Otis Assessment, Research and Scholarship Grant Narrative

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Communication Arts, Liberal Arts & Sciences, Graduate Graphic Design

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Overview:

The purpose of my OARS grant was to analyze the Communication Arts Senior students' Semester Review structure, rubric, and and resulting evidence of student work as a tool for department-wide assessment. To form a solid basis for my explorations, I intended to research articles/papers relating to the use of rubrics in the assessment of college-level graphic design programs. I planned to input data from each Senior's review rubrics, both from faculty and the student's self-evaluation into a spreadsheet format. I then intended to add to this spreadsheet data on each student's grades in key required courses from the previous two semesters. I also aimed to gather input from faculty on the effectiveness of the department semester reviews and rubric. Finally, my goal was to reflect on this research and offer suggestions for improving the department's current reviews, rubric, and assessment structure in the future.

This report provides a background for my research and analysis, a discussion of evolving department assessment procedures, a rudimentary analysis of data gathered from Fall 2015 Senior Reviews, and a list of recommendations resulting from my research and analysis.

Introduction

For the purposes of this report I will focus on the use of rubrics and reviews as a tool to assess student learning in a design program teaching graphic design, illustration, and advertising.

I want to begin by sharing the words of my colleague Scott Grieger, who spoke about the strains that assessment has on arts faculty. He presented his thoughts at Otis' Academic Assembly last semester. I choose to include all of Scott's notes in their entirety here because they encapsulate

everything about why we must take assessment tools as just one part, perhaps an overvalued part, of the overall arts school educational experience. The text below is in no way a transcript of Scott's words. However, the following is quite powerful and deserves to be read as a complete text:

"I was asked by the Faculty Senate Steering Committee to prepare a short opinion about one of my favorite hobby horses here at Otis. It will take about four minutes. This one is about a trend I have noticed over the last few years of the increasing use and importance of assessment tools, forms, rubrics, digital questionnaires and course evaluations at our art college. When some of these tools first appeared in my classroom I thought to myself "Oh look customer satisfaction surveys what will come next." I admit that when those forms were on paper, in the old days they were sometimes useful, because it was a nice ritual were I left the room and my charges actually concentrated filling the forms out. They sometimes boosted my ego and sometimes I got suggestions on how to improve. However, over the years I have been tasked to do increasingly detailed forms answering questions in a language that is completely foreign to me. In simple fact they are sort of offensive. The amount and complexity of these sorts of instruments borders on a profound lack of trust and don't come close to what I do in a classroom. You see, using every instinct at my command, I am trying to give my students religion. I want to burn down their house, make them aspire to their higher selves and enter adulthood educated and strong. I want them to know that it is interesting to be interesting. So far I have seen nothing to this effect on any form, questionnaire, report, rubric or check box.

I want to read you portions of an editorial from the New York Times, Sunday Review section from January 17, 2016, titled "How Measurement Fails Us"

Two of our most vital industries, health care and education have become increasingly subjected to metrics and measurements. Of course, we need to hold professionals accountable. But the focus on numbers has gone too far. We're hitting the targets, but missing the point.

Whatever we do, we have to ask our clinicians and teachers whether measurement is working, and truly listen when they tell us that is isn't. Today, that is precisely what they're saying.

Avedis Donabedian, a professor at the University of Michigan's School of Public Health, was a towering figure in the field of quality measurement. He developed what is known as Donabedian's triad, which states that quality can be measured by looking at outcomes (how the subjects fared), processes (how the work was done) and structures (how the work was organized). In 2000. shortly before he died, he was asked about his view of quality. What this hard-nosed scientist answered is shocking at first, and then somehow seems obvious.

"The secret of quality is love," he said.

Our businesslike efforts to measure and improve quality are now blocking the altruism, indeed the love that motivates people to enter the helping professions. While we're figuring out how to get better, we need to tread more lightly in assessing the work of professionals who practice in our most human and sacred fields.

Thank you for listening."[1]

I couldn't agree more. There is indeed an unquantifiable aspect to teaching the arts and as Scott's words attest, demands on faculty to justify their methods through numerically-based assessment tools threatens to distance educators from their pupils and obfuscate the relationship between, rather than unite, artistic inspiration and production. We may, indeed be over-quantifying cultural production, an endeavor that by its very nature resists objective categories of success and failure.

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[1] This comes to me courtesy of Scott Grieger, who originally delivered these notes as an address during Otis College's March 2016 Academic Assembly.

But reality is staring us in the face.

As my colleague Debra Ballard, chair of Liberal Arts & Sciences, and Associate Provost for Assessment and Accreditation has pointed out, the beaurocratic language, forms, and perpetual review cycles that come with accreditation standards are here to stay:

"The continued demands for accountability, external demands for student and institutional performance are not going away and if anything, will increase. The challenge is making them meaningful, regular, and sustainable in the normal rhythms of the institution".[2]

So how does a department like Communication Arts balance the realities Debra articulates while not crushing the "love" Scott pinpoints as crucial to the survival of the profession? I don't pretend to have an easy answer.

