HE 712: Advanced Institutional and Program Assessment in Higher Education

Course Syllabus
Fall 2018

Instructor: Amy Swan, Ph.D.
Office: Enterprise Hall 312
Email: aswan2@gmu.edu
Office Hours: By appointment
Class time: Tuesdays 7:20-10:00pm
Location: Music Theater Building 1008

Course Description
Within the context of higher education, what is quality? How do we identify and measure quality? What is our role in influencing and ensuring quality? Questions such as these will guide our conversations in this discussion-based seminar. Over the course of the semester, we will explore the foundations of the current interest in assessing outcomes of undergraduate education, as well as the purposes and practices of assessment in American higher education.

Learning Objectives

- Expand your understanding of assessment in higher education at the regional, institutional, departmental, and program levels, including:
  - The rationale for assessment
  - Different approaches to assessment
  - Professional standards and guidelines
  - The role of faculty and students in assessment

- Provide experience in communicating with and engaging stakeholders in the assessment process, including:
  - Interpreting and reporting assessment results for different audiences
  - Situating assessment in the context of institutional decision-making processes

Instructional Methods and Policies
This course will incorporate several different pedagogical approaches during the semester designed to achieve the above objectives. In order for this class to be successful, however, you are expected to share the responsibility for your learning as well as for the learning of your peers. You are expected to come to class ready to engage in the classroom dialogue, and with all
reading and other assignments completed by the specified due date. (See below for limited exceptions.)

1. **Attendance:** You are expected to attend every in-person class session, or notify me in advance that you will be absent along with the reason for the absence. You are also expected to arrive on time for class and remain for the duration of the class. You are asked to refrain from conducting private conversations in class, and are requested to use appropriate language and behavior that are not demeaning or disruptive to either the instructor or the other members of the class. *Regarding electronic devices (such as laptops, cell phones, etc.), please be respectful of your peers, your instructor, and guest speakers, and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to class.* Failure to consistently abide by these attendance policies will have an adverse impact on your final grade.

2. **Assignments:** All assignments must be completed by the due dates listed in the calendar below. All assignments should be uploaded to Blackboard.

   All formal work (research, final projects, etc.) should utilize APA style (refer to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th* edition). Papers should be typed using 12-point standard font (e.g., Times New Roman) with one-inch margins. Papers should include page numbers, headings (and sub-headings, if appropriate), properly formatted tables and figures if used, and properly formatted references.

   This is a graduate-level course, and thus graduate-level writing is expected for all written work. This includes correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, and clarity of expression. Excessive errors in your work will result in a lower grade.

3. **Contact information:** Contact information is provided on the first page of this syllabus. I am happy to meet with you outside of class; please email me to set up an appointment.

4. **Blackboard website:** This course will utilize the online learning website called Blackboard. On this website, you will be able to access all scanned readings, PowerPoint presentations, and other class handouts. You are expected to use this website to access relevant readings and course materials as well as to submit completed assignments.

5. **Religious observances:** If you need to miss a class or make up an assignment due to an individual participation in a religious observance, please notify me by the end of the first class meeting. You will not be penalized and will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up any academic assignments that are missed due to participation in a religious observance.

**GMU Policies and Resources for Students**

1. Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code (See http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/).
2. Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (See http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/).

3. Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.

4. The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students’ personal experience and academic performance (See http://caps.gmu.edu/).

5. If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me at the beginning of the semester and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474 or ods@gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS.

6. The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing (See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/).

7. Drop/Add Deadlines:
   - Last day to add class: September 4, 2018
   - Final drop deadline (no tuition penalty): September 9, 2018
   - For additional information, please refer to the Office of the University Registrar website: https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/fall-2018/

Course Materials
There is no required textbook for this course. All readings listed on the syllabus are available on our Blackboard course site.

