During the Spring semester of 2010 the Assessment committee asked me to complete a report on my assessment activities for one section of my History 211 course. Assessment is at the core of teaching, and is an activity embedded in what I do in all of my courses every semester. This is a report responds only to the specific, narrow meaning of assessment as defined by accrediting agencies and committees.

The task required is to evaluate some aspect of Goal 1 of the Muskingum College Assessment report:

Muskingum Students will develop skills in perception, analysis, and expression.

My original plan to measure this goal involved employing Turning Point technology in the classroom to measure student understanding of specific historical concepts at the beginning and end of the term. Unfortunately, due to many technological problems during the rough transition to a new technology maintenance system, I was unable to employ TurningPoint in the classroom during the first half of the semester. As a result, I revised my assessment plan, and employed two streams from assessment already embedded in the course (i.e. scheduled exams.)

My objective was to measure student ability to analyze primary source documents from a historical perspective.

For each exam, students are required to complete a primary source analysis. Students must be able to explain the provenance, perspective, bias, and historical context of a specific document. For the first exam students were asked to analyze a visual document which we had reviewed a few weeks earlier in class. That document was the Official Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1629). Of the 31 students who completed the exam, 10 identified the document and its provenance effectively, and seven did so partially. Eleven explained its perspective effectively, and an additional six partially. Seventeen were able to identify some specific evidence of bias in the document. Eight students effectively placed the document in a meaningful historical context, and ten did so partially.

For the third exam students were asked to analyze a text document, the last will and testament of Richard Randolph, a Virginia slaveholder (1797) which we had discussed in groups a few weeks earlier in class. Of the 28 students who completed the exam, twenty-one identified the document and its provenance effectively, and three did so partially. Twenty explained its perspective effectively, and an additional seven did so partially. Nineteen were able to identify
some specific evidence of bias in the document. Fifteen students effectively placed the document in a meaningful historical context, and nine did so partially.

While a portion of the class continued to struggle with primary source analysis and how to employ the concepts of provenance, perspective, bias, and historical context, there was a measurable collective improvement in all categories.

My second objective was to measure the effectiveness of student written expression, specifically their capacity to draw from what they had learned from lectures, the texts, and primary source documents to answer a broader historical question. On the first exam students were asked to write an essay of five to seven well developed paragraphs on the following prompt:

*Compare and contrast the development of the English colonies in the Chesapeake with those in New England in the first half of the 17th century. What were the goals of the founders of these colonies? What challenges did each face, and how successful were they at overcoming these challenges? Do you believe the colonies of one region were more successful than the other? And if so, what factors contributed to the different levels of success in the two regions?*

I evaluated their responses for clarity of expression, completeness of the answer, and ability to provide specific examples to support their points. Of the 31 students who completed the exam three wrote essays of exceptional clarity, and seven wrote essays of adequate clarity. Eight students wrote essays that could be considered complete answers to the prompt, and an additional nine students wrote essays that attempted to address at least 75% of the prompt. Three students effectively employed specific examples to support their responses to each part of the prompt, and seventeen students employed a relevant specific example in at least one part of their answer.

On the third exam students were asked to write an essay of five to seven well developed paragraphs on the following prompt:

*Why were the politics of the 1790s so divisive? What issues divided Americans in this decade? What were the positions on these issues of the political parties which emerged in this decade?*

Of the 28 students who completed the exam seven wrote essays of exceptional clarity, and an additional nine wrote essays of adequate clarity. Eighteen students wrote essays that could be considered complete answers to the prompt, and an additional four students wrote essays that attempted to address at least 75% of the prompt. Ten students effectively employed specific examples to support their responses to each part of the prompt, and fifteen students employed a relevant specific example in at least one part of their answer.

Again, the evaluation of essay answers indicates that collective student improvement in written expression, as measured by clarity, completeness, and ability to employ evidence to support their argument.

Both assessment tools demonstrated a collective improvement in performance for these tasks.