This report details a journey towards some understanding and possible solutions, all of which admittedly contain forms and rubrics that no doubt need much improvement.

It is my hope that this document catalyzes a further investigation into creative ways art departments, specifically those teaching the "graphic arts," can deploy easy, useable tools to meet assessment demands, tools that don't try to fix what isn't broken, allowing teachers to do their jobs with as little distraction and impediment as possible.

I trust in the love and want to work towards a collegiate environment where it can continue to flourish.

The Role of Rubrics

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[2] Art and Design Colleges: Assessment on Their Own Terms by Debra Ballard. 12.

During my own time as an undergraduate and graduate student, I was never graded according to a rubric and never encountered one until I started teaching at Otis in 2010. Now, it seems rubrics are the go-to tool for assessing student learning. Indeed, a rubric has proved useful in unifying Comm. Art's assessment process.

The Communication Arts department has relied on end-of semester reviews for over six years as a way to gauge student performance on a department-wide scale. However, it is only since Fall of 2013 that the department began using a rubric during reviews as a way to evaluate student performance.

According the the department's program review analysis from Fall 2013:

"The most appropriate time to evaluate overall student learning and success is during the junior and senior reviews. We strive to establish high standards for our students. Sharing the rubric with the students before the review informs them of the standards under which they will be graded. Giving them a copy of the completed rubric after their review allows them detailed guidelines in order that they may address any deficiencies and emphasis their strengths".[3] My interest is in finding out if this rubric actually reflects student growth.

About Rubrics

Researchers interested in assessment tools sing the praises of rubrics as tools benefitting both teachers and students. Rubrics can equip faculty with little formal teaching experience with a tool to adequately evaluate student performance. Rubrics also provide a codified "equal playing field" students and educators can use to determine fair grades. Additionally, rubrics help students self-

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[3] See Comm. Arts Program Review page.
https://ospace.otis.edu/communication_arts_program_review/About_the_Program/

assess their performance because a narrative structure explains where they fall along a continuum that corresponds to an established grading system.[4]

As I discuss later, I believe the existing Comm. Arts rubric used to evaluate student performance during semester reviews, though certainly imperfect, does indeed provide a working model to help faculty develop their own customized assessment tools. I believe it does provide an equalized grading structure across the department. And when used in a self-reflective manner, the rubric can assist students in gauging how they are progressing in the program. I explore these phenomena in my report.

While there are obviously very beneficial perks to using a rubric to assess learning, I want to point out one important thing that comes up again and again in scholarly articles encountered during my research. Discussion about the use of rubrics highlights, first and foremost, their role as a *time saving* tool, something that makes grading quicker and easier. Rubrics are attractive because they allow teachers to evaluate *more work, by more students, faster, and with more accountability*.[5]

So, it should come as no surprise that the Comm Arts rubric functions first of all as a time-saving device intended to make assessment less cumbersome. The long-term goal therefore is to customize this tool and make it work for the department so that we can make informed decisions about how to best serve our students while maintaining the opportunity for faculty to develop as teaching and practicing professionals, with minimal interference from assessment demands.

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[4] The praises of rubrics in arts education in college courses is best discussed in A Tale of Two Rubrics: Improving Teaching and Learning Across the Content Areas through Assessment by Kenneth Wolf, Mary Connelly, and Ann Komara.

[5] The selling point is right in the title of the oft-cited bible for rubric development: Stevens, D. D. & Levi, A. J. (2005). Introduction to rubrics: an assessment tool *to save grading time*, convey effective feedback and promote student learning. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

About Semester Reviews

The Comm Arts department invests a lot in its reviews and for this reason the department does not have classes during week 15. All students are required to participate in reviews. If a student does not attend reviews they are marked absent for all of their Comm. Arts classes for that week, providing a hefty incentive for attendance. It has always been very rare for students to miss reviews, with only one or two students doing so each semester.

While students were not graded, per-se, on their pre-Fall 2013 reviews, they did receive valuable feedback from faculty. After each in-person review, students received notes from faculty about what worked, what needed improvement, and suggestions for classes to consider taking and opportunities for research during the upcoming winter or summer breaks.

The pre-Fall 2013 review structure is outlined on the Comm Arts Program Review page under Assessment.[6] The info is pasted below:

Sophomore/Fall

Sophomores did not have reviews in the Fall semester because they just entered the department and didn't have enough completed work to adequately assess their department-wide performance. Instead, they were required to sit in on six or more Senior reviews, take notes. and not interrupt the reviews in any way. This experience was designed to help them see what their future work in the department would be like and to assist them in determining if Comm arts was the right fit for their desired artistic output. The experience was designed to allow them to see modeled behaviors.

