Nichols to Offer Two On-Campus Workshops

Dr. James Nichols, a nationally recognized authority on higher education assessment and author of four widely used books on institutional assessment, will be on campus April 9, 2003 to present three assessment workshops to the SNC Community. President Hynes, members of the AAC, Dean’s Council, and Assessment Committee have been invited to Nichol’s first workshop entitled Achieving HCL/NCA Level 3 at St. Norbert College (9:00-10:00 a.m. Union 101b). This workshop will address a number of important questions, e.g. What does a “Level 3” institutional assessment effort look like? How is assessment activity typically supported and rewarded by senior administrators in “Level 3” institutions? What are some ways in which assessment data are routinely used in decision-making at “Level 3” institutions?

Dr. Nichol’s second workshop will focus on the ongoing assessment efforts of the General Education & Honors Committee. Entitled Using Course Embedded Assessments (11:00 a.m.-12:10 p.m. Union 101b), this workshop will share insights and techniques for using the course-embedded assessment data collected this year and suggest possible next steps. Finally, Dr. Nichols will present a third workshop for the entire campus community. Assessing Student Writing (3:00-4:30 p.m. Union 101b) will suggest possible approaches to assessing program effectiveness in the area of student writing. Dr. Nichols will share examples of writing assessment plans and rubrics in use at other colleges and universities. If interested in any of these workshops, please call or email Pat Wery (Continued on Page 2)

Student Satisfaction with St. Norbert: What Role the Academic Major?
By Jack Williamsen

Satisfy — v.t. 1. To fulfill the desires, expectations, needs, or demands of a person. (from the Latin satisfacere, to do enough)
—Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd Ed.

As a higher education outcome, satisfaction is somewhat suspect. It seems more appropriate for a restaurant or automobile manufacturer, say, to be interested in satisfaction (“Customer satisfaction is our only goal”) than a college or university.

Further, satisfaction has vague connotations of corporeal pleasure and indolence, perhaps because of the connection to its etymological cousin, “satiety.” Such connotations would appear irrelevant to an institution devoted to “the life of the mind.” Lastly, a concern for satisfaction might lead to a misplaced emphasis on pleasing, perhaps at the expense of maintenance of standards of (academic) excellence.

Given the above, interest in student satisfaction and its correlates appears to be misplaced. But wait. Although satisfaction may indeed be more related to the affective than to the cognitive dimensions of experience, it might just be an important precursor to openness to learning.

It is difficult to conceive, for example, of a student investing herself (without coercion) in a learning experience about which she is—or expects to be—dissatisfied. Satisfaction is not only associated with the quiescence of satiety, but also with positive feelings toward some object, experience, or (Continued on Page 2)
Nichols to Offer Two On-Campus Workshops (Continued from Page 1)

(x3855) at the OIE so that we can be sure of adequate seating, handouts, and refreshments.

For those who would like a more comprehensive exposure to higher education outcomes assessment, Dr. Nichols, his wife Karen, and Dr. Eliot Elffner will offer a two-day regional workshop entitled Assessment of General Education and Values in Higher Education on campus April 10-11. An informative flyer and registration form are attached to this newsletter. The OIE will pay the registration fee for any SNC faculty or staff who wishes to attend this conference. Simply send the registration to the Office of Continuing Education as indicated. The OIE will be billed automatically.

Student Satisfaction with St. Norbert: What Role the Academic Major?

By Jack Williamsen (Continued from Page 1)

person. Such positive feelings encourage a continued emotional investment, a willingness to extend oneself, to maintain contact. Given this perspective on satisfaction, wouldn’t you prefer to have students who are satisfied rather than dissatisfied?

The St. Norbert Current Student Survey, administered annually since 1994, contains a number of “satisfaction” items. Question 31 of the Survey asks how satisfied the respondent is with St. Norbert College (response options are: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, very satisfied, and not sure). Overall satisfaction with the College can have many dimensions, including what might be called “subsatisfactions.” Satisfaction with College physical facilities, social opportunities, interpersonal relationships, academic offerings, and co-curricular activities are some examples.

