



Assessment Times

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Racing to Excellence Amid COVID-19 Challenges by Sharon Wilks, PhD, RN (Nursing) and C. Jenise Williamson (Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies)

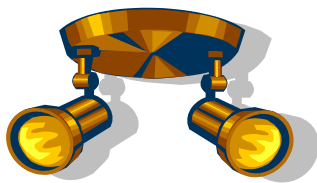
In March 2020, as the effects of the corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic were impacting people and communities across the globe, they were also affecting activities within the Bowie State University (BSU) community. BSU embarked on a rigorous support system for faculty, students, and staff, to create a fully remote teaching and learning environment. Preparation and support services occurred through Blackboard orientation sessions for students and faculty to facilitate a seamless teaching and learning environment from face-to-face to virtual. Orientation sessions for Blackboard online facilitation occurred through a step-by-step Blackboard online orientation session for students and face-to-face and virtual Blackboard orientation sessions for faculty, conducted by faculty mentors. Faculty were given the flexibility of engaging in synchronous and/or asynchronous virtual teaching and learning activities to support their students.

In addition to orientation sessions for students, BSU provided support services such as virtual Department of Information Technology (DIT) and Counseling Services, as well as ongoing COVID-19 updates on the university's webpage. Resources like these are critical to student performance and assessment, especially since researchers found that university students reported increased stress and anxiety because of COVID-19 confinement, social distancing, and other restrictions (Husky, Kovbess-Masfety, & Swendsen, 2020; Perez, Santos, Cisneros, & Tongson-Fernandez, 2019).

Helping students to learn and succeed means creating an environment in which they feel like they belong, even through the stress from the COVID-19 pandemic. "[S]tudents' sense of belonging on campus is crucial not only for student success and persistence, but for student equity. Feeling respected, welcomed, and valued is correlated with outcomes like higher grades, retention, and engagement" (DiMenna, 2019). Since the beginning of the COVID-19 episode and the need for social distancing, students no longer have the ability to easily find a sustainable community. Peer mentoring might be a good solution for creating a feeling of belonging in the virtual classroom. DiMenna (2019) stated that "students tend to find peers more approachable and easier to connect with [than faculty or staff], which can be especially beneficial to women and students of color."

COVID-19 also created the need for online university-related activities such as attendance at the annual conference of the Association for Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE). The conference was converted to a virtual platform and was attended by 25 members of the BSU community including faculty, staff, and some members of BSU's Committee for the Assessment of the Student Learning Experience (CASTLE). Many beneficial and practical sessions addressed topics such as assessment strategies for fostering an equity and growth mindset, assignment rubrics design, and affective learning. In addition, the Assessment Institute conference hosted by IUPUI is free this year and will be held virtually October 25-28, 2020.

(continued on page 2)



In the next edition: ICD and CCE assessment results



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On The Horizon:

Middle States Visit Rescheduled

Bowie State University's Middle States Commission on Higher Education on-site evaluation visit has been rescheduled until fall 2021. Middle States provided the opportunity to reschedule the visit due to the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the changing environment at institutions for faculty, staff and students.

Dr. Rafael Ramirez-Rivera, Chancellor of the Arecibo Campus of the University of Puerto Rico, will continue as team chair for the BSU visit. Other members of the team will be announced in spring 2021.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★
 ★ "Democracy demands ★
 ★ that the religiously- ★
 ★ motivated translate ★
 ★ their concerns into ★
 ★ universal, rather than ★
 ★ religion-specific, ★
 ★ values." ★
 ★ - Barack Obama ★
 ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★



Another benefit that might come of the necessary changes due to COVID-19 is through heavier reliance on technology for online classes. "Researchers are focusing on the large amounts of student data that can be gathered and archived in online courses and programs in order to 'mine' the data for patterns that can assist educators with improving learning outcomes. Referred to as 'learning analytics'... these approaches enable faculty and course designers to make rapid changes in instructional practices and curriculum, and they empower students to make informed decisions about their learning behaviors and course choices" (Prineas & Cini 2011). Despite the COVID-19 challenges, BSU continues to thrive in what may be the new normal of teaching and learning. As the race to excellence continues, the focus remains on facilitating the success of all BSU students.