Sophomore/Spring

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[6] https://ospace.otis.edu/communication_arts_program_review/Assessment

The Spring Sophomore reviews consisted of three 15 minute meetings with faculty. The review was intended as an introduction to professional preparation and interviewing experiences. Each student showed their work produced in the sophomore year to two faculty in their area of concentration. In addition, they met with one faculty from another area of concentration of interest to them. For example, a graphic design student met with two graphic design faculty and one advertising faculty.

Junior Fall

Each student presented their portfolio in a power point format to a panel of three faculty. This was a closed review. Junior Reviews provided a critical point of assessment for the students to ensure that they are on the right track of study. The meeting allowed for faculty to assess the student's body of work, assess strengths and weaknesses, and guide them to improvement.

Junior Spring

Juniors did not participate in Spring reviews, and instead completed the Spring internship Fair. Their Spring coursework would be integrated into their Senior Fall reviews.

Senior Fall

This review was critical to assess the development of the student as well as the curriculum. Senior Review was the last all portfolio review for the Communication Arts student. It was an open review including Sophomore attendees.

Senior Spring:

Seniors did not have a Spring Review and instead they were assessed by their work in Senior Show.

Pre-Fall 2013 Semester Faculty Meeting

After each review full-time and adjunct faculty were required to attend a department dinner to discuss the results of the reviews. Part-time faculty were welcome to attend but were not required

to do so. During this dinner faculty shared their observations about student success and engaged in a healthy discussion about ways the department could improve. This could mean restructuring classes, new policies and procedures, or even solutions to individual student problems. The Assistant Chair, Office Manager, or a volunteer faculty would take notes on this group discussion. The dinner was often followed by faculty grading sessions, where faculty, who often team-teach using shared syllabi, graded their student's final work and determined final grades for the semester. The entire faculty dinner process worked to allow everyone to check in on their own class performance and to learn what each faculty in the department teaches. They were also able to share resources and teaching tips, and in general develop a community and shared collegial environment.

Restructuring Reviews For Assessment Purposes:

There were many reasons for choosing the reviews as a locus for administering assessment and gathering student work. First of all, after completing its department-wide assessment in 2013, the Comm Arts department realized the complexity of relying on faculty to gather, document, and provide assessment for A, B, C, and D/F work from every required studio class. This had to be sent to the department's Office Manager, Assistant Chair, and Chair, who were in charge of entering the work into the school's O-space assessment page.

In the midst of our assessment, the department chair, in coordination with the Provost's office, looked at how to better streamline this process. It quickly became evident that we had already been using our semester reviews as a successful assessment tool for many years. All we needed to do was shift the design of our reviews to better capture the evidence we needed for future evaluations. The department concluded that using the reviews for greater assessment purposes would save time and energy, and also allow us to better showcase our student performance.

Additionally, it became evident that the review structure was an excellent way to highlight the department's holistic approach to teaching our students, how we see all classes as connected

through a strong core program. What was missing was a standardized way of measuring student performance during these reviews, something more in line with a grade, something that moved verbal critique to a concrete, written assessment. A rubric seemed to be the answer.

In collaboration with the department Chair and faculty area coordinators, we set about drafting an extensive rubric faculty could fill out after reviewing each student. The rubric needed to be comprehensive enough to apply to all of our students, in every area of emphasis: Advertising, Graphic Design, and Illustration, while also allowing for criteria specific to each student's chosen track of study. Writing the rubric was difficult and illuminating, shedding light on how every part of the department is connected through shared goals, epitomized in our Program Learning Outcomes.

In constructing this rubric I took into account the department's stated Program Learning Outcomes:

Build fundamental theories, methodologies and competency in a broad range of media.

Demonstrate communication skills such as: listening, writing, negotiating, critiquing, and presenting.

Emphasize through practice, problem defining and problem solving.

Apply risk taking in content, conceptual development, and formal outcomes.

Learn best professional practices: time management, project planning, and collaboration.

Develop as a "whole student," by engaging in cross-disciplinary studies and extra curricular activity.

These PLO's are addressed in the department rubric along with the college's Institutional learning outcomes:
critical thinking, written and oral communication, information literacy, and quantitative reasoning.

In constructing the rubric we used a mixture of resources to design the department-wide rubric. In my capacity I referred to and incorporated the language of Bloom's taxonomy[7]. I also sought to implement best practices for creating assessment rubrics as detailed on Otis' Guide to Creating A Killer Rubric, which incorporates many strategies outlined in Stevens and Levi's Introduction To Rubrics manual[8].

I plotted desired outcomes in a rubric matrix, using a narrative structure to describe student performance along a continuum from excellent to unacceptable in a way that corresponds to the Otis grade structure (A to F). I worked to embed the language (direct or inferred) of these outcomes into the final rubric.[9]

As you can see, the final document is quite long, detailed, and covers a lot of skills and outcomes on a tabloid-sized piece of paper. The rubric's imposing nature set a standard students were quick to understand. The thought behind it was that reviews were important enough to warrant such an exhaustive assessment tool and that students would take the reviews and the rubric very seriously. I have mixed feelings now about the usefulness of the imposing nature of this document and my thoughts are detailed further in the Recommendations section of this report. No matter its visual structure, the lasting impact of this rubric is tangible.