We decided to limit our initial exploration to the relationships between satisfaction with the respondent’s academic major and overall satisfaction with the College. After all, the central purpose of the college experience is the pursuit of learning, and the academic major contributes significantly to a student’s identity as a learner and scholar. So one would hope—no, expect—that student satisfaction with one’s major is associated with corresponding satisfaction with the College.

Data from the 2002 Current Student Survey confirm the expectation: there is a robust relationship between satisfaction with components of the major and overall satisfaction with the College (technically, the multiple correlation between these components and overall satisfaction hovers around .44, with little variation among Survey years we checked).

The finding is reassuring, but not very interesting. More information comes from the details of Question 25(la-lh) of the Survey. Q25 asks respondents to rate their satisfaction with a number of components of the major. The components are shown in the following table, along with the percent of “somewhat-“ and “very satisfied” respondents to the 2002 Survey. (The small number of respondents who were “Not Sure” are excluded from the computations used to derive the percentages.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Somewhat Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Total Percent Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Instruction</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Curriculum</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Courses Offered</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Course Content</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Advisement</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Preparation</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad/Prof. School</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Major Program</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table above indicates, “Overall Major Program” has (by a statistical hair) the highest total percent satisfied; “Range of Courses offered” has the lowest (77%). “Quality of Advisement” has the highest percentage of “Very Satisfied” respondents. There is a tie between “Range of Courses Offered” and “Grad/Prof. School Preparation” for lowest percentage of “Very Satisfied” respondents (36%).

Satisfaction with the overall major program (Q25lh) might be viewed as a kind of summary rating, a shorthand for the other seven satisfaction ratings. But do the seven contribute equally to overall satisfaction with the major?

The answer is, “No.” Although all seven items are significant contributors to satisfaction with the major, when they are pitted against each other to determine which components provide the largest independent contributions, career preparation is in first place. It is followed closely by course content, instruction, curriculum, and grad school preparation. Quality of advisement makes the smallest relative contribution, perhaps because advisors—with only a few exceptions—need not be faculty members in one’s major discipline.

From the perspective of the typical student, then, satisfaction with his/her major has a lot to do with the sense that courses will prepare her/him for the world of work after graduation. (Arguably, this link may vary among major programs, but that is another study for another time). Does this association also hold for overall satisfaction with St. Norbert? Let’s see how our “significant seven” fare when we explore their association with global satisfaction with the College.

Ninety-six percent (96%) of all respondents to the 2002 Current Student Survey said they were satisfied with St. Norbert College. Forty-six percent (46%) of all respondents were “very satisfied.” One way to compare the seven components of academic satisfaction might be to see whether students very satisfied with each of...
them are also very satisfied with the College. We would expect this to be the case, with higher percentages than the average 46% for all students. The table below shows the expectation is correct.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Component:</th>
<th>Percent Very Satisfied w/ SNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Instruction</td>
<td>If 56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Curriculum</td>
<td>Very 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Courses Offered</td>
<td>Satisfied 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Course Content</td>
<td>W/ 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Advisement</td>
<td>Component, 53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Preparation</td>
<td>Then 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad/Prof. School Preparation</td>
<td>→ 65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The way to state the information from the third column of the table is as follows (“Instruction” is the example): “56% of students ‘very satisfied’ with the quality of instruction in their major reported they were “very satisfied” with SNC.

All academic components of the major show improvement over the 46% “very satisfied” with the College average for all students. Graduate/professional school preparation has the largest very satisfied percentage (65%), quality of advisement the lowest (53%).

These percentages are all larger than the average ‘whole College’ 46% because there is a positive relationship between satisfaction with an individual major component and overall satisfaction with the College; the higher the former, the higher the latter. The percentages are not 100% because this relationship is not perfect. Overall satisfaction with St. Norbert is not completely determined by satisfaction with any single dimension of the college experience.

Although all seven components contribute to overall satisfaction with SNC, it is not quite true (as the Dodo announced after the race in Alice in Wonderland) that everyone has won and all must have prizes. For it is possible that some of the components of the major are associated with overall satisfaction with SNC because they are riding on the correlational coattails of other components. When forced to demonstrate (at customary levels of statistical significance) their independent ability to predict overall satisfaction, they just might not measure up. Possible? Yes. Likely? Indeed.