DiMenna, Michelle. (2019). Why-and-how-to build a sense of belonging on campus. EAB. <https://eab.com/insights/expert-insight/academic-affairs/why-and-how-to-build-a-sense-of-belonging-on-campus/>

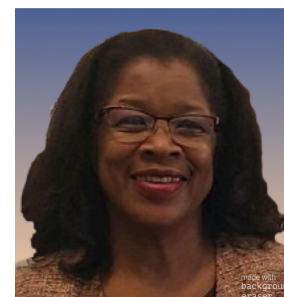
Husky, M. M., Kovbess-Masfety, V., & Swendsen, J. D. (2020). Stress and anxiety among university students in France during Covid-19 mandatory confinement. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 102, 15291. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsy.2020.152191>

Perez, M. A., Santos, A. A., Cisneros, R., & Tongson-Fernandez, M. (2019). Stress, stressors, and academic performance among Asian students in Central California. *American Journal of Health Studies*, 34(1), 29-3.

Prineas, M., & Cini, M. (2011, October). Assessing learning in online education: The role of technology in improving student outcomes. (Occasional Paper No. 12). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OccasionalPaper12.pdf>

Outcomes Measurement Feature Within Blackboard

One of the COVID-19 adjustments related to teaching and learning was the need for faculty to increase or fine-tune their engagement with Blackboard in order to facilitate the pivot to virtual teaching, learning and assessment environments. This effort was also designed to increase student engagement in the virtual Blackboard classroom. One feature that will undoubtedly be of interest to faculty is in the "goals" on the left panel of the Blackboard home page. Information under the goals tab has great benefit for measuring student performance. It also has benefits for assessment coordinators, as they gather and analyze student performance data and develop and complete assessment reports.



Dr. Sharon Wilks

The goals tab in Blackboard shows a list of standards from accreditation bodies for various programs at BSU, as well as goals for other areas within the university. For example, standards for the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) and Council for the Accreditation for Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) are located within the goals tab. Goals for the General Education Program and the BSU Strategic Plan are also located within the goals tab.

In addition to availability of accreditation standards and other goals, there is the option to upload course student learning outcomes (such as critical thinking, oral and written communication, etc.), which can be integrated into individual course assignments. Aligning the accreditation standards and/or student learning outcomes to specific course assignments provides a measurable assessment of the standards and student learning outcomes. In addition to providing outcome measures for faculty, these assessment measures also facilitate reporting of the outcomes measures usually required for accreditation reports.

For questions related to the goals feature on Blackboard, please contact Tolulope Oladipo at toladipo@bowiestate.edu or Dr. Fabio Chacon at fchacon@bowiestate.edu. Dr. Sharon Wilks serves as faculty and assessment coordinator in the Department of Nursing. She is currently a Center for Academic Programs Assessment (CAPA) 2020-2021 Faculty Assessment Fellow.

Culturally-Relevant Assessment

Students often say they want educational material to be “relatable”. They want to see themselves in the texts in ways that make sense without the intercession of the instructor to make the content matter. However, that isn’t always possible or even advisable if we want to raise students’ consciousness to the height of scholarship in a global community. As an HBCU, Bowie State University is very familiar with teaching a diverse student body in a culturally responsive way. Assessing student work also in a culturally relevant way is a good way to make academic material matter.

How to conduct culturally relevant assessment (CRA) was one of the main sessions in the virtual conference of the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE) held in June of this year. Harriet Hobbs, Karen Singer-Freeman, and Christine Robinson are devoted advocates of CRA. They state that CRA “avoids stereotype threat” and presents “inclusive content aligned with teaching and SLOs, clear instructions, scaffolding, inclusive content, and high-utility value.”



C. Jenise Williamson

Increasingly, the need to relate classwork with the job place makes relevancy a key component of student learning. Hobbs, Singer-Freeman, and Robinson call this “utility value—work that has meaning beyond the academic context.” While some might say this approach is a business model-only approach, the need to earn a livable salary is very real. They state that examples of assignments that have high inclusive content with a high to moderate utility value are reflective writing and oral presentations, and possibly writing in the discipline.

