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# THE EVENING WEEKEND NEWS

A Newsletter for the Part-time Montgomery College Faculty

March 2006

Charlotte Jacobsen, Editor

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## Whose Idea Was This? — Outcomes Assessment

By Ken Weiner

Used to be there was a time when educators and institutions could substantiate how effective their academic programs were by simply describing the breadth of their offerings, the quality and commitment of their faculty, and the college's enormous investment in state of the art technology and science and learning labs. Now it seems, there's a new expectation – not just at MC, but at 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities across the nation – that unless faculty have defined and are regularly assessing the intended outcomes of such programs, the academic effectiveness of the institution remains in question. What's up with that?



Ken Weiner

What's up is this: while good intentions and hard work continue to be important and highly valued, in the end they are simply not enough. Any organization whose mission is to deliver high quality education, or any services for that matter, and is truly committed to that mission has the responsibility of going one step further and asking the questions, "Are we making a difference?"; "Are our programs working, and if not, can we find ways to improve them?" Asking and answering these questions is what outcomes assessment is all about, and it's what Middle States and every other accrediting agency across the country demands of the institutions they oversee.

Note that these questions ask about the effectiveness of programs and services, not individuals, a distinction that can't be stressed enough. Outcomes assessment is not intended, nor designed, to evaluate the performance of any individual, be it student, faculty member, staff or administrator. In fact, this past fall Montgomery College's two Executive Vice Presidents issued a clear statement to that effect. (See *Student Learning Outcomes Data Protocol Statement* at [www.montgomerycollege.edu/outcomes](http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/outcomes)).

Formally defined, outcomes assessment is the systematic collection of data, both qualitative and quantitative, for the purpose of providing information about how well the programs or services being assessed are achieving their intended outcomes, followed by the use of that information to improve such programs or services where necessary. At its most negative, outcomes assessment will point up weaknesses in programs that can then be remediated; at its most positive it will provide objective evidence to support compelling anecdotal stories in celebrating programmatic strengths. Either way, the process produces a win-win outcome.

While the long term goal is to establish a culture where assessing outcomes for all programs and services is routinely expected and performed, the immediate focus at Montgomery College is to assess student learning outcomes for our most highly enrolled courses. The process to accomplish this, one which at some point will impact almost every full-time faculty member and adjunct at the College, requires three basic steps:

First, discipline faculty must define the key learning outcomes for the course being assessed; that is, they must determine what are the most important things that students take away from their course. In general, such learning outcomes should reflect higher order thinking and/or the acquisition of transferable skills, as opposed to recall of microbits of information.

Second, discipline faculty must develop a common means of assessing how well students are achieving these key learning outcomes, and all faculty who teach the course in a given semester must administer this assessment, and then score it using agreed upon evaluation criteria.

Finally, upon receiving the analysis of the data from the College-wide Outcomes Assessment Team, discipline faculty must review, discuss, and interpret the results, and where appropriate, make recommendations that will help improve the program and

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*Outcomes Assessment (continued)*

services that were assessed. This last step is known in the outcomes assessment world as "closing the loop", and completing this is absolutely essential for the process to be worthwhile and successful. Assessing outcomes just for the purpose of collecting data and making pretty graphs and reports is of little or no value to anyone.

Currently, we are well on our way to implementing a successful outcomes assessment process at Montgomery College. This past fall, for example, some 270 sections covering eight high demand courses at the college assessed three learning outcomes. Six of these courses are integral to our General Education Program, and consequently they were asked to assess at least one or both of two general education competencies: writing effectively and information literacy. This semester all sections of four additional courses will be assessing three learning outcomes, while another 10 courses will be preparing to do the same during the next academic year.

Once the data is analyzed the results will be shared with discipline faculty for their interpretation and recommendations. However, we also anticipate that assessment results will stimulate discussions among wider audiences at the college. For example, the results of the writing effectively assessment will likely lead to a college-wide discussion about what constitutes satisfactory writing at the college level, and what the faculty and the institution can do to ensure that students achieve this skill.

In the end, it is the fact that the outcomes assessment process becomes a catalyst for these kinds of vibrant discussions that make the process so important and valuable. Such discussions lead to a set of common core expectations for all students enrolled in a specific course, they establish accepted standards of performance by students, and they foster interdisciplinary considerations that all too often are not present in our academic community. Most of all this process and the associated discussions lead to a subtle, but very powerful, shift to a results-based perspective, and results, that is, student learning of knowledge, skills, values, and the ability to think critically about the world we live in are why most, if not all, of us have made education our professional life.

For more about Outcomes Assessment at Montgomery College, visit [www.montgomerycollege.edu/outcomes](http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/outcomes) or contact College-wide Outcomes Assessment Coordinators Ken Weiner (Math (R), x.5203) or Samantha Veneruso ( Eng (R), x7940).

