

DATE: 3 August 2009

TO: Dr. Joanne Bruno
Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs

FROM: John Grew, Ph.D.
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RE: MAPP Assessment of the General Studies Program

Introduction and Methodology

As a follow-up to my 2008–2009 year-end report for the William J. Maxwell College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), I wish to provide the following summary of some recent results of the evaluation of NJCU's General Studies Program (GSP). In 2007, Dr. Fiol-Matta, who was the CAS Dean at the time, reported extensively on the results of ongoing evaluation of the GSP as of that date. The original evaluation plan for the GSP was highly complex and not practicable, and was subsequently revised. One modification involved the incorporation of a standardized test, the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP), from the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

The decision to employ the MAPP predated my assignment to the CAS Dean's Office in February 2008, when Dr. Fiol-Matta assigned the GSP and its assessment to me. I administered the MAPP during the Spring 2008 semester. Dr. Katerina Baitinger administered the MAPP during the Spring 2009 semester. The MAPP was administered in the Spring semesters to include Senior students whose graduation was imminent.

The MAPP was administered to three cohorts of students: Beginning (students in FYE sections); Midpoint (students in Civilizations II sections); and Graduating (Seniors). The rationale for this design was to longitudinally study groups of NJCU students throughout their undergraduate studies. For an unknown reason, FYE and Civ II students were evaluated in 2007, but not Seniors. FYE and Civ II students can be evaluated in sections run by compliant instructors, and populations large enough (50 or more) to achieve statistical significance are easily obtained. It proved very difficult to enlist enough Seniors to take the MAPP, even though incentives of iTunes cards and a pizza lunch

were provided. The current MAPP data from the tested cohorts include 119 FYE students, 89 Civ II students, and 64 Seniors. Additional students who took the MAPP had their results excluded due to irregularities.

NJCU employs an abbreviated form of the MAPP that is administered online through an ETS minisite. Additionally, NJCU students were to have also answered approximately 35 questions about themselves (e.g., identifiers, GPA, major) and their perceptions of the GSP. ETS compiles but does not evaluate the answers to these questions. Unfortunately, these questions were not given to the students taking the MAPP in Spring 2009. Therefore, data derived from these questions is not available for the Senior cohort, which unfortunately, is of the greatest interest among the three student cohorts.

The combined MAPP results for each student cohort are attached. The FYE and Civ II cohorts took the MAPP in 2007 and 2009. The Senior cohort took the MAPP in 2008 and 2009. The results for each cohort have several components: Summary of Scaled Scores; Summary of Proficiency Classifications; Scaled Score Distributions for Reading, Writing, Mathematics and Critical Thinking (skills proficiencies); and Scaled Score Distributions for Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences (academic area). The data is also compiled in a way that allows comparison of NJCU cohorts with National cohorts of similar students, both by scaled scores and proficiency levels, as determined by ETS.

Discussion of the Results

The following observations and trends are derived from these MAPP score data:

Comparison of NJCU Student Scaled Scores with National Cohort-Counterparts

- NJCU students achieved lower scores in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by their cohort-counterparts nationally;
- NJCU Seniors achieved lower scores in almost all academic and skill proficiency areas than those achieved by the Freshman national cohort-counterparts, with the exceptions of Humanities and Critical Thinking;
- NJCU students achieved lower score increases in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by their national counterparts, with the single exception of Writing;
- NJCU students achieved lower maximum scores (i.e., <130) in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by their cohort-counterparts nationally, with the single exception of one Freshman student in Reading (i.e., 130).

Comparison among NJCU Student Cohorts

- NJCU Seniors achieved higher scores in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by NJCU Freshman;
- NJCU Midpoint students achieved lower scores in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by NJCU Freshman, with the exceptions of Math and Social Sciences;
- NJCU Seniors achieved higher scores in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by NJCU Midpoint students.

Comparison of NJCU Student Proficiency Levels with National Cohort-Counterparts

- NJCU students achieved lower proficiency levels in all skill proficiency areas than those achieved by their cohort-counterparts nationally;
- NJCU students achieved higher nonproficiency levels in all skill proficiency areas than those achieved by their cohort-counterparts nationally;
- NJCU Seniors achieved lower proficiency levels in many skill proficiency areas than those achieved by the Freshman national cohort-counterparts;
- NJCU students achieved equal or higher proficiency increases in many skill proficiency areas than those achieved by their national counterparts, including Advanced Reading, Intermediate Writing, Advanced Writing, and Advanced Math. (NJCU students move from either Marginal or Nonproficient to Proficient at a higher rate than their national counterparts in these skills proficiencies.);
- NJCU students achieved higher nonproficiency decreases in many skill proficiency areas than those achieved by their national counterparts, including Basic Reading, Advanced Writing, and Basic Math. (NJCU students move from Nonproficient to either Proficient or Marginal at a higher rate than their national counterparts in these skills proficiencies.)

