Assessment Narrative
Department of Animation
Dori Littell-Herrick, Chair Animation

2005-6
In my first year at Woodbury as Chair of Animation, assessment was dominantly informal. One-on-one reviews of work were conducted in studio classes with written records not the norm. Final reviews were group critiques including professionals from the industry where possible, with comments from reviewers generally not recorded. Although the catalog indicated that students were required to submit a portfolio of their work to advance to Senior Studio, in practice this was not happening.

One result of this is that I saw a number of grade appeals by students who were not able to translate the verbal critiques into an accurate assessment of how they were doing in the class. This was particularly difficult in courses such as figure drawing and animation core studios where adjunct teachers were softening critiques by telling students they were "doing well" or "improving" before beginning the actual critique. This occurred even when the student's work was average or below average in quality. Students heard the opening statement and expected better grades than they received at the end of the semester. Work was returned without a grade indicated so students were surprised when they did not do well.

Since this was my first year at Woodbury, I dealt with each individual case on its own merits and resolved to let the previous curriculum run for one full year before making any changes based on my observations.

2006-7
With the help of the full time faculty, I organized and conducted a Junior Portfolio Review for the first time. Juniors were giving written instructions during the spring semester, and faculty advisers were available to the students to assist them in putting together portfolios. We also asked the students to do a written component that included a discussion of their professional goals when they entered the industry, and a short synopsis of the topic for their senior capstone film. The first review had both successes and problems.

Successes:
- The students turned in the portfolios, and took the process seriously,
attempting to show their best work.

- They gave thought to the senior capstone project, allowing them to begin work during the summer.
- We had an opportunity by looking at the portfolios in aggregate to look at the program through the lens of junior student work.

Problems:

- We saw that waiting to assess work until the end of the junior year was not practical because if a student had a problem area, there was no time to correct it.
- Some students were not able to assemble a professional-style portfolio because they either did not save the work, or did a poor job of presentation because they had no previous experience in putting together a portfolio.
- Although we hoped the students would begin work on the capstone project on their own during the summer, this did not happen except in a few limited cases.

We made some major changes based on this review:

- I initiated a curriculum rewrite, requiring a progress portfolio review at the end of the freshman, sophomore and junior year.
- We added a 1 unit Portfolio Workshop course in the freshman year to assist students in preparing their first year-end portfolio.
- We created a set of expectations for each year that supported where we felt students should be.

Freshmen are expected to turn in a portfolio that shows a reasonable level of presentation skills. We do not expect a high level of art or animation skills but look at the skill level in regards to what skills would be needed to do well in the sophomore year. In reality, the freshman progress portfolio is as much about process as skill; we want students to turn in a portfolio for the purpose of learning to create a portfolio.

Sophomore portfolios are now regarded as a gateway portfolio. We review these portfolios with an eye to identifying students who are at risk in the program and are not likely to succeed. We look especially at drawing skills, understanding of visual language, animation and story skills. Students who are deficient in any of these areas are asked to do further course work during the summer and resubmit. By holding this review at the sophomore level,
we can redirect students at an earlier time in their academic career, especially if they choose to change majors. If they wish to stay in the animation program, we can focus student's work on their specific weaknesses while they still have time to improve before beginning their capstone project.

The junior portfolio now serves as a gateway to Senior Studio, and still requires the students to present a synopsis of their capstone project. We are now able to better direct students on how to proceed for the summer to support the senior project.

The three year-end reviews also allow us to assess the program at progressive levels. The first year we did this, we were able to see several weaknesses in the program, the most troubling one being that students were arriving at their junior and senior year with insufficient drawing skills. This was heavily impacting their ability to complete their senior film with acceptable quality, leaving them with little useful material for their professional portfolio. We also had a site visit from NASAD in the spring of 2007 and they confirmed that the drawing curriculum needed improvement based on their review of student work. For the next year, we focused on the drawing course sequence, reviewing the course content and making sure that the curriculum had one required drawing-intensive course in each semester up to spring of the junior year. In fact, many of our studio courses rely on drawing as part of their class projects, but we wanted students to have required classes that specifically focused on that skill.

We also created and tested a rubric for reviewing the progress portfolios. Based on notes from a course at the WASC conference that year, we created a rubric based on our university principles and scored from 5 (excellent) to 1 (poor) with 0 for not shown in the portfolio. We intentionally did not look at the students' grades but reviewed only the submitted art. The week after final review the full time faculty and a small representative group of adjuncts met in a conference room and reviewed all three years of portfolios as a group. This review also had successes and problems.

Successes:

- We launched the year-end portfolio process and began to create a culture of portfolio production and review as a critical part of the program.
- We were able to identify students with specific skill needs and meet
with them one-on-one to direct them to the best resources, whether at Woodbury or other near by training opportunities.

- We were able to get a clear overview of the curriculum, year by year.

Problems;
- The group critique and discussions took so long that the last portfolios reviewed got short shrift.
- The rubric was too abstract to be useful. As a result each reviewer interpreted it differently causing for a wide range of scores on some students. Comments and scores were not always in alignment.
- Some of the students who needed the extra work did not follow through but we had no mechanism to remove them from the following year's studios.