The department began using this rubric in reviews in Fall 2013, with adjustments made each year since to reflect the demands/evolution of the department and to better align with assessment

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[7] A language I first learned while enrolled in Otis' Bricks n Clicks class.
[8] http://www.otis.edu/guide-to-designing-killer-rubric
[9] See attached FALL2015.SENIOR.RUBRIC.COMMARTS.dox

needs. Additionally, faculty have begun integrating the rubric's language into class syllabi[10]. In the two years since the review rubric was first put in place, the department has restructured the review process as follows:

As you can see, the rubric has grown to include a section where faculty can check off areas that need improvement from a supplied list. This helped save time for faculty who found themselves writing the same notes to students over and over again in reviews. The rubric also now contains a significant section dedicated solely to faculty notes written specifically for each student.

The department's updated review structure is now as follows:
Students are given very clear guidelines for structuring their review pdf presentations. They prepare a 5-7 min presentation to accompany their digitally projected portfolio. After each student completes their presentation they have a 5-10 min. conversation with faculty. After this faculty have approx. five minutes to fill out the rubric. Faculty then transcribe the paper rubric's grades and notes to a department computer to be archived along with the student's pdf presentation. During this time the Senior fills out their self-evaluation rubric. Once done, both parties exchange rubrics, so the student receives written feedback on the spot. The student receives immediate feedback and faculty captures student work and a record of the assessment.

Since 2013, the department has also increasingly empowered students to provide proper documentation of all signature assignments in their core classes by insisting that these projects be embedded into each student's pdf presentations. The results of this move to student-generated documentation from faculty-led, faculty-generated documentation of student work means students learn how to best document and present their work, with the added benefit of the department ensuring every project is properly ready and in a system for assessment purposes.

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[10] See archived class syllabi on the Communication Arts Assessment Evidence page. In particular, instructors in classes as disparate as Practicum and Illustration for Exhibition use the rubric's foundational outcomes as a starting point for customizing their own class-specific rubrics.

Perhaps most importantly, the pdf requirements for each student presenting their work for review ensures that the department is able to get clearly labeled documentation of each signature assignment from each student starting Fall Sophomore semester until the end of the Fall Senior Semester.

New Review Structure:

Sophomore/Fall

Sophomores still do not have reviews in the Fall semester. Their participation in reviews has remained the same. They are still required to sit in on six or more Senior reviews, however, now they are required to fill out at least one review rubric for a Senior review they attended. This experience helps them better understand the rubric as a metric for assessment.

Sophomore/Spring

The Spring Sophomore reviews now align with the Junior and Senior Fall Reviews in structure and requirements. However, this is a closed review, not open to other students. Sophomores now complete a self-assessment rubric.

See attached SophReviewReq for more info.

The Rubric for this review is attached: SPRING2016.SOPH.RUBRIC.COMMARTS

Junior Fall

Closed Junior Review

See attached FALL15_JUNIOR_Review_Requirements_Dec2 for more info.

The rubric for this review is attached: FALL2015.JUNIOR.RUBRIC.COMMARTS

Junior Spring

Juniors still do not participate in Spring reviews, and instead complete the Spring internship Fair. Their Spring work is integrated into their Fall Senior Review.

Senior Fall

Seniors now complete a self-assessment rubric.

See attached FALL15_SENIOR_Review_Requirements_TR for more info

The rubric for this review is attached: FALL2015.SENIOR.RUBRIC.COMMARTS

Senior Spring:

Seniors still do not have a Spring Review, and instead, are assessed by their work in Senior Show. Additionally, as of Spring 2016, seniors are required to produce a Senior reflection. I would have liked to have integrated an analysis of these reflections, but there was simply not enough time to do so as the assignment was only implemented this semester. In the future Seniors will also be required to produce a final portfolio pdf as part of their Senior Projects class, which will provide necessary documentation of first and second-semester Senior work.

The post-review faculty meeting also changed structure. Now, faculty discussion is guided by focusing on two criteria for examination taken from the rubric. For example, the department will look at Type & Image-making and Media Exploration for the Sophomores, then explore two more criteria for the Juniors, and then two more criteria for Seniors. Through this structured discussion the department as a whole examines how each criteria is being met across all grades and areas of emphasis in the department over the course of each three years reviews take place. The resulting conversations and notes that result from them provide an excellent basis for adjusting department courses and policy. For example, this process resulted in the establishment of a Type For Illustrators class which addressed concerns brought up while discussing Type & Image-making for Sophomores.