Comparison among NJCU Student Cohorts

- NJCU Seniors achieved higher proficiency levels in almost all skill proficiencies than those achieved by NJCU Freshman, with the exception of Critical Thinking;
- NJCU Midpoint students achieved lower proficiency levels in many skill proficiencies than those achieved by NJCU Freshman;
- NJCU Seniors achieved higher proficiency levels in almost all skill proficiencies than those achieved by NJCU Midpoint students, with the exception of Critical Thinking;
- NJCU Seniors achieved lower nonproficiency levels in all skill proficiencies than those achieved by NJCU Freshman;
- NJCU Midpoint students achieved equal or higher proficiency levels in most skill proficiencies than those achieved by NJCU Freshman;
- NJCU Seniors achieved lower nonproficiency levels in all skill proficiencies than those achieved by NJCU Midpoint students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report should not be construed as an endorsement of the MAPP or its application as an assessment of NJCU's GSP. ETS provides documentation that supports the MAPP's validity as an assessment of "[G]eneral education student learning in two and four-year colleges and universities in order to improve the quality of instruction and learning." (John W. Young, *Validity of the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)*, Center for Validity Research, Educational Testing Service, 2007). Judging the validity of the MAPP for this purpose at NJCU is neither within my expertise nor a purpose of this report.

However, the MAPP results reveal some interesting and valuable information:

- NJCU Freshmen are uniformly less prepared than entering Freshmen are across the nation, on average, based on MAPP results. This is not new information, but it does reinforce widely held beliefs and other indicators;
- NJCU Seniors are uniformly less prepared than graduating Seniors are across the nation, on average, based on MAPP results. This information reinforces widely held beliefs;
- NJCU Seniors are generally less prepared than entering Freshmen are across the nation, on average, based on MAPP results;
- NJCU students achieve slightly smaller gains between their Freshman and Senior years than students across the nation, on average, based on MAPP results;
- NJCU students uniformly gain skill proficiencies and academic area knowledge between their Freshman and Senior years, based on MAPP results;
- NJCU students generally improve their skill proficiency and academic area knowledge classifications between their Freshman and Senior years, based on MAPP results (i.e., move from Nonproficient to either Proficient or Marginal or move from Marginal to Proficient);
- NJCU students often improve their skill proficiency and academic area knowledge classifications between their Freshman and Senior years at higher rates than students across the nation, on average, based on MAPP results (i.e., move from Nonproficient to either Proficient or Marginal or move from Marginal to Proficient).

These considerations and caveats should be borne in mind throughout any discussion of MAPP results and GSP assessment:

- The MAPP may not be a perfect means of assessing the outcomes of NJCU's GSP, but it is designed to perform exactly that task;
- Some individuals are inherently biased toward or against standardized tests as a means of assessing the GSP or in general, and may overgeneralize or marginalize MAPP results as a consequence;
- MAPP results may be inherent skewed toward revealing better or worse performance in certain skills and academic knowledge areas at different times during students' academic plans. For instance, intensive writing and math instruction is typically concentrated in the first two years, rather than the last two years of study, for most college students. Therefore, comparing the midpoint assessment and the freshman assessment in these areas may reveal greater gains than a comparison of the senior and midpoint assessments. Conversely, gains in academic area knowledge performance and proficiency might be greater between the midpoint and senior assessments than between the freshman and midpoint assessments;
- This report does not report levels of student satisfaction and fulfillment because there is inadequate Senior cohort data.

The following recommendations are offered:

- Revise or replace the current GSP with one that is specifically designed to increase attainment in and achieve specified levels of skill proficiencies (learning outcomes) and academic area knowledge;
- Devise a plan to assess student achievement and progress within the agreed-upon skill proficiencies/learning outcomes and academic area knowledge. Evaluate the utility and efficacy of continuing to administer the MAPP for this purpose;
- Continue to assess faculty and student perceptions of and satisfaction with the GSP;
- Require GSP courses or classes to include this assessment in their syllabi. Require selected GSP course instructors to compile and submit assessment data or results;
- Require students to participate in GSP assessment. Require participation in the GSP assessment program a graduation requirement for Seniors;
- Train permanent and adjunct faculty to employ the GSP assessment program;
- Provide the results of the rates of student proficiencies, knowledge and progress derived from the GSP assessment program to the GSP Coordinating Committee to inform the Committee's recommendations for future modifications to the GSP and/or the GSP assessment program;
- Publish the results of the GSP assessment program.

cc:

Attachment