As part of the ongoing WASC Education Effectiveness Review, the full time faculty and participating adjuncts reviewed and rewrote the department's learning outcomes. We developed a more concise curriculum map by combining the various NASAD standards (Film-TV, Digital Media and Core Knowledge) to come up with a set of standards that applied directly to animation. Armed with these tools, and the outcomes of our portfolio review, I developed a 4-year assessment plan for the department, including a new rubric for the year-end portfolio review.

We continued our focus on art during this year. Three separate faculty members reviewed the drawing program and curriculum. We are still in the process of implementing a number of changes:
- Drawing courses were reviewed at the syllabus level and moved in the curriculum to create a better sequence for learning.
- Content of some art courses were changed.
- I am submitting a co-curricular drawing requirement of 120 hours for graduation to the Curriculum Committee. These hours may be taken at Woodbury or outside the university. Work completed outside the university must be submitted as a portfolio for review before credit is given.

At this point we are going to let the drawing sequence run for a while and assess its success during the year-end reviews. I am also encouraging the teachers in the drawing classes to critique clearly, return grades promptly and explain the grade in writing. This is an ongoing process.
We restructured our year-end reviews using the new rubric based on NASAD standards and our new learning outcomes. To deal with the burnout problem from the year before, I set up a viewing room with monitors and players so that faculty could come in when they chose over 3 days and review the students reels and portfolios. The room was kept locked to protect the material and to allow faculty to discuss the process as they worked without student involvement.

While this process still took 3-4 days, it was less tiring. However we still found that faculty quit giving number rankings even though it only required checking a box and reverted to written comments without grading. Freshman and sophomores got thorough reviews, but juniors did not. Next year, I am planning on assigning a limited number of students to each faculty member who is able to participate in the review, both full time and adjunct, and requiring that they complete at least those students in a thorough way. They may review as many more as they want or have time. By creating an overlap of reviewers, I hope that all students will get quality reviews.

The new rubric seems to work where it was used properly. I was able to create an alignment between the 2007-8 rubric and the 2008-9 rubric by matching university principles to NASAD standards. I am working with the institutional researcher to determine how best to record and display the data and what sort of information can be reasonably drawn from the review. I would like to complete the 4 year cycle of this assessment plan before making major changes as this will make sure that all learning outcomes get equal focus at some point in the process. The core knowledge requirements are reviewed every year because they are foundational to the other standards.

Successes:
- More faculty members participated in the new review system.
- The rubrics were better focused, making for better consistency of review between reviewers looking at the same student's work.
- Students that were identified as needing extra work were all contacted and the majority of them completed that work.

Problems:
- There were still students who did not get an adequate review (see
Some faculty quit using the rubric part way through the week and just made written comments, so we had no data to collect from their reviews.

Because we asked for DVD formatted discs to enable us to watch all the reels and portfolios on TV monitors with DVD capability, we did not get any data files for archiving that could be used to produce a show later.

As mentioned above, I plan to work with the first two problems by assigning students to each teacher and requiring fully completed review sheets including the rubric. I am also planning a training session in using the rubric so faculty see how easy it is to fill out. This year we will require both a DVD formatted disc and a data disc with the same files so we can watch the portfolio during review and archive the data disc. Where possible we are moving the bulk of our archive, especially the older work, to a digital format to save storage.

In addition, we took a close look at the written statements that are required as part of the portfolio and found that many of the students are arriving in their senior year unable to write at a college level. Currently there is only one required writing-intensive course in our curriculum, Animation History. Most of the writing-centered courses happen outside of our major, either as a general education requirement or as a minor requirement. We suspect that students are not identifying the need to write well as a core skill of our discipline, despite the importance of writing well in the profession. We are at the very outset of reviewing our curriculum with writing and visual research as a focus and will be working on this for a couple of years.

2009-10

This year the faculty is focusing on refining our assessment plan, the collection of data, and understanding how to use that data for improving the program. We are preparing for a site visit from WASC and will be setting up an exhibit that demonstrates our process and shows examples of progress. During our discussions, we realized that we were not reviewing the capstone projects, the student's final film and professional reel or portfolio, in a way that would align with the three year-end reviews. Since we have archived this material from past years, we have decided to go back and review selected student work. We expect that this will add to our ability to assess
both individual students and the program as a whole.

We will continue our focus on writing and are beginning that process by looking closely at the written statements that accompany the year-end portfolio. We are considering creating a sequence of focused questions for each year that will help students be self-reflective as they review their own work. To facilitate the process, we are planning to engage the Writing Center in the development of assignments and require the students submit a draft to the Writing Center for review and notes prior to turning it in with the portfolio. I am submitting curriculum changes to the Curriculum Committee to include the written statement assignment in the catalog and to imbed the assignment in the spring core studio. Students in the freshmen year will write the statement as part of the 1 unit Portfolio Workshop class, sophomores will write the statement as part of the Sophomore Studio II, and juniors will complete their statement, a project submission for the senior project, in Junior Studio II.

Writing is already a part of the Animation Portfolio course in the senior year where student create their professional reel and learn businesses practices related to job hunting. They write a self-reflective statement to accompany their reel as well as a practice cover letter. We will be examining the writing in that course as well, with an eye to improving the writing assignments. The progress portfolio statements and the written material form AN 495 Animation Portfolio will give us material to assess as we continue working on writing as a focus in the animation discipline.