Data & Methodology

I am by no means a statistician and I don't have a background in data analysis. However, I find the information I collected in this study quite fascinating if only as a jumping off point for further inquiry. As noted in my recommendations, I conclude that analysis of the data gleaned from this report and any future reports should go through professionals trained in gathering and analyzing information like this and that resulting summaries should be taken as inspiration for long-term

improvement, not a mandate for immediate change. I am purely looking at my data as a way to see if the rubric might reflect student grades in their classes.

For the purposes of my analysis in this document, I focused solely on evaluating data gathered from the Fall 2015 Senior reviews. I chose to analyze this review because it evidences the most work created while students have been in the department. Additionally, students cannot transfer into the department after their Fall Junior year, so the data gathered affords the most accurate picture of student development within the department and excludes credits transferred in from other educational institutions. Also, by Fall 2015 this class of seniors had participated for three years in the department's revised review structure mentioned above.

For the purposes of this study I excluded any student without a complete data set. This meant that if for some reason they were missing data they were not included in my final findings. So, if they were missing a specific class due to withdrawing from a course, or had the course in process, I excluded them from my final data set. Also if the info they entered in their self-eval was incomplete, they were excluded from the final data set. In the end I was able to examine 33 students out of a total of 52 enrolled seniors. This is, of course, not a statistically reliable sample. However, having entered all the data, and confronted with the realities of time and resources, I felt it best to soldier on and analyze the information at hand. I take this into account in the final recommendations section of this report.

I maintained student anonymity by assigning each Senior a letter in place of their name.

When I began my data entry I met with Jean-Marie Venturini, Instructional Designer in Otis' Teaching Learning Center, and she helped me understand where to find my data and looked over some of my beginning spreadsheets. She was extremely helpful. Additionally, Comm Arts Assistant Chair, Tanya Rubbak was very patient and helpful in providing me with student transcripts for my data collection. In the future, I wish I had worked directly with a statistician and/or The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness to better plan my study to ensure

better data, graphs, and analysis. However, I discuss how to best utilize these resources in the future in the Recommendations section of this report.

Methodology

The spreadsheet and graphs for this report are viewable using this google docs link:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1AgWmFYOcsE_Pos2K-6AP7T8Wvoj5xBBx0lOEHt92XY0/edit?usp=sharing

Gathering this data was no small feat. I began by establishing the information I wanted to measure in this report. I wanted to enter data from the Senior Review faculty and self-evaluation rubrics. I also wanted to enter data from Senior's transcripts.

I first recorded the numerical grade for each of the five grade-able sections in the department's review rubric (Type & Image, Ideation & Iteration, Visual Literacy, Research Skills & Critical Analysis, Media Exploration, and Craft & Professional Presentation & Senior Project).

I cut and pasted the grade each student received from Faculty during their review into a spreadsheet.

This was relatively easy to do because this data is available in Word documents on the department's Ospace page, though the process did take quite some time.

Then I set to entering the info each Senior hand-wrote on their own self-evaluation rubric. This was rather tedious, but the experience of actually handling the student evaluations and seeing how they filled them out led me to valuable conclusions outlined later in this report.

When referring to the google spreadsheet, you see that columns are grouped by color, with designations F-C1 and Sr-C1, etc.
F corresponds to Faculty grades entered in the Senior's review rubrics.

Sr corresponds to the self-evaluation grade each Senior entered on their own self-eval. rubric.

C1 corresponds to Type & Image

C2 corresponds to Ideation & Iteration

C3 corresponds to Visual Literacy, Research Skills & Critical Analysis

C4 corresponds to Media Exploration

C5 corresponds to Craft & Professional Presentation & Senior Project

F-Total corresponds to total grade given by faculty to the student.

S-Total corresponds to total grade given by Senior in their self eval.

I then examined each Senior's transcript and entered data from specific required courses. Since student transcripts only have letter grades, I had to assign numerical values to each grade according to the Otis grading scale:

A   95-100

A-   90-94

B+   86-89

B   82-85

B-   78-81

C+   74-77

C   70-73

C-   67-69

D   60-66

F   0-59

This meant that I had to estimate a numerical value to correspond with each grade. Given my experience teaching in Comm. Arts and LAS, I find that faculty tend to round student grades UP as opposed to down. This is based only on personal experience and undocumented conversations

with faculty. Because of this, I chose to select the highest numerical grade for each letter grade category:

I used the following system:

A = 100

A- = 94

B+ = 89

B   = 85

B- = 81

C+ = 77

C   = 73

C- = 69

D = 66

F   = 59

Therefore, the data entered by no means accounts for the subtlety in grading that has a student perform within the four points that separate grading increments above a D or the 67 points that are the difference between an F and a C-. So my data provides a rough, but I believe fair (if only investigatory) look at student grades against review grades. This rounding up may also account for slightly higher course grades compared with review grades discussed later in this report.

In the future analysis will have to take into account this unfortunate way of assigning numerical values to letter grades. Additionally, I had to hand-enter each student's data from printed transcripts because Otis does not have an easily accessible database of student grades, and certainly nothing that exists in an excel format. The many, many hours spent entering this data testify to the need for such an automated and easily searchable system. Of course, it goes without saying that such a database must include robust encryption so as to prevent a breach of student privacy and not violate FERPA standards.

