

November 1, 2013

Hello, Suffolk University FPLC Members ~

As part of my assessment consultation work with you through the Center for Teaching Excellence and in response to your desire to participate in a workshop focused on how to assess student knowledge, I have developed this workbook. I created it for you to use in the context of the classroom research projects that you're developing as FPLC Members.

Whether you work with your students virtually or in a studio, lab, or classroom, this workbook will help you...

- ... develop an approach to understanding what your students are learning through their work with you.
- ... develop a greater awareness of how to leverage your own teaching history and expertise to create a classroom research project that will be meaningful and useful to you and others interested in the impact of your teaching.
- ... frame your research question
- ... identify appropriate assessment techniques
- ... develop some concrete assessment approaches to use in your classroom research project
- ... develop a sense of where you might choose to seek targeted assessment support through individualized consultation.

The workbook will help you achieve these things by prompting you to complete the following eight steps:

1. Explain what you want to do for your classroom research project.
2. Situate what you're going to be doing in your classroom research project in the context of a goal for your students.
3. List ways you've measured student learning in the past.
4. Review and reflect on your past approaches to measuring student learning.
5. Identify your objective. Explain—in very specific terms—what you expect your students to be able to do as a result of participating in your classroom research project.
6. Brainstorm approaches you might take to determine what your students learned as a result of participating in your classroom research project.
7. Review and reflect on approaches you might take to determine what your students learned as a result of participating in your classroom research project. Decide on the best one (or choose more than one).
8. Connect your objective for your classroom research project to the approach (or approaches) that you're going to take to measure student learning.

You'll notice that these steps are nothing new to you—you've done them all already at one point or another in some context or another. This workbook is merely providing you with a space to bring together these things you already know how to do. (And the workshop in which some of you are using this workbook is helping you set aside some time to do so!) I hope you find the process helpful.

If you have any questions while working through it, please feel free to contact me at 413-231-3009 or [paula@quinnevaluation.com](mailto:paula@quinnevaluation.com).

Best regards,



Paula Quinn

## **An Approach to Assessing Student Learning in FPLC Classroom Research Projects**

### **Step 1. Explain what you want to do.**

What do you want to change about the way you're teaching? What's the problem or opportunity that you want to address with your classroom research project? If you don't know yet, ask yourself these questions:

- What do you *think* you want to do for your classroom research project? Why?
- How is what you think you'd like to do similar to what you've done in the past?
- How is what you think you'd like to do in your research project different from what you usually do in your day-to-day work with students? What's at the heart of what will be different?
  - Your interaction with other faculty members?
  - The materials you'll use in your teaching?
  - The approach you'll be using in your interactions?
  - The way you'll be preparing for the classes you'll be teaching?
  - The assignments you'll be asking your students to complete?
  - The content of the assignments?
  - The format of the product of the assignment?
  - The type of skill you want your students to demonstrate?
  - The level of insight you'll be expecting your students to convey?
  - The depth or detail of the information you'll want your students to understand?
  - Something else?

**What are you going to do for your classroom research project?**

## Step 2. Situate what you're going to be doing in the context of a goal for your students.

In the broadest terms, what is it that you hope to accomplish through your project? *Focus on the intended achievement, not the actions you plan to take.* To help you articulate it better, consider the following questions. Do you want to...

- Change student attitudes?
- Change student perceptions?
- Improve student knowledge?
- Improve student skill?
- Increase student awareness?
- Enhance student/faculty relationships?

**In very broad terms, what do you hope to accomplish?**

**Example:** *I want to help theatre students become better actors.*

**In very broad terms, what do you hope to accomplish?**

You've just articulated the **goal** for your project—a broad statement directly tied to a known need, gap, or opportunity that provides an overarching framework for an intervention or program. In general terms, you've described the ultimate impact of your project (not the means to getting there) and you've provided a context in which to begin articulating specifics about how you're going to measure what happens as a result of your project.

