

# **Developing Key Tools: Reflective Writing and Rubrics**

**Mike Gress, Interim Director of  
Institutional Effectiveness**

# Reflective Writing

## What are Reflective Writings?

- Student response to questions about what, how, and why they have learned, or reflections on the significance of their learning, who they are, their growth and development, their experiences, or their satisfaction
- Qualitative data—perception of the evaluator is key to the results
- Reflective activities, when structured, systematic, and consistent, can be summarized in a significantly meaningful way.

# Benefits of Reflection

- Helps students learn by encouraging meta-cognition and synthesis
- Balances quantitative and direct assessments with qualitative, indirect—provide fresh insights, allow for exploration of how learning occurs that quantitative data doesn't allow for
- Provides faculty with insights into students' experience with essential tasks
- Yields useful information quickly and easily that can be used as formative data for next class period—one minute paper, email minute, muddiest point.

# Reflection

## Three Directions of Reflection:

- **Reflection-on-Action:** Looking back on what was accomplished and reviewing
- **Reflection-in-Action:** Reflecting while in the middle of a process or activity; used to improve the results
- **Reflection-for-Action:** Reviewing what has been accomplished and what it means for future action

# Reflection

Two types:

- Indirect assessment of students' (or others') perception of what, how, and why they have learned
  1. Helps students learn how they learn best and manage their learning (metacognition)
  2. Helps students pull together what they have learned and its significance (synthesis)
- Direct assessment of students' ability to “appreciate,” value diverse points of view, express their levels of spirituality, integrity, openness to ideas, desire to learn, etc. (Affective Outcomes)

# Reflection as Direct