

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **Assessment in the capstone course**
- **Library Assessment**
- **Student writing in capstone courses**

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## Assessment in the Capstone Course



When we shifted into high gear for student learning assessment several years ago, we started with assessment in the capstone, for the simple reason that capstone students should be able to demonstrate all or most of the learning outcomes for a degree program. It's the culminating experience where students pull the strands of their coursework together to understand how their discipline makes sense of the world and gives it meaning.

In general, students in a capstone are in a great position to look back at their years and provide incisive commentary on your program in all its parts and levels. Who wouldn't want to assess learning at this point in student development?

**General Education Assessment.** So the capstone is not only a great place to see how you've done in the major content areas, but it's an important contributor to General Education goals as well. Typically you're looking at writing, research, critical thinking, perhaps oral communication, quantitative literacy, and other General Education skills in capstone courses. Those assessment targets are often part of an assessment plan in the major, and the results can serve double duty as General Education assessment. Agree on rubrics for those General Education competencies and you make things much easier for both General Education and program assessment.

**Institutional Learning Goals.** Because the capstone is often where students demonstrate the broadest learning and competencies, it can align with and support institutional learning. Since a capstone is often project-based and sometimes team-based, it's potentially a good site for the assessment of ethical leadership, career preparation, advocacy for justice, and experiential learning in general. These are all parts of the John Jay Mission Statement, and capstone courses typically provide the flexibility needed for students to demonstrate these activities and dispositions.

In conclusion, there are few places in academic affairs that provide as much fertile ground for assessment as capstone courses.

## Library Assessment



*“The greatest challenge for us, though, is to assess the impact that the library has on students’ academic success”*

The Library’s approach to assessment is quite different from other academic departments that have majors and credit-bearing courses. We actively work to support research, teaching and learning for students, faculty and the scholarly community at large, and to promote information literacy among our students (and faculty) by building strong print and electronic collections, providing reference help, library classes, a robust website and a comfortable and welcoming physical environment.

While assessing such a multitude of goals and activities is a huge challenge, our most obvious success has been where the need for improvement is arguably greatest: providing a comfortable and welcoming physical environment. We have conducted two rounds of what we hope will be triennial surveys of in-person use of the physical library. Students have been clear about their need for more time and space in which to study, more help at the circulation desks, and more places to charge their devices. We have responded by staying open 24-hours during finals, increasing staff at critical hours, persuading Facilities and Space Planning to repair and add chairs, and obtaining grants from the Student Technology Fee to buy charging tables and charging hubs. We have been open about the process in articles in the Library newsletter, Classified Information: <http://www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/blog/in%E2%80%9090library-use-survey-report-2013>.

Assessing our collection has become easier as more books and (particularly)

journals have migrated to an online environment. We carefully study usage statistics and compute cost per journal article downloaded to determine if we are spending our money wisely, and we adjust our subscriptions accordingly. Similarly, we are able to assess the use of the Library website by looking at Google Analytics and at web logs to determine how users are finding us and what pages they are using most.

The greatest challenge for us, though, is to assess the impact that the library has on students’ academic success. We study CUNY and John Jay student satisfaction surveys (we always do well) and solicit feedback from the faculty whose classes we teach (almost uniformly positive) but, except for the occasional thorough review of capstone courses, we have no method to formally assess students’ information literacy at graduation, or what effect library resources, services, or formal instruction has had. One recent exception was the 2013 survey of graduate student programs. There we learned that: of those few students who said they had received a library instruction class, 89% thought it was somewhat or very useful; 61% visited the Library’s website at least once a week; 85% thought the Library databases were useful for their graduate coursework and 77% thought these databases were useful for their research or professional development.

We would be happy to partner with another academic department to pilot some means of more rigorous assessment of information literacy as part of that department’s own assessment process.

## Student Writing in Capstone Courses

Departmental assessment reports of capstone courses have identified major student writing issues. This trend was also observed in the 2012 General Education Assessment report. Despite having two English general education courses (focusing on writing) and numerous writing assignments in courses within and outside of majors, students are still reaching the capstone course without the ability to: write a thesis statement; develop an outline; form logical arguments; support the main points of their papers; effectively cite their sources; and even create coherent sentences. The latter is particularly troubling as students have reached a 400-level course without the ability to clearly express their ideas. If content alone is being used to assess student performance up until the capstone course, then the question that should be asked is: how can one judge whether a student understands the ideas, if he or she cannot clearly express their ideas so that the reader can comprehend them? Content alone cannot be used to check student comprehension. What is also required is the evaluation of the expression of student ideas in individual courses in the major. Furthermore, writing-intensive courses should (wherever possible) be included in the major to reinforce and practice writing skills learned in the English general education courses.

### ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

**For more information on Assessment at John Jay College, see:**

<http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/assessment-john-jay-college>

**For “Guidelines for Assessment at John Jay,” see:**

<http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/guidelines-assessment-john-jay>

**For “Assessment of Student Learning” see:**

<http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/assessment-student-learning>

**For “Administrative Unit Assessment” see:**

<http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/administrative-unit-assessment-plans-and-reports>

**For “Institutional Assessment,” see:**

<http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/institutional-assessment>



## College-Wide Assessment Committee: Who We are

John Jay College of Criminal Justice has an Assessment Committee with college-wide responsibilities. Having a single group with oversight and reporting responsibilities allows for the most efficient sharing of information, plans, and best practices, and in general promotes greater campus awareness about the benefits of systematic assessment.

The Campus-Wide Assessment Committee coordinates assessment efforts for both student learning and institutional effectiveness, broadly understood.

### College-Wide Assessment Committee Members

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