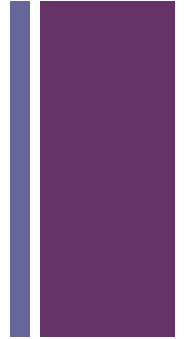


Students First: Using students' self-assessment narratives as evidence of institutional assessment

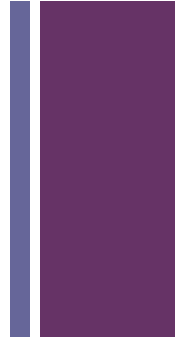
Kerri Shaffer Carter, Eportfolio Director
Westminster College, Salt Lake City

+ Background: Westminster's eportfolio initiative



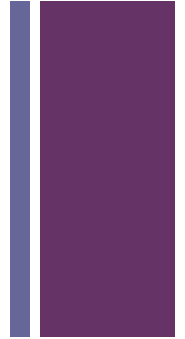
- Campus – wide
- Formative and summative
 - Introduction to CWLGs in freshman LCs
 - Competency portfolio
 - Midpoint Portfolio
 - Final Portfolio
- Structure and components: at least two pieces of evidence and one rationale for each College Wide Learning Goal
- Purpose: assess student mastery of the College Wide Learning Goals and effectiveness of LE program

+ Learning



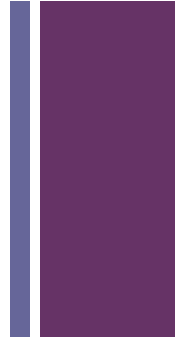
- Process
- Iterative
- Make connections
- Application/transfer of knowledge to multiple contexts
- Change as a person
- Explicit

+ Phenomenology



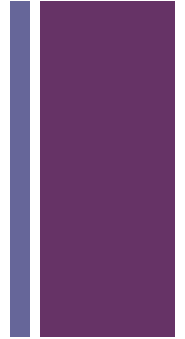
- Subjective: education is inherently subjective
- Experiential
- Descriptive
- Intentional: consciousness is consciousness of something or someone
- Intersubjective/relational: meaning comes from the interaction between subjects, or between a subject and her surrounding environment

+ Hermeneutic Phenomenology



- Transcendental phenomenology: purely descriptive, subject brackets preconceived ideas and understanding of the world; not assessable.
- Hermeneutic phenomenology: interpretive; any description of experience is always already interpretive
- Description of experience *within a specific context*
- Particularly suited to assessment of student accounts of their own learning in relation to a particular goal or outcome
- Renders personal descriptions of experience assessable

+ In practice



- Process papers
 - Describe the multiple pieces evidence and the process that went into creating them
 - Explore emotional dimension of creating evidence: comfort/discomfort, confident/insecure, proud/indifferent/not proud (also expressed in portfolio through use of images, multimedia, etc.)
 - Investigate connections between the pieces of evidence

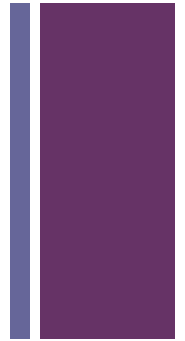
- Rationales
 - Describe the experience within the context of the College Wide Learning Goals
 - Use the rubrics to assess skill level
 - Outline specific steps for reaching the next level on the rubric

+ Example 1: Lizzy, Critical Thinking

In order to draw a comparison between the paper and the rock climbing problem, I'd like to think of each foothold and each handhold as a piece of evidence. The starting point is the prompt, and the final rock is the conclusion to the essay. In order to create an argument that is solid, you must pick and chose what evidence to use and how to properly use it. You must progress through the argument, going from one premise to another while properly explaining each movement. Each piece of evidence on it's own is not going to tell you anything new, just like no one hold is the solution to climbing an eight foot wall. If there are issues with your technique, you must be able to identify the problem and adjust for it.

For my paper concerning Durkheim and Moynihan, all of the sources I used were ones that we had read and discussed in class, and so there was very little research on my part. But as far as deciding which sources to use, what my thesis would be, and presenting my argument, I think that this paper displays exemplary skill. I am not really in very good shape for a rock climber, and so my physical limitations translate onto the wall and negatively impact my own performance. However, I am very accomplished at looking at a problem and figuring out what needs to be done in order to complete the problem, even if I am not physically able to do it. In order to improve my skills in both areas, I hope to work on projects that require research more often, and do more of my climbing outdoors, where the footholds and handholds might not be as obvious to me. I hope to be able to apply the skills I've learned in both these areas in future academic projects and outdoor explorations.

+ Example 2: Tessa, Writing



The failure, titled simply Prompt 1, is a short essay whose purpose should have been to analyze Aristotle's language in his treatise on happiness. Unfortunately for me, I did not have the slightest clue how to perform a literary analysis, and "Prompt 1" made this painfully clear both to me and to my professors.

Because my essay is more a page-and-a-half-long diatribe on "the audacity to be happy" than a literary analysis, it demonstrates absolutely no **awareness of the audience and their expectations**. My professors expected me to interpret language, not to preach in florid prose. The essay does indeed preach; it makes sweeping claims about the entire human population—"individuals actively pursue personal and professional accomplishments while neglecting to seek happiness in earnest," for example—which my professors absolutely abhor. Furthermore, these vague generalities have no **compelling evidence** to support them. They make enormous leaps of logic and arrive at the conclusion that essentially a single formula for the acquisition of happiness will be effective for everyone. Really the only redeeming quality of this paper is its grammatical adequacy. If nothing else, the piece lacks mechanical errors.

If I were to write another paper concerning Aristotle's treatise on happiness, I would focus more on the language he employs and less on drawing my own ambiguous conclusions about humanity and its capacity for happiness. Aristotle, after all, is the philosopher; I am much more qualified in the field of literary analysis than in that of metaphysics.

+ Example 3: Ryan, Social Responsibility

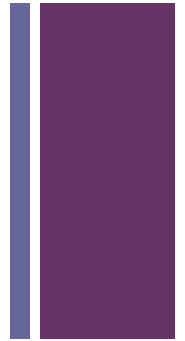
Though this certainly was an example of social responsibility, in assessing the event based on the two criteria (power relations and cultural lenses), I think both certainly could have been developed better than they were. I didn't ask a whole lot of questions; I simply needed the hours to put down on an application.

For that reason, I give myself a beginning level, because I had very little grasp on how the relationships between the Homeless Shelter and the county played out, and my lens was closed to the needs of the many; I simply took my situation for granted and gave a minimal contribution so that I may get some "feel good" sensation from the experience. Though my performance within the situation held to that beginning standard, I now hold that accomplished view for recognizing that there was more to it than I was allowing myself to see.



Me (near the center in the back) and other Key Club Members

+ For discussion



- What other types of assignments might generate and capture this kind of learning?
- How can we effectively make the case that reflective practice is a form of direct assessment to administrators and accreditors?
- What sorts of tools do we need to ensure that our assessment of student narratives is effective (provides comparability, validity) while still focusing on the individual student's account of her experience?