As it turns out, quality of instruction and career preparation do not make any important unique contribution to overall satisfaction when they compete with the other components. The winner of this race is graduate/professional school preparation, with range of courses offered, quality of course content, quality of advisement, and quality of curriculum close behind.

Let’s recap. All seven components of our major programs (Q25a-lg) contribute to satisfaction with one’s major and to overall satisfaction with the College. That is, all are correlated at statistically significant levels with major and College satisfaction.

But that’s not the whole story. The seven components are also related to each other to varying degrees. These common relationships obscure the unique, independent contributions the seven components make to satisfaction with the major and satisfaction with the College.

Stripped of the common relationships the components have with each other, left only with their unique contributions to satisfaction, first place goes to career preparation for satisfaction with the major (ok, maybe not every major; that’s TBA) and to grad/professional school preparation for overall satisfaction with the College. (Ironically, career preparation, important as an independent predictor of satisfaction with the major, is not very useful when it must compete with the six other components in predicting satisfaction with the College.)

One should be careful not to make too much of these results. The quantitative differences among the seven components are often small. Even if statistically reliable, such differences may have only modest practical implications.

Still, given limited resources and a desire to improve quality, the information on satisfaction in this report may suggest to its readers some ‘targets of improvement’ that might elude educated guesses or speculation. Listed below are some ideas to get you started and stimulate your thinking.

- You may wish to see how closely your discipline mirrors findings from the entire 2002 Current Student Survey sample in the first table above. Inviting your majors to complete an anonymous ‘index card’ survey will provide you with information about student perceptions you probably did not have before. The perceptions, in turn, can lead to informal conversation with majors about the reasons for their satisfaction levels. It is these “reasons” which provide clues about modifications.

- An added twist on the above index card survey is to ask majors about the importance to them of the eight components (e.g., “How important to you are the following aspects of the major (scale: “1” = “Very Important”, “2” = Somewhat Important, “3” = Somewhat unimportant, “4” = Very Unimportant, “5” = Uncertain). Our expectation is that satisfaction and importance are related, but that does not mean they are identical by any means. You may prefer one over the other.

- As noted above, satisfaction with career preparation is an important contributor to satisfaction with the major. However, its relevance may vary among academic disciplines. How closely do discipline faculty and your majors agree on the importance of career preparation? And, given its relationship to overall satisfaction with the College, you may wish to add “graduate and professional school preparation” to the comparison.

The suggestions above are certainly not exhaustive. And they may not be particularly relevant to a particular discipline’s educational goals for its majors, so other ideas will be more useful. Further, information about student satisfaction is not a substitute (Continued on Page 4)
Draft Institutional Assessment Plan Nearing Completion

The College Assessment Committee has met three times this semester. Its principal task has been to review a draft Institutional Assessment Plan. This plan, which will eventually be submitted to the faculty, AAC, SGA, and perhaps several other campus units for endorsement, will accomplish several things. It will define the role of assessment as it relates to teaching and learning at St. Norbert College. It will summarize the history of assessment at the College and describe Higher Learning Commission expectations for accreditation. It will establish a set of principles for undertaking outcomes assessment as well as establish guidelines for data use and release. It will identify various forms of outcomes assessment implemented at the College, explain how these relate the College Mission and goals, and describe the relationship between these means. Finally, it will elaborate the role of all campus constituencies (e.g., Board of Trustees, President, Dean, faculty, staff, students) in assessment. Anyone wishing to review a work in progress may access the most current draft on the OIE web site. Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

CAAP Critical Thinking Test Administered to Gs 12 Student

CAAP is a nationally normed multi-part examination focusing on academic skills. Gs 12 students were asked to complete the Critical Thinking Test. Their responses will allow us to compare St. Norbert College students with national norms. In concert with other assessment data being collected over the next three years, these results will help us begin to identify strengths and weaknesses of the present program and ultimately revise and improve the College’s General Education Program. Summary data for critical thinking will be published in a future issue of this newsletter.

Apply now for Summer Assessment Mini-Grants

Mini-grants of approximately $3,000 are available. Funds may support any assessment activities. A copy of the “Request for Funds to Support Assessment Activities” is available on the OIE website: www.snc.edu/oie or by contacting Pat Wery (x3855) in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.