Each student is grouped by their area of concentration. This made it easier to enter data from their transcripts for their core classes.

I chose to isolate grades from three specific classes for each area of concentration because these courses, while named differently, address similar competencies across areas of emphasis.

Graphic Designers grades were entered for the following classes:

Communication Studio 3

Communication Studio 4

Professional Practices

Advertising grades were entered for the following classes:

Advertising Art Direction 2

Advertising Art Direction 3

Professional Practices

Illustration grades were entered for the following classes:

Communication Studio 3

Communication Studio 4

Professional Practices

In general, Advertising and Art Direction 2 & 3 correspond curricularly to Comm Studio 3 and 4.

I felt that this comparison would provide an opportunity to see how each student performs across the board, excluding the particularities of course requirements from concentration to concentration. For example, I did not want to have to compare Illustration Painting & Drawing to Typography 3, as these courses are profoundly different and measure very different learning

outcomes. At least with the comparisons I chose to measure here I can be somewhat confident that student performance is equally evaluated across classes that share similar educational goals.

Analysis of Data

While the raw spreadsheet generated from this report appears overwhelming at first, I found the information gathered quite informative after breaking it up into observable comparisons. I chose to calculate the differences between grade outcomes as a way to generate graphs that might make sense of this overall data to get the easiest comparison between the Review Rubric grade and the students grade as indicated on their transcript (with the value I assigned to each letter grade as discussed earlier). In analyzing this data I am particularly interested in finding similarities within a 10 point difference, since this generally indicates one letter grade.

While each graph does not indicate statistical correlation, and it is my inference that if the difference between the review grade and the class grade fall within a 10 point difference, the rubric can be understood as a good, though not statistically-proven, model for assessing student performance. Additionally, given the imprecise nature of my assigning a numerical value to a letter grade on each student's transcript, a good measure of discrepancy in the relation between transcript grade and review grade can be expected.

Information Not Used

Some of the most interesting information gleaned from looking at the rubrics was not necessarily quantifiable given the tools at my disposal. As previously mentioned, the rubric has a section for checking areas that need improvement and a place for notes.

While I did begin to input this data into my spreadsheet, the information became quickly out of my control, extremely time-consuming, and I couldn't figure out a way to properly quantify it. However, it is in these notes one finds some of the best feedback and reflections of student performance. My Recommendations section has some thoughts about how this information might best be put to use in the future.

Student Outliers

One interesting use for these rubrics is that they clearly identify student outliers, the best example being Student O. As you can see, Student O remains a strong outlier in almost every graph on this report. Perhaps this is an indication that this student might require specialized assistance and inquiry as to why this disparity exists. It is my opinion that while the review rubric in this instance does not reflect how this student performs in their classes, the review itself as a place for evaluation provides a great opportunity for the department to locate the existence of such a student who, for one reason or another, is achieving higher grades in core courses, performance that don't correspond to their overall department-wide portfolio and presentation.

Graphs

Comm 3 Graph

The first graph displays the differences between Communication Studio 3 grades and Faculty grades on the final rubric. As we can see, the numbers do vary, with a few obvious outliers, especially with students O and Q remaining clearly outside of the average range of differences between student course grade and faculty grade. Additionally, we can see that faculty evaluations of students on the Rubric tend to skew lower than the student's Comm. 3 grades, with 11 of 32 students getting an equal or higher grade from their reviewer than the grade they received in their Comm Studio 3 class. Most faculty grades are within a 15 pt. range of difference from the student's Comm3 grade. This is a rather large number considering that 15 its spans an entire letter grade. One reason for this discrepancy may be that Comm. 3 is a Junior-level course and this review assessment happened during the Senior Fall semester. So, it is possible that Seniors are held to a higher standard, and that their review performance indicates a more rigorous output than what was necessary during their Comm.3 class.

Comm 4 Graph

The second graph indicates the difference between students' Comm 4 grades and the final grade they received during their reviews. Again, we see review grades skewing lower than course grades, with only six students getting an equal or higher grade from their reviewer than the grade they received in their Comm Studio 4 class. However, we do find a greater similarity between faculty review grades and course grades in this graph, with 25 of 33 students' review grades falling within 10 points of the grade they received in Comm 4.

Professional Practices Graph

The third graph shows the difference between students' Professional Practices grades and the final grade they received during their reviews. Here, there seems to be a closer relationship than the previous two graphs, with 29 of 33 students' review grades falling within 10 points of the grade they received in Comm 4. Perhaps this similarity corresponds to the very nature of reviews, that because they showcase a student's professional presentation skills, faculty are more apt to get an accurate gauge of how the student performed in their professional practices course.

