

Appendix 6

From Effect to Cause: A Brainstorming Exercise

The scenarios presented here can be used as the focus of a brainstorming exercise to help faculty and staff members get a sense of the kinds of changes in curriculum and practice that may result from assessment.

Scenario 1. Faculty in the Biophysics Department agree that student majors should be able to make effective oral presentations of their research findings, but they are not satisfied with the quality of the oral presentations made by their seniors. Unfortunately, they can't find a place in the curriculum for students to practice preparing and making oral presentations. All the faculty agree that they have so much content to cover in their courses that they don't have time to teach students how to make effective oral presentations and then listen to them. How might the faculty address this?

Scenario 2. Senior Biology majors at Roselyn College scored poorly on the botany section of the XYZ National Biology Test. Some faculty feel this is not a concern, because virtually all Roselyn Biology graduates go on to careers in the health and medical fields. Others feel that a grounding in botany is essential to being a well-rounded biologist. How might the faculty resolve this?

Scenario 3. In blind reviews, 85% of Cultural Anthropology senior theses were scored "outstanding" in terms of clarity, organization, the comprehensiveness of their review of scholarly literature, and the soundness of their analysis and conclusions. Five percent were scored "very good," 5% "adequate," and 5% "inadequate." What might the faculty do with this information?

Scenario 4. The faculty of the European Studies Department agrees that their student majors should be able to summarize the tenets of the major ancient Greek philosophers. Unfortunately, a review of a sample of student papers shows that the students are generally poor at doing this. To make matters worse, there is only one course in the department that covers ancient Greek philosophy, taught by a senior faculty member who adamantly refuses to consider modifying what or how he teaches. What might the department do?

Scenario 5. One of the goals of the Organizational Leadership program is for students to be able to "write clearly and effectively." Although Organizational Leadership majors are asked to write term papers in at least six department courses, their writing quality is nonetheless generally still inadequate by the time they're seniors. Faculty are quick to point to the woefully poor writing skills of entering freshmen and equally quick to blame the English department for not bringing their writing skills up to par in freshman composition classes. What, if anything, might be done to improve students' writing skills by the time they graduate?