

# Wright College Academic Department/Program Assessment project #2 Final report Spring 2016

## What?

The biology department spent the Fall 2015/Spring 2016 academic year assessing how we prepare our students in regard to reading, writing, speaking, and listening, in the larger context of how our student learning outcomes (SLO's) are linked to the Colleges' educational mission.

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## Why?

The biology department is currently engaged in a multi-year effort to examine how well our department SLO's link with the College SLO's. This year, we are examining how our students are prepared for reading, writing, speaking and listening when in a workplace or academic environment. Our long-term goal is to build a culture of assessment in our department so that we can implement meaningful change based on data. With this second assessment project, we began by surveying each course for how our materials matched up with developing reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Following this survey we selected a course coordinator for each course to oversee the implementation of assessment projects specific to each course. In doing so, we are committing to integrating fully into our courses assessment that can provide long-term data. Additionally, by identifying existing coursework as assessments, we avoid the risk that courses or instructors may unwittingly leave out assessment tools from one year to another, which would negatively impact how we detect long-term trends that might require intervention.

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## How?

All full-time faculty met in September 2015, to discuss how to implement our departmental assessment project for the current year (College SLO #2 on reading, writing, speaking, and listening). In our previous assessment project looking at SLO#1 we realized that we wanted to build a long term culture of assessment within our department rather than scramble to put together temporary assessment projects of limited usefulness. Each full-time and part-time faculty member for every biology course was asked to complete two surveys. The first survey asked faculty to list how many, or what percent, of their labs, lectures, etc developed reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The second survey asked faculty to discuss specific course work that related to the four skills contained in SLO#2. In January 2016, our department met to select activities on a course-by-course basis that would serve as assessment tools to examine these skills listed in SLO#2. For each course a coordinator was chosen that would identify specific assessments and incorporate them into each section.

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## What we found

Our faculty survey identified a range of reported activities that developed reading, writing, speaking and listening to varying degrees. Across all courses it was felt that our tests, exams, and quizzes all developed reading and writing skills. However, there was quite some variation among faculty whether (or if) speaking and listening skills were also assessed in tests, exams, and quizzes. In all classes and across all faculty, it was reported that labs developed reading and writing skills primarily, with some labs also developing speaking and listening skills. To varying degrees faculty across all courses listed lectures as developing reading skills, but not all faculty reported that lectures developed writing skills. Our faculty reported various activities during lectures that facilitated speaking and listening, such as class discussions, think-pair-share questions, and “Jeopardy” style lecture sessions. Additional take-home assignments and homework, while variable across classes, developed all four skills.

From these surveys, it was found that there were many activities in each class that developed reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In our department meeting in January, we discussed the depth and breadth of these activities and how to implement change. From what we learned in SLO#1 we decided we did not want a standard assessment across all courses as it potentially was not applicable to all sections of each class. As well, data collected from a departmental assessment would only stay relevant if we kept using the same assessment year after year without change, which further limited our ability to tailor our assessments to each course. As a department we decided that it would be most appropriate if each course had its’ own specific assessments. This would allow more flexibility in how we designed our assessment tools. During our meeting we also decided to set up short and long-term goals for our department.

Our short-term goal was to designate for each course a coordinator that would oversee the selection and implantation of course specific assessments. Beginning in February 2016 each coordinator filled in a departmental template indicating what assessment they chose for their course for SLO#2 and how they will analyze the data generated from these tools. These templates were submitted in late March and were reviewed by the departmental assessment coordinator. In most instances coordinators identified final exam questions or other activities that from now on will serve as embedded assessments. These coordinators will also oversee their respective courses to ensure that all full time staff and adjuncts administer the assessments and turn in their data for analysis. Based upon the analyses of these data in subsequent years we can then craft specific interventions to improve the outcome of SLO#2 where applicable.

Our long-term goal is to eventually map course SLOs to course content. By completing this activity we as a department will have fully realized content maps, linking District, College, Departmental, and Course SLO’s to actual course content. This long-term activity will make our ability to identify and craft assessments much easier going forward as we move to assess SLO#3, 4, and 5 in the upcoming years. This activity will be organized by our course coordinators in consultation with the full-time faculty that teach these particular classes.