Publications

Senior Assessment Specialist and faculty member Sara Finney, former CARS director Donna Sundre, along with A&M alums Matt Swain and Laura Williams were published in the journal *Educational Measurement*. The publication is titled “The validity of value-added estimates from low-stakes testing contexts: The impact of change in test-taking motivation and test consequences.” Accountability mandates often prompt assessment of student learning gains (e.g., value-added estimates) via achievement tests. The validity of these estimates have been questioned when performance on tests is low stakes for students. To assess the effects of motivation on value-added estimates, they assigned students to one of three test consequence conditions: (a) an aggregate of test scores is used solely for institutional effectiveness purposes, (b) personal test score is reported to the student, or (c) personal test score is reported to faculty. Value-added estimates, operationalized as change in performance between two testing occasions for the same individuals where educational programming was experienced between testing occasions, were examined across conditions, in addition to the effects of test-taking motivation. Test consequences did not impact value-added estimates. Change in test-taking motivation, however, had a substantial effect on value-added estimates. In short, value-added estimates were attenuated due to decreased motivation from pretest to posttest. (Citation can be found on the last page of this report)

Doctoral student Heather Harris, and her advisor, Jeanne Horst also had a publication released titled “A Brief Guide to Decisions at Each Step of the Propensity Score Matching Process.” This article can be found in the journal Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation and can be accessed online at a link provided in the citation page of this report.

Susan joined CARS January 4th after Sharon Sipe’s retirement. Susan has been at the University in an administrative capacity for over 10 years. She comes to our department most recently from the College of Health and Behavioral Studies. We are very excited to have Susan on board and she has been working diligently with our other administrative assistant, Paula Love, to get up to speed on the inner workings of the Center.
Assessment Day 2016 Highlights

Attendance & Assessments: Almost 3,400 students with 45-70 credit hours going into the Spring 2016 semester completed their university-wide assessments on February 9th. Our attendance rate was 92.5%, which is slightly higher than last year (~90%) and similar to both 2013 and 2014 (~93%). Although no one student completed more than four assessments during their two-hour testing session, over 20 different assessments were administered across students. Many of these assessments were given to the same students as incoming freshman in Fall 2014, permitting exploration into how students’ knowledge, skills, behaviors, and beliefs change over time.

Weather: Because the forecast for Assessment Day called for both ice and snow, we reviewed our inclement weather policies and shared them with the students, proctors, and administrators prior to Assessment Day. The unfavorable forecast provided a good opportunity to review our policies and consider with whom the policies needed to be shared. We were incredibly lucky that the weather cooperated. Although 7 of our 61 proctors were unable to make it to Assessment day, our back-up plan for proctor absences worked well.

Assessment Day Focus Group: Twenty-six students participated in a focus group pertaining to Assessment Day. The Assessment Day team gathered a mix of encouraging and discouraging information about Assessment Day. We were encouraged to hear that students seem to understand the purpose of Assessment Day and perceive it as being important to the university. However, we were discouraged to hear that when students did hear something about Assessment Day from their professors, it was often negative. As well, students informed us that some professors: 1) are not cancelling labs/classes (forcing students to choose between the University mandated participation in Assessment Day and their class participation) or, 2) are requiring students to make-up the classes cancelled due to Assessment Day (sometimes on a Saturday).

QT Handheld Devices: Gathering assessment data electronically is more environmentally friendly and less costly than paper and pencil testing. Currently, we gather data electronically using the ISAT/HHS computer labs, and 50-80 Chromebooks owned by CARS. This Assessment Day, we also piloted QT handheld devices, which are devices that essentially serve as electronic scantrons. As we found with a focus group in Fall 2015, students generally enjoyed using these devices and preferred them to scantrons. However, because both the fall and spring focus groups found these particular devices hard to use (buttons are very small & hard to press), we will not use this device in the future and will continue to pursue other options (e.g. smartphone application) for electronic data collection.

Final Thoughts: Overall, we feel Spring Assessment Day 2016 was a success and are so grateful the weather did not force us to hold a snow date on a Saturday! Our gratitude is reflected in our smiling faces (shown from left to right: Paula Love, Administrative Assistant; Kelly Foelber, Doctoral GA; Derek Sauder, Masters GA; Jessica Jacovidis, Doctoral GA; and Dr. Dena Pastor, Senior Assessment Specialist)
Assistant Assessment Specialist and Assistant Professor John Hathcoat traveled to New Orleans with Cluster Two Coordinator, Dennis Beck to present at the AAC&U’s annual General Education Conference. Their presentation was titled “Inclusive assessment strategies in the arts and humanities: Focus groups and q-sorts.

This presentation examined the utility of distinct assessment strategies for examining student learning outcomes in the Arts and Humanities within the context of low-stakes testing. Focus groups were presented as a strategy that may be adapted to collect information about the performance of individual students as well as emergent group dynamics. Strategies were also provided for selecting stimulus criteria and the construction of prompts to be used during this procedure. Finally, attendees participated in a q-sorting procedure wherein they sorted student written responses according to a fixed distribution. This distribution served as an initial framework for creating a rubric. Strengths and limitations of this procedure were also addressed.

The session was well attended, with approximately 45 individuals in the session. Participants were highly engaged and we have been contacted by numerous people after the presentation to provide additional information about this assessment strategy. Kate McConnell indicated that they may invite us back next year to conduct a workshop on implementing this procedure to create rubrics.

The new and improved CARS website has made a great impact, as it was featured in the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment newsletter (which we noted last month). One feature that has been particularly well received has been our interview series “Assessment Leaders Around the Globe.” February’s interview featured Dr. Peter Ewell – the president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). These interviews are conducted by graduate assistants in CARS, which provides them the opportunity to meet and speak with leaders who work in the fields they will be pursuing. Next month’s featured interview involves Trudy Banta, Managing Editor of Assessment Update. You can find past and current interviews on our website at http://www.jmu.edu/assessment under the “Headlines” section.

Councils, Advisory Boards, and Committee participation:

- Keston Fulcher and John Hathcoat have been asked to assist the Academic Advising Advisory Board (AAAB) in their efforts to articulate student learning outcomes for academic advising on campus. They met with a subcommittee consisting of Mary Doyle Morsch, Margaret Kyger, Jennifer Litwell, and Anna Lynn Bell in order to modify outcomes provided by a national association of academic advising. The subcommittee plans on presenting their work to the larger group at the next meeting.

- Heather Patterson and John Hathcoat will be providing two assessment workshops at a professional development meeting to the University Health Center staff. They are currently in the process of selecting topics. This is a result of participation in the University Health Sciences Assessment Committee.

- The Assessment Award subcommittee has reviewed existing awards for student affairs professionals. An initial draft of the award has been created and submitted to the larger council for review. Professional development funding for the recipient of the award has also been informally approved.
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• Doctoral student, and member of the SASS office in CARS, Heather Harris, created a new example reporting template for the Student Affairs Assessment Advisory Council’ website. Doctoral student Madison Holzman and SASS faculty advisor John Hathcoat have also continued to provide workshops about rater training and rubric development to OSARP (Office of Student Accountability and Restorative Practices).

• A record of 65 academic programs were eligible for the APT alternative option in the 2016-2017 academic year. This option allows academic programs to take a year off of writing a full assessment report in order to focus their efforts on implementation, or exploration, of possible program-level changes to the curriculum, interventions, or assessment processes. PASS held three APT alternative information sessions for these programs in February. The purpose of each session was to recognize the hard work of the exemplary assessment programs on campus, explain the APT alternative option, and promote learning improvement at the program level.

• Geology held their Academic Program Review (APR) in February. The APR is conducted internally by undergraduate and graduate degree-granting academic programs or programs driven by student outcomes. This comprehensive review seems assessment and/or evaluative information about the entire program or unit. Degree Granting and Other Academic APRs must be conducted every eight years with an interim report due every four years. The intent of this report is to update program status and examine programmatic issues. Members from PASS attend each APR to report on the strengths and potential improvement areas for each program’s assessment practices.

GENERAL EDUCATION CLUSTER UPDATES:

Two focus groups for Clusters 1 and 2, each consisting of about 30 students, were held on Assessment Day (which was held on February 9th). The purpose of the Cluster 1 focus group was to gather information that could be used to modify a new information literacy instrument (INFOCORE) while the purpose of the Cluster 2 focus group was to gather assessment data from students who have already fulfilled their Cluster 2 requirements. Students were pre-selected from the larger population of students required to participate in Assessment Day and were emailed in advance to direct them to participate in the focus group as a way to meet their Assessment requirement.

Ph.D. Program News

2nd year Ph.D. student Kristen Smith has been appointed to serve as the Division D Senior Representative for the Graduate Student Council (GSC) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). This is an important honor for Kristen and to our institution as a whole.

Kristen will attend the GSC business meeting and other sponsored events that will take place during the annual meeting of AERA in Washington, D.C. in April. Congratulations to Kristen on this prestigious appointment!
On Wednesday, February 17th, Kelly Foelber (2nd year Doc student), Madison Holzman (1st year Doc student), and Carolyn Miesen (2nd year MA student) attended the “Careers in Statistics” Panel, hosted by the Washington Statistical Society. The panel was held at the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the panel was to provide discussion and advice for students interested in statistics-related careers in the DC Metro area. Panelists included employees from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), US Census Bureau, Ernst & Young, and BDS Data Analytics LLC. In addition to discussing career opportunities for students with our specific skill set with panelists, Kelly, Madison, and Carolyn also spoke with high school, undergraduate, and graduate students from other institutions about our programs here at JMU.

Presentations


Publications