Average Grade Graph

The fourth graph shows the difference between students' average grades from Prof. Practices, Comm. 4, and Comm 3 compared with the final grade they received during their reviews. As with the previous graphs, review grades skew lower than the average grades from these three courses. However, the graph also shows 27 of 33 students' review grades falling within 10 points of their average grade. This graph is particularly interesting because it may indicate that the review rubric might in fact be a successful tool for gauging overall student performance *across* courses within the department, rather than an indicator of a student's development in specific courses. Considering that the reviews are designed to measure this sort of performance, it may be inferred that the reviews and the rubric are of some use in overall assessment.

Self-Eval Graph

The final graph presents a similarity between students' self-evaluation grades and the review grades determined by faculty. Here we have 29 of 33 students' review grades falling within 10 points of their average grade. This perhaps indicates that a clear majority of student are able to see their own performance in line with how faculty view them, indicating that students are aware of the requirements set forth by the review structure and are cognizant of how they are performing in line with expectations. We also see that in this graph there are far more faculty grades that are higher than students' self-evaluation grades, much more than in the other graphs.

Conclusion

Based on these graphs we can infer that the rubric is a somewhat adequate indicator of student performance in these three core classes. While not statistically significant, student performance aligns with faculty evaluations typically within a 10 point margin. However, faculty review grades skew predominantly lower than student grades on their transcripts. Students' own self-evaluations of their performance during reviews most closely align with their review grade and only in this instance do faculty grades skew somewhat higher than student self-evaluations.

I also was not able to perform comparative analysis for each individual section on the review rubric(F-C1, F-C2, etc.). An analysis of these individual categories might provide greater insight into the effectiveness of the rubric, and may perhaps provide a more direct correlation with student transcript grades. The Recommendations section of this report details how I plan to incorporate these particular sets of data into future reworking of the department rubric.

Recommendations

From my experience the most apparent change that should occur is that all review rubrics need to undergo an overhaul in their language, appearance, and interactivity. Paper rubrics may provide a

kind of intimacy that students appreciate, but they don't make for easy analysis, as evidenced in the dozens of hours I spent entering data into my spreadsheets[11].

My recommendations are as follows:

1) Expand & Simplifying Wording

First of all, I propose the rubric's primary categories (type & image, craft & Prof. Presentation, etc.) be expanded to more than five. I know this violates many tenants of rubric formation, but I feel doing so will provide a more robust opportunity to assess students in a variety of skills and achievements.[12] Further expanding the outcomes assessed also allows the rubric to read with simpler, to-the-point language that does not have to encapsulate too many objectives. While I do feel the rubric's existing narrative grading grid accurately describes student progress, it too could use some serious editing to ensure all students and faculty will actually read the document. Too many words can be exhausting.

Finally, the department should consider if each area of concentration (Advertising, Graphic Design, Illustration) needs its own review rubric. Over the years it has become apparent that Illustrators and Graphic Designers are evaluated for different outcomes (for example, painting vs. book-design) but also share necessary, required skills (use of hierarchy, typographic fundamentals, etc.). For example, both learn the fundamental basics of typography, but implement them with quite different results. Sharing one rubric allows the department to standardize expectations across areas of emphasis, but this may restrict our ability to focus on the students specifically in each concentration. Perhaps the department should experiment with a more hybridized rubric that allows for some specialization that looks for outcomes particular to each area of emphasis.

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[11] For a discussion of student interpretation of hand-written vs. digital comments see Rohrbach's Educational Assessment in Emerging Areas of Design: Toward the Development of a Systematic Framework Based on a Study of Rubrics. In: Undisciplined! Design Research Society Conference 2008, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK, 16-19 July 2008.

[12] Best practices, according to Otis' own rubric page, and Stevens & Levi's Introduction to rubrics suggest one should keep the number of criteria being evaluated to no more than six so as not to overwhelm the person being evaluated.

2) Move to An Online Form

I propose translating the most valuable information in the department rubric into an online form that can be easily accessed and used by faculty and students. I had a productive meeting with Jean-Marie Venturini, Instructional Designer in Otis' Teaching Learning Center and we discussed current available options. While the school currently uses Formstacks to implement school-wide surveys, I found this platform's interface rather uninviting and constricting. For example, it favors yes/no answers over an assessment that could have instructors pick a grade along a sliding continuum. I hope to find more options that will allow for more intuitive, user-friendly design. I would particularly like to find a platform that allows users to select fields on a sliding scale, using a color-coded matrix. This conclusion is informed by Stacie Rohrbach's pioneering work on redesigning rubrics for assessing graphic design education, which notes that simple actions, like highlighting sections of a rubric to correspond to a grade, or color-coding the matrix, improves student's understandings of their performance[13]. This would be particularly useful since I noticed while examining all the paper rubrics that students routinely circled the area of the rubric they thought best fit their performance, sometimes circling the space in-between grading narratives, in place of assigning a numerical value to a certain category. If students are already filling out the existing rubric in this manner, without being prompted, why not give them the ability to do so using a simple online form?

