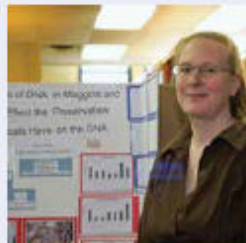


JUDGMENTS *of* QUALITY

Connecting faculty best assessment
with student best work!



Association for General and Liberal Studies 2013

PROLOGUE
John Nichols
Saint Joseph's College



Genesis & Development of the Project

The key question that gave rise to this undertaking was and is: “How do we assess our graduates’ best work in liberal education in ways that match the quality of the work we expect at the highest undergraduate levels of liberal learning?” This question kept surfacing at the annual AGLS conferences in talks on a wide variety of topics, with a “clumping” of occasions around the influence of regional and specialized accreditors. The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) formulated its version of our question in this compact form: “What assessments are *worthy of our mission?*”

That is the positive or attracting version of the question. The negative or repelling version asks: “How do we avoid lowering expectations, in our capstones for example, simply because we have to generate data for accountability reports, perhaps even quantitative data?” The participants in this project joined the project, because they are convinced that they have identified and validated assessments that indeed do measure up to, and do not infirm, student liberal education outcomes at the about-to-graduate levels.

At the origin, the project was composed of two groups of institutions, one from the Association for General and Liberal Studies (AGLS) and one from the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC).

The first gathering of the combined groups occurred during the October, 2010 AGLS Annual Conference in Austin, Texas. At this point, the focus was on recruiting eight to twelve institutions to constitute each project group and on defining the project goal as fully and precisely as necessary. The statement of the *goal of the project* at the end of the Austin Conference was this:

To identify, document, evaluate, write up, and publish ways of assessing student learning at the about-to-graduate levels of liberal learning. It is acknowledged and celebrated that the institutions collaborating in the project will conduct a splendid diversity of programs, with diverse outcomes, and use a wide range of methods of assessment.

By the summer of 2011, it was clear that the AGLS group was well ahead of the ACTC group in terms of definition of the particular facets of the project on which it would work, and these institutions had also already developed and tested creative ways of assessing liberal learning. Quite graciously, the ACTC group, recognizing that the AGLS group would get to the threshold of publication well in advance of themselves, agreed that AGLS should go ahead and publish their results and ACTC would publish its results perhaps one year later. Readers of this

monograph, therefore, should anticipate and look forward to a second report issuing from this project in 2014, based on the creative work of the ACTC group.

Enough funding was secured from the Lumina Foundation to support three further gatherings (“convenings” is the Lumina term). For the first of them, representatives from ten institutions spent three hours prior to the 2011 AGLS Conference in Miami, working to understand in depth one another’s liberal education commitments and programs, comparing outcomes and assessments at summative levels, and seeking partners for the work groups that would be formed in the project. Some additional communication continued via e-mail in the fall and winter of 2011-12.

In June of 2012, eighteen representatives of the AGLS institutions traveled to the Indiana campus of Saint Joseph’s College to work (“intensely,” they said at the end) from the evening of the third to noon of the sixth on getting the project up to full speed. They clarified project outcomes, they formed three work groups, and they succeeded both in defining and in beginning to construct their respective contributions to the project (see the four chapters of this booklet). The key design principle for this publication is for it to function as a companion piece for the 2006 *AGLS Guide* to program review and assessment in general education. They also planned presentations for the 2012 AGLS Conference in Portland, Oregon: a panel for one of the plenary sessions, two concurrent sessions, and two roundtable discussions—all of these sessions growing out of the very collaborative and productive three days of work in Indiana.

The third Lumina-funded convening was another three-hour work session at the Portland Conference. Some of that time was spent on final adjustments to the presentations that project members would be making at the Conference over the following three days. The more challenging work for the group was a thorough critique of the pages they had produced since June for the project publication, with the primary purpose of making a unified whole, in accuracy of content and examples especially, out of parts that had been produced by various members. They set a December 1st deadline for final drafts of the chapters—which everyone succeeded in meeting!—and final editing and formatting of the monograph continued into the early weeks of 2013.

Who Are the “They”?

The eighteen people who did the June 3-6 work in Indiana, and therefore ended up with writing assignments for this booklet, are listed below. There are other people who were at one or the other meetings of the project, but who were not at the June work session. A complete list of everyone associated with the project, with titles and e-mail addresses, is in the Appendix.

Champlain College (VT)

Craig Pepin

Miami Dade College (FL)

John Frederick
Barbara Rodriguez

North Dakota State University	Larry Peterson Susan Ray-Degges
Portland State University (OR)	Vicki Reitenauer
St. Edward's University (TX)	Cory Lock Robert Strong
Saint Joseph's College (IN)	Fr. Jeff Kirch Michael Malone John Nichols (Project Director)
University of North Dakota	Thomas Steen Joan Hawthorne
University of St. Francis (IN)	Elizabeth Kuebler-Wolf Matthew Smith
Vincennes University (IN)	Chad Bebee Michael Gress (AGLS Executive Council) Laurel Smith

Readers will also find these names listed at the head of the chapters and other items in the following pages, according to the various research and writing contributions individuals made to this publication.

The Title

As befits a publication dealing with liberal education, the title chosen for this monograph embodies a linguistic structure with a classical pedigree of literally dozens of centuries. *Judgments of Quality* is a genitive construction of some special depth. It is both objective and subjective in its intended message.

The classical example of this structure can be found in the old Latin grammars, with “amor Dei” as the quasi-universal example. “Amor Dei” means both the love God has for us and the love we have for God. Mono-valent examples of the genitive might be “love of wine” (objective) and “women of strength” (subjective). The elegance of the classical genitive is that it avoids more ponderous noun constructions, whether of Teutonic (Voraussetzunglosigkeit) or Yankee (student learning outcomes assessment protocol) origin.

Everything contained in this monograph expresses the both/and thinking that our title communicates. We are striving to improve assessment of liberal learning by connecting the best judgments faculty can make with the best undergraduate performances expected from students. High quality judgments meeting academic work of high quality.