**Step 3. List ways you've measured student learning in the past.**

Before we move on to what you're going to measure for this project, though, it'll be helpful to think about what you've done in the past to measure your students' learning. For this part of the workshop, let's think about measurement of student growth in terms of grading. Consider the following things that might be used to determine student grades:

- In-class or virtual participation (frequency, quality)
- Portfolios (breadth of work, quantity of materials included, legitimacy of work included)
- Performance (games, role playing, computer simulations, or demonstration of lab techniques)
- Attendance
- Journals
- Writing
- Problem solving
- Final products
- Demonstration of process

**How have you graded your students in the past? On what were their grades based?**

**Step 4. Review and reflect on your past approaches to measuring student learning.**

**How do you know that the grades you assigned students were valid and accurate reflections of what they demonstrated through their work with you?**

**What did you do to ensure consistency of grading across students within each course?**

**What might you have done to make grading within a course even more consistent across students?**

**Step 5. In very specific terms, explain what you expect your students to be able to do as a result of participating in your project (your objective).**

Now think about what you expect your students to learn or be able to do as a result of participating in your project and experiencing your new approach. Think as precisely as possible. These verbs are examples of the level of specificity that would be especially helpful:

- |             |               |            |              |
|-------------|---------------|------------|--------------|
| ▪ Argue     | ▪ Plan        | ▪ Infer    | ▪ Locate     |
| ▪ Compare   | ▪ Prepare     | ▪ Prove    | ▪ Translate  |
| ▪ Contrast  | ▪ Reconstruct | ▪ Modify   | ▪ Paraphrase |
| ▪ Judge     | ▪ Synthesize  | ▪ Employ   | ▪ Estimate   |
| ▪ Defend    | ▪ Write       | ▪ Compute  | ▪ Label      |
| ▪ Discuss   | ▪ Model       | ▪ Predict  | ▪ List       |
| ▪ Summarize | ▪ Change      | ▪ Classify | ▪ Memorize   |
| ▪ Assemble  | ▪ Apply       | ▪ Describe | ▪ Repeat     |
| ▪ Compose   | ▪ Dramatize   | ▪ Express  | ▪ Order      |
| ▪ Create    | ▪ Illustrate  | ▪ Convey   | ▪ Name       |
| ▪ Design    | ▪ Manipulate  | ▪ Indicate | ▪ Gather     |

**What, specifically, do you expect your students to learn or be able to do as a result of participating in your project? (If there's more than one thing, identify them all.)**

**Example:** *Theatre students will develop the ability to collaborate with a director regarding issues related to character portrayal.*

**What, specifically, do you expect your students to learn or be able to do as a result of participating in your project? (If there's more than one thing, identify them all.)**

**Step 6. Brainstorm approaches you might take to determining what your students learned as a result of participating in your project.**

Find a colleague. Share with her or him what you just wrote in the box for Step 5: what, specifically, you expect your students to learn or be able to do as a result of participating in your project. Now, together, brainstorm...

**For each thing that you expect your students to learn as a result of participating in your project, list all of the possible ways that you might use to determine what they've learned. At this point, all ideas will be useful—don't censor any of them!**

## Step 7. Review and reflect on approaches you might take to determine what your students learned as a result of participating in your project.

Now ask yourself these questions:

- Which of these approaches causes a serious struggle when I try to logically defend it as yielding true and valid evidence of what I wanted my students to learn?
- Which of these approaches can I easily and logically defend as yielding true and valid evidence of what I wanted my students to learn?

Now think about factors that might affect your ability to take any one of these approaches. For example, consider the following:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Time to gather or administer</li> <li>▪ Time to score or grade</li> <li>▪ Ability to develop a consistent approach to measuring across students</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generation of an unwieldy amount of data</li> <li>▪ Lack of understanding of how to analyze the data</li> <li>▪ Excessive monetary cost</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

Cross out the options that you can't defend or that aren't feasible (but first ask yourself again if they really aren't feasible!); circle the options that you can defend and that do seem feasible.