An added benefit of an online form is that data inputted is easily extracted, aggregated, and disaggregated in a variety of formats, from excel sheets to printed graphs and pdf docs, accessible and readable by multiple stakeholders. Feedback is instant and archived. Having the rubric online would therefore make entering data on the department's assessment page much quicker and easier and students could receive their evaluations instantly via email.

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[13] For more discussion see Rohrbach's Analyzing the Appearance and Wording of Assessments: Understanding their Impact on Students' Perception and Understanding, and Instructors' Processes, Carnegie Mellon University, USA 2010.

An online form would also allow for the department to capture and store written comments and checked areas for improvement in a searchable database. This would allow anyone producing department assessment to identify keywords of interest. For example, one could look for "typography," and find every instance that word was used in assessment. A tool like this would be extremely valuable in planning new courses and altering existing courses to best fit the changing needs of our student population.

Finally, an online form will hopefully transition the existing rubric from a visually imposing document into something more digestible, less reminiscent of an artifact apropos to a high-stakes standardized testing environment. One possible pitfall of the current review model is that it is by its nature a "high-stakes" form of assessment. This has positive and negative consequences.

As discussed earlier, the grand rubric and heavy emphasis on week 15 reviews ensures that students take them seriously. This was confirmed during this semester's post-review faculty discussion, where faculty unanimously noted that because the Sophomore class used their Practicum classes to prepare for reviews, the result was better documentation of work and professional presentation, a profound improvement the department has seen in recent memory. So, perhaps the high-stakes environment is working. It's also worth mentioning that many students in our department are preparing to enter a field filled with high-stakes events, client pitches, exhibitions, etc. So, one could say the semester reviews mirror this world and provide students with a challenging, yet safe space to get used to such stressful public presentations of their work.

However, in working and re-working the review model and its rubric the department needs to keep in mind the pitfalls that come with high-stakes assessment platforms.[14] Perhaps this change

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[14] I am thinking here specifically about Douglas Boughton's discussion of high-stakes testing in his paper Assessment of Performance in the Visual Arts: What, How, and Why. In Karpati, A., Gaul, E. (Eds.) : *From Child Art to Visual Culture of Youth - New Models*

entails the further integration of smaller assessments in classroom assignments, or more student self-evaluations of work throughout the semester. I am not at a point now to say what approaches I think will work best to avoid falling into the teaching to the test trap.

3) Don't Overanalyze The Numbers

Perhaps the strongest conclusion I have come to after embarking on this project is that the accumulation of data and its analysis only gets you so far. I think a study like this may be effective every four years or so, but I am extremely wary of anyone performing such a calculated analysis every year. The data is only a snapshot and cannot provide an accurate picture of the department's performance. In reviewing the notes from the this semester's post-review faculty meeting, I still find faculty input to be the most useful and immediate analysis of student performance[15]. I am wary of anyone using the raw data I gathered as part of this report as the basis for making immediate curricular changes in the department because we simply have not used the new rubric and review structure long enough to be able to say with 100% accuracy that it correctly does or does not gauge student performance. We must take more time to try it out and then gauge its effectiveness, perhaps during the next accreditation cycle.

Finally, I think the accumulation of the types of statistical information in this report and its analysis is best left to professionals trained in such matters. I embarked on this project mostly because I wondered if our rubric was actually mirroring student success. However, I did not expect to have to re-learn statistics, a subject I was not very good at to begin with. I am sure the college's Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness will find this report interesting and will no doubt pinpoint areas in my methodology and analysis that are factual, need improvement, or downright wrong. I suggest that that they make suggestions on how to better arrange and

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and Tools for Assessment of Learning and Creation in Art Education. Intellect Press, Bristol, UK.
[15] You can read a summary of these discussions on the Comm Arts Evidence Ospace page: https://ospace.otis.edu/comm_arts_evidence/Instructions1211112/.

analyze data in the future while understanding that such metrics only provide one small side of the department's overall pedagogical trajectory.

I end this report back where I began, with Scott's discussion about the love that defines teaching in arts school. All of this data, the grades, assessed outcomes, Bloom's taxonomy language, all of it pales in comparison with the one-on-one interactions between students and teachers. The review rubric is a tool of convenience and it certainly serves its purpose of providing a fast, efficient, and comprehensive way to assess department-wide student performance. The reviews themselves also allow the department to capture all signature work from all required classes. In this way they are very useful for assessment purposes. But rubrics, reviews, and assessments are not catch-all solutions to evaluating the successes or failures of a department's program. The strength of the Comm. Arts department has always been the dedication of its faculty, administration, and staff and the willingness of inventive and curious students to engage in critically experimental learning. I do believe the love involved in this community is at the heart of how we can view its success, and it still eludes me as to how such a transference can be quantified on a spreadsheet.

If this report tells us anything its the the current review rubric is useful, does it's job, and can certainly be improved. But it should not take the place of faculty autonomy and the love that defines a useful arts education.