

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

ASSESSMENT UPDATES

November 2008 Newsletter

William Shakespeare and Assessment

I recently had an opportunity to visit with the English Department about assessment. As I am the son of two English professors, who read Macbeth to me as a bedtime story, (that fact probably explains more about my character than I'd like to admit) I prepared a list of quotations for the occasion that explain assessment in Shakespearean terms:

1. On why we don't do assessment: "In time we hate that which we often fear." (Anthony and Cleopatra, 1.3.13)

2. On why we eventually do assessment: "Necessity's sharp pinch!" (King Lear, 2.4.231), "O reason not the need!" (King Lear, 2.4.263)

3. Assessment should improve, not impair our teaching: "Striving to better, oft we mar what's well." (King Lear, 1.4.346)

4. Assessment is not just an aggregation of data: "These are but wild and whirling words, my lord." (Hamlet, 1.5.133), Polonius, "What do you read, my lord?" Hamlet, "Words, words, words." (Hamlet, 2.2.195)

5. Assessment data ought to focus on improving student learning, not on reinforcing our own value: "I have bought golden opinions from all sorts of people." (Macbeth, 1.7.31). "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." (Hamlet, 2.2.259)

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Please remember to submit your 2007/08 Department Assessment if you have not already done so.



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6. Most of us are comfortable doing assessment, since we all grade regularly, but contemplating assessment for an external audience is worrisome: "The attempt and not the deed, confounds us." (Macbeth, 2.2.12)

7. Effective assessment is simple, not elaborate: "More matter, with less art." (Hamlet, 2.2.95)

8. We are not assessing the students, but their learning:
Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. (Sonnet 116)

8. Assess things that you can change in a way that is appropriate to your subject matter: "There is occasions and causes why and wherefore in all things. (Henry V., 5.1.50). "It is [not] like a barber's chair that fits all buttocks." (All's Well that Ends Well, 2.1.19)

9. Assess things that matter that you can also measure: "Equalities are so weigh'd that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety. (King Lear, 1.1.6)

10. Analysis of data is not prognostication: "If you can look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow and which will not, speak then to me." (Macbeth, 1.3.58)

11. "Is this the promised end?" (King Lear, 5.3.265)