



# ASSESSMENT UPDATE

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Assessment website:  
[www.eiu.edu/~assess](http://www.eiu.edu/~assess)

## Important Dates

- The 109th NCA/Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting will be held March 27-30, 2004 in Chicago. This year's theme is "The Distinctive Organization in the Age of Accountability."
- Program Assessment Summaries due to CASA by June 15, 2004. See the assessment web site for copies of the blank forms.

## WATSON-GLASER DATA

Effective critical thinking is one of the four undergraduate goals outlined in the University Assessment Plan. Beginning Spring 2002, the *Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WG)* has been administered in Senior Seminars to assess the critical thinking skills of our students.

The *WG* contains 16 scenarios and 40 items. The scenarios deal with problems, arguments, and situations that are encountered daily in work and classrooms. The scenarios consist of both neutral and controversial items. The neutral items deal with issues such as the weather, which do not usually cause strong feelings. The controversial items contains issues such as politics, which often evoke strong reactions.

The *WG* consists of five subtests:

- **Inference** – drawing conclusions concerning the truth or falsehoods from the data provided.
- **Recognition of Assumptions** – recognizing unstated suppositions from

the data provided.

- **Deduction** – deciding if certain conclusions follow from information given.
- **Interpretation** – weighing evidence and deciding if conclusions are valid based on the data provided.
- **Evaluation of Arguments** – distinguishing between strong, relevant arguments and weak, irrelevant arguments regarding a specific issue.

Although the *WG* consists of five subtests, according to the Psychological Corporation, owners of the appraisal, it is the total composite score that provides the most reliable measure of critical thinking ability. The total possible composite score is 40.

The mean scores for each of the five subtests and the total composite mean for each semester are given in the table on page 2.

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## ALUMNI REFLECT ON EASTERN

Each year the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) requires that each public institution survey its alumni. Each institution may include institution-specific questions to accompany the IBHE-mandated questions. In spring 2002, Eastern decided to add two qualitative questions to the survey: *What had the most positive impact on you during your time at Eastern?* And *What had the most negative impact on you during your time at Eastern?*

In summer 2002 alumni who graduated in 1997 were surveyed; the response rate was 41% and a great deal of qualitative

data was collected through comments to these two questions.

Thirty-seven percent of alumni indicated that the relationships they formed with faculty and advisors had the most positive impact. "The staff and professors I worked with were great in helping me to achieve and succeed in obtaining my degree, and they went above and beyond with personal concern." Many comments reflected how appreciative former students were of professors' spending time with them, learning their names, and challenging them.

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## WATSON-GLASER CONT.

A Critical Thinking Subcommittee consisting of Melanie Burns, Teresa Britton, and Debra Hopgood has recently been formed. The members of this subcommittee are working to develop qualitative data concerning the *WG*, based on the

quantitative information provided by the scores. The goal of this subcommittee is to provide the university community with information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of students' critical thinking abilities.

	Inference	Recognition of Assumption	Deduction	Interpretation	Evaluation of Arguments	Total Composite Mean
<b>Possible Score</b>	7.00	8.00	9.00	7.00	9.00	40.00
Spring 2002 N=575	3.92	5.34	6.25	4.33	6.95	26.79
Summer 2002 N=598	3.71	4.92	5.94	4.16	6.78	25.51
Fall 2002 N=600	3.86	5.24	6.08	4.30	6.76	26.24
Spring 2003 N=718	3.99	5.13	6.35	4.35	6.87	26.65
Summer 2003 N=615	4.00	5.31	6.43	4.54	6.79	27.09

## ALUMNI CONT.

Eighteen percent of alumni from that class indicated that making friends and engaging in social activities had the most positive impact on their time at Eastern. "In my financial practice networking is key, and I have such a strong base from college I cannot put a value on that."

Specific departments, courses, or programs topped the list for 17% of alumni while 11% credited co-curricular programs such as athletics, housing positions, intramurals, and RSOs as being among their favorite memories. The small campus and small class sizes were mentioned by 10% of the alumni while 6% targeted the friendly atmosphere and sense of community as their most positive impact. Personal growth (3%), diversity of people (2%), and helpful staff (2%) were the other topics mentioned.

Many alumni (12%) indicated that they felt no negative impact; "Everything is a learning experience,"

noted one respondent. Another commented, "Overall my experience at Eastern was extremely positive. I learned a great deal and have many fond memories."

Thirteen percent of alumni indicated that a particular professor or course had had the most negative impact while 10% indicated trouble with departments or programs.

Common issues (7%) for negative comments included parking, the poor condition of the old library, and a lack of technology on campus. Other negative experiences mentioned were: advising (6%); social life (6%); housing and dining issues (5%); job searches and preparation for work (3%); personal issues (3%); a lack of diversity on campus (2%); monetary problems (2%). Typical negative comments were [there was a] "lack of social events without being in the Greek system. Limited places to go for fun under age of 21," and

"Parking. Build a garage already!" Some respondents also commented on the "lack of diversity in the student body" as having a negative impact on their time at Eastern. Most notable is that several issues categorized as negative by students have been addressed. Eastern now has an impressive, up-to-date library and technology resources have grown a great deal since 1997.

A number of negative comments concerned topics about which Eastern can do very little; such topics include the location of the University and the size of the Charleston community.

Overall while many of the positive impact comments created patterns expressing what Eastern does well, the negative impact responses tended to be more personal to each respondents individual circumstances.

More comments from this alumni survey are available at [www.eiu.edu/~assess](http://www.eiu.edu/~assess).