*Montgomery College's  
Rockville Campus  
40th Anniversary  
Gala*

*Tuesday, April 4, 2006*

Dinner, dancing, awards, and performances by MC students and alumni.

Proceeds go to the  
Rockville Campus  
Student Fund

Attire: business/semi formal

**RSVP by March 27, 2006**  
**Rockville 40th Anniversary**  
**Gala Event Chairs,**  
**at 301-610-4019**

## Adjunct Counselor Presents at Advising Conference

By the late Jeff Gardner

*[Editor's note: All of us who knew and worked with Jeff were shocked to learn of his death in December. The following article illustrates his enthusiasm and professionalism.]*

Will I go to Las Vegas for the NACADA (National Academic Advising Association) advising conference? Well, yes, I think I'll be free in October! Why was I asked to attend? I'm an adjunct faculty member on Saturday mornings and Tuesday / Thursday evenings for the Counseling Department.



Jeff Gardner

Over 3,400 (including over two dozen from Montgomery College) descended upon Las Vegas for five days of educational presentations, poster sessions, workshops, and special programs out of approximately 10,000 advisors, counselors, faculty, and administrators who are members.

Some of us weren't just there to soak up innovative ideas, counselors Joan Hawkins and Tim Kirkner ran a standing room only session that focused on our Transfer Studies Certificate Program. I submitted a proposal for a presentation, "Humor in Advising."

I know the topic seems oxymoronic, since advising is a very serious process, with potentially significant impacts on students' academic and professional futures. Yet, the session – which I have presented at NACADA conferences since 2001 – is always standing room only. This year was no exception, as over 250 attendees crammed into a room with just 180 chairs! Many people tell me they came because they are intrigued by the title.

I approached the topic from a serious perspective. After an opening icebreaker exemplifying an alternate form of humor, I ran through several slides that addressed various benefits and the down side of introducing humor into the work environment. Summarized the existing research on humor used little of my allotted 50 minutes as there is none! To provide substance, I looked at the research on humor in two related fields: humor in teaching, and humor in counseling psychology.

Will my session explain how to tell jokes while advising. No, not at all. Humor is a frame of mind; and

incorporating it into a professional environment involves more thought, effort, and consideration than simply cracking one-liners.

My emphasis was on alternative forms of humor. In addition to discussing anecdotes, which if personal can be extremely effective, I discussed humorous quotations, cartoons, and posters; and provided examples of these. To illustrate the use of posters, I downloaded a large number from [despair.com](http://despair.com). These "demotivational" posters are a real jolt when interspersed during a presentation.

I was pleased if I say so myself with the Vegas presentation and particularly when a large number of attendees stayed to talk with me at the conclusion of the session. I also was delighted with the positive comments from my colleagues at MC, many of whom were seeing me for the first time. (Editors' comment: Jeff's presentation was fantastic!) I want to say a quick word of thanks to Counseling Department Chair Dana Baker, who was very active in promoting the NACADA conference among MC faculty.

Presenting at professional conferences is often overlooked as a benefit of being in academia, available also to adjuncts. I have found it to be wonderfully rewarding, and want to encourage all of you to consider it – especially at a NACADA Conference. Aside from the National Conference, held every October, the Mid-Atlantic Region of NACADA (incorporating schools in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C.) also sponsors a "regional" conference every spring. This year's regional was held in April at Virginia Beach; next year's will be in March at the Willow Valley Resort in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The regional conference offers a more local / affordable method of becoming a presenter. For more information, visit the NACADA website at: [www.nacada.ksu.edu](http://www.nacada.ksu.edu).

The following student appreciation note reinforces why I love working with students! (see page 4)

Professor Hurwitz,

*It was a pleasure being in your class this semester. Spring 2005 is my first year back in school since I withdrew from a university in 2000. You along with the great staff at Montgomery College have made it such a smooth transition. Being in your class has made me realize how much I truly want to Study Business/Marketing for the long run. I ultimately want to pursue a MBA in Marketing or Global Marketing. Our current up-to-date textbook has been a great resource. I hope we will run into each other during my career path!*

*Thanks!*

## What's happening on Wednesday, April 26th?

**Part-Time Faculty Appreciation Celebration  
with food, wine, & live forties music!  
SAVE THE DATE!**



### IMPORTANT DATES

<b>Mar. 28</b>	5 p.m. Mid-term grades due
<b>April 4</b>	40 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala
<b>April 26</b>	Part Time Faculty Appreciation Celebration
<b>May 8-14</b>	Final week of classes-exams
<b>May 29</b>	Memorial Day; College Closed
<b>May 30</b>	Summer Session I classes begin
<b>July 10</b>	Summer Session II classes begin



