from non-CMP101 writing-intensive courses. Instructors provide ungraded copies of student work from these courses. A random sample is selected, and faculty members from throughout the college are invited to participate in the assessment session at which the rubric is normed, student work is evaluated, and results are tabulated and discussed.

Having developed an assessment practice and a methodology with which faculty are now familiar, we have more recently extended our assessment efforts in the following ways.

Assessment now includes student work in courses with a primary competency other than written communication (e.g., service learning, using the civic engagement VALUE rubric); combining criteria from two or more rubrics—written communication, oral communication, information literacy, inquiry and analysis, critical thinking—to evaluate work from a required capstone in the major that satisfies the core curriculum’s “research and presentation” requirement; and using a home-grown rubric to assess work from courses having contextualization as the primary competency. In addition, last March, we piloted the use of a revised version of the civic engagement rubric.

The assessment sessions have been useful for differentiating evaluation from assessment; presenting assessment as a means to achieve improved instruction and learning, rather than as a task imposed on faculty; adapting the rubrics’ language to the needs of specific disciplines, courses, and assignments, rather than criticizing the rubrics as vague; and demonstrating the necessary linkage between assignment and product. The rubric-based assessment sessions have also led to discussion of what the competencies mean; what a competency-based core curriculum entails; how best to implement a core curriculum; how best to communicate this curriculum as a coherent, well-integrated whole, rather than as a checklist of requirements (in this the overlap of certain rubrics has played a crucial role); and how to make the competencies central to, rather than merely part of, a Daemen College undergraduate education.

Rubrics are currently being used in two pilot projects. The first, which grew out of participation in an AAC&U summer institute in 2010, involves using the rubrics to map the major according to appropriate core competencies and levels of proficiency for each, based on required courses in the major. The second, which is even more promising and clearly related to the first, is using the rubrics to create assignments that clearly and methodically connect course content and core competency (or competencies). The Core and Interdisciplinary Committee also uses the rubrics to review courses proposed for the core (specifically for evaluating learning objectives written for each competency addressed in the course).

Use of Results

Assessment of writing-intensive, capstone, and service-learning courses has led to the following changes:

- The English department recommended, and the administration approved, hiring a writing coordinator and a writing-in-the-disciplines specialist.
- The English department redesigned the required first-year writing course and added an information literacy component (using the AAC&U/ALA rubric).
- In order to make instruction in first-year writing classes more consistent and accountability more immediate, the English department now requires that all full-time English faculty teach at least one first-year writing course per semester and that all, or nearly all, CMP101 classes be taught by full-time faculty. As a result, the number of sections taught by part-time faculty has decreased from 65 percent to less than 10 percent.
- The writing coordinator and writing-in-the-disciplines specialist have offered frequent in-house workshops for faculty and staff, especially faculty teaching writing-intensive courses.
- There are plans to expand the use of professional writing tutors and to offer greater training for and oversight of peer writing tutors.
- As a result of the service-learning evaluation, faculty agreed to create a common self-reflection service-learning prompt that includes the various rubric categories for all service-learning course instructors to use.
- The data for each department's student work samples for capstone courses from the May evaluation project were shared with the respective department. Many departments changed the course outline and implemented new strategies to improve student performance. The data were also used to set goals for the individual departments and, as reflected in the college's 2012 strategic plan, for the college as a whole. For example, the strategic plan calls for 55 percent of the students' papers in capstone courses to demonstrate, on average, a level 3 or higher on the respective VALUE rubric.