Strongly Recommended
### Course Schedule

#### Class 1 (Aug. 28): History and Purposes of General Education

**READ:**


**Please bring to class (in printed or electronic form):**
- The mission statement of the institution where you began your undergraduate education
- Information about the general education requirements at the institution where you began your undergraduate education

#### Class 2 (Sept. 4): “Essential” Student Learning Outcomes

**READ:**


#### Class 3 (Sept. 11): Accreditation

**READ:**


### Class 4 (Sept. 18): Assessment Policy in Virginia

**READ:**


### Class 5 (Sept. 25): Measuring Student Learning

**READ:**


### Class 6 (Oct. 2): Measuring College Learning in (a) Major

**READ (in order listed below, as readings are interrelated):**

On the American History Association website:
- [About Tuning](http://www.historytuning.org/about.html)
- [AHS History Tuning Project: 2016 History Discipline Core](http://www.historytuning.org/tuningproject.html)


**DUE:** Assessment Strategy Critique

Please note that there is no class meeting on Oct. 9 (this date is used as a make-up date for Monday classes that did not meet on Labor Day)

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<tr>
<th>Class 7 (Oct. 16): Using Direct Measures</th>
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<td><strong>READ:</strong></td>
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<th>Class 8 (Oct. 23): Linking Assessment and Institutional Planning</th>
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<th>Class 9 (Oct. 30): Engaging Faculty and Students in Assessment</th>
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**DUE:** QEP Research Memorandum

| Class 10 (Nov. 6): Analyzing, Reporting, and Using Assessment Results |
READ:


Class 11 (Nov. 13): Specialized and Professional Accreditation

READ:


Class 12 (Nov. 20): Project Preparation Day – No Class Meeting

Please use this time to work with your team on your final project.

Class 13 (Nov. 27): International Perspectives on Assessment

READ:


Class 14 (Dec. 4): Final Presentations

DUE:
Team presentation

Assessments
Class participation, 15%
You are expected to participate in or lead class discussions and group work in a manner that demonstrates thoughtful reflection and understanding of the subject matter as well as respect for your colleagues in the class. In order to participate meaningfully, you are expected to attend every class session and you must come to class having read all of the reading assignments.

Final Project and Related Assignments
Working with a project team, you will develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) proposal for James Madison University (JMU). We will cover QEPs and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation, and form teams based on shared areas of interest, in the early part of the semester. You will also be provided with in-class teamwork time throughout the semester. In order to assist you and your team in the development of your final project, you will complete two individual assignments, described below. While you will complete these assignments on your own, each one will require you to coordinate with your teammates.

Assessment Strategy Critique, 25% (Due Oct. 2)
Select two of JMU’s SCHEV-approved peer institutions and discuss how those institutions address and assess the area that your team is focusing on for your QEP proposal. For example, two of the institutions on JMU’s peer list are Boston College and the University of Alabama. If the focus of your team’s QEP proposal is writing skills, you will need to investigate and critique how Boston College and the University of Alabama address and assess writing skills.

Specifically, you should address the following questions in a paper that is no more than five pages long:

- How, if at all, do the peer institutions define your QEP skills area?
- To what extent do the peer institutions address your QEP skills area in their institutional learning outcomes?
- How do the peer institutions assess your QEP skills area?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each peer institution’s approach to assessing your QEP skills area?

These questions will be easier to answer for some institutions than they are for others. You will likely need to do a bit of searching on institutional websites to find the information you need, and you may also need to draw conclusions based on available information.

Please see grading rubric and sample paper on Blackboard.

QEP Research Memorandum, 25% (Due Oct. 30)
Compare and contrast two QEPs that focus on the same area that you and your team have selected for your final project. You will need to coordinate with your project team to develop a list of QEPs, and divide the list among the team. Your five-page administrative memo, which should be geared toward your project teammates, should include the following components:

- Explanation of why each institution decided to focus on this area for its QEP
- Description of each QEP, including desired outcomes
• Overview of the assessment strategy associated with each QEP
• Discussion of QEP elements that might (or might not) work well at JMU
• Conclusion

Please see grading rubric and sample paper on Blackboard.

**QEP Proposal, 35% (Due Dec. 4)**

You will present your proposal to the QEP Selection Committee (e.g., your classmates), on the last day of class. Your presentation should address the following:

• How the QEP is related to JMU’s institutional planning efforts
• How the QEP would directly improve institutional/student performance at JMU
• What JMU students will learn as a result of the QEP
• How the activities of the QEP will improve student learning at JMU
• How the QEP will help accomplish JMU’s institutional mission
• Personnel that will be needed to implement the QEP
• Plan to assess the achievement of QEP goals

You are not required to include a budget or timetable in your proposal. You are also not required to submit a written proposal. You will, however, need to submit a copy of your presentation materials (e.g., PowerPoint, handouts), as well as an explanation of each team member’s role in preparing the proposal and presentation.

More information about the final presentations will be provided in class. Please see grading rubric on Blackboard.

**Grade scale:**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+*</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-99</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
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*includes scores that round up to 100 (e.g., 99.5)