**Relocate to this space the approaches for determining what your students learned as a result of participating in your research project that you've identified as defensible and feasible.**

**Examples:** 1) Have students write background sketches of their characters. Discuss each student's sketch with her or him. Rate each student on his or her ability to use the text of the play to justify the sketch. 2) using a rubric to guide the process, observe students during rehearsals and rate the extent to which they incorporated director feedback into their performances and revised their portrayals of their characters.

**Relocate to this space the approaches for determining what your students learned as a result of participating in your research project that you've identified as defensible and feasible.**



**Step 8. Connect your objective for your classroom research project to the approach that you’re going to take to measure student learning.**

In the table below, relocate your objective from Step 5 to the column on the left. Relocate the corresponding and relevant measure from Step 7 to the column on the right. Explicitly connect the two in the merged box that appears below them. Repeat the process for other objectives.

**Example:**

<p><b>What, specifically, do you expect your students to learn or be able to do as a result of participating in your project?</b></p> <p><i>Theatre students will develop the ability to collaborate with a director regarding issues related to character portrayal.</i></p>	<p><b>What approach are you going to take to determine this? What is your measure of student learning?</b></p> <p><i>1) ratings of student ability to use the text of the play to justify their written background character sketches 2) scores from observations of students during rehearsals that reflect the extent to which they incorporated director feedback into their performances</i></p>
<p><b>For each thing you expect your students to learn or be able to do, explicitly link what you expect your students will learn or be able to do as a result of participating in your project with the relevant measure.</b></p> <p><i>Theatre students will develop the ability to collaborate with a director on character portrayal. Ability to collaborate will be measured through conversations with the students and through observations of their performances. Conversations will be rated according to student ability to justify their own written sketches of their characters, and observations of performances will be scored using a rubric targeting the extent to which those performances effectively incorporated director feedback.</i></p>	

<p><b>What, specifically, do you expect your students to learn or be able to do as a result of participating in your project?</b></p>	<p><b>What approach are you going to take to determine this? What is your measure of student learning?</b></p>
<p><b>For each thing you expect your students to learn or be able to do, explicitly link what you expect your students will learn or be able to do as a result of participating in your project with the relevant measure.</b></p>	

You’ve just articulated an **objective** for your classroom research project—a statement related to your project goal that describe measurable standards by which you will evaluate project accomplishments. In very specific terms, you’ve described changes you intend to achieve through the project and what measures you’re going to use to determine the extent to which those changes occurred.

## Next steps...

### Review and reflect on your objective.

- Does this objective really speak, ultimately, to what you want for your students? Does it align well with your goal?
- Does the measure that you're using *really* make sense to you?
- Who is the anticipated audience for this work? Will your objective and measure make sense to them, too?

If your answer to any of these questions is “no” or even if you find yourself feeling unsure, then review all of the ideas you’ve developed so far to determine where you should revise. While it may seem like a significant undertaking, it’ll be worth it because your project will be grounded in a well-articulated and cohesive foundation. And if your foundation is well-articulated and cohesive, it’ll be easier to plan and execute the project, and it’ll also be significantly easier to write about it later.

### Review the literature that’s relevant to your project.

Now that you’ve clarified what you’re going to be doing for your project, begin to situate it in the context of related work. A great place to start this piece of your work is at the FPLC wiki. Go to [“What is SoTL?”](#) under the “Focus Course Projects” page.

### Use the work you’ve done through this workbook as a basis for beginning your IRB proposal.

Begin formally drafting your proposal by going to [IRBNet](#).

### Seek out support for any areas where you feel it would be helpful.

I’m available to consult with you on an individual basis regarding issues related to your classroom research project: [paula@quinnevaluation.com](mailto:paula@quinnevaluation.com) and 413-231-3009. And Katie Linder is available to talk or work with regarding *any* issues you have related to your project or to your FPLC experience: [klinder@suffolk.edu](mailto:klinder@suffolk.edu) and 617-725-4170.