To best serve the student, program goals, course objectives, and student learning outcomes (SLOs) must be in alignment. How each of the SLOs align with job performance is becoming more and more necessary for transparency and retention. A very good example of an assignment that addresses utility value, alignment, scaffolding, and reflection can be found on the website of the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). The article entitled “Liberal Arts Skills in Action” by Nina Namaste can be accessed through this link: <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/assignment-library/liberal-arts-skills-in-action/>.

Putting the focus on inclusive teaching and assessment practices gives both instructors and students a sense of belonging in the classroom and directs students toward a welcoming future. For more information about CRA, see the AALHE newsletter at this link: https://www.aalhe.org/assets/docs/Intersection/AAHLE_spring_2020_intersection.pdf.

C. Jenise Williamson is an associate professor in the department of Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies. She first came to BSU in 1994 and shortly thereafter started the creative writing program. She has been the assessment coordinator in LLCS for eight years and continues her work there and also as a Center for Academic Programs Assessment (CAPA) 2020-2021 Faculty Assessment Fellow.

College of Business Plans for the Future

Submission compiled by Dr. Becky Verzinski, AVP for Assessment

The state of assessment in the College of Business is strong and vibrant. Under the leadership of the new dean, the college has recently established an Office of Assessment and Accreditation (OAA) signaling a commitment to continuous improvement, high-quality standards, and excellence in teaching. His vision for building a sustainable assessment culture is centered on ensuring the College of Business has measurable and achievable educational goals and well-defined student learning outcomes.

The College of Business currently maintains two professional accreditations. The undergraduate business administration and MBA programs were reaffirmed by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) in 2019, and the MPA program has been accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA). In 2020, the program earned NASPAA reaccreditation for the period September 1, 2020 to August 31, 2026.

The MS in Management Information Systems program successfully concluded an external review in 2020 in preparation for the University System of Maryland periodic program review. These assessment and accreditation efforts reflect a significant adherence to the maintenance of high standards for academic programs, faculty, and co-curricular activities.

To move the assessment process forward, the OAA will be staffed by the new Coordinator of Assessment & Accreditation, Nedra Mahone, who brings multiple years of assessment experience within higher education. She has most recently served as BSU's Director of University Testing Services, where she was responsible for creating formalized and documented processes for the administration of a variety of internal and external assessments.

Ms. Mahone previously served as the Coordinator of Assessment & Accreditation for the College of Business and prior to that, as a full-time faculty of finance, accounting, and real estate. She has more than 15 years of experience in teaching, instructional design, and assessment and accreditation, having participated in trainings with Robert Branch (ADDIE), James Popham (Transformative Assessment, Classroom Assessment: What Teachers Need to Know), Drexel University Assessment Workshops, and many others. She is also Quality Matters certified. Ms. Mahone holds a Master's degree in Business Administration and is pursuing Doctoral Studies with the University of Ulster, NI.

Ms. Mahone looks forward to rejoining the college at a time when moving to remote learning is helping faculty to collaborate on unified core courses. Working with the new positions of core course faculty coordinators and using online textbook tools, she will be supporting faculty in enhancing the college's assessment process.



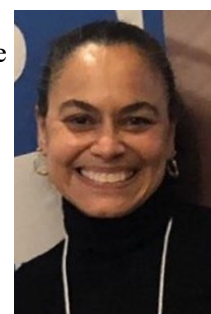
Mr. Joshua Adebambo

Additional OAA staff members include the new Data Analyst, Joshua Adebambo, a recent graduate from Bowie State's MBA program. Mr. Adebambo will provide analytical support in the OAA to inform decision-making related to the continuity of learning. Finally, an administrative assistant who will provide the necessary support for activities consistent with the OAA's goals and objectives is slated to be hired later this year.



Dean Lawrence McNeil

documented processes for the



Ms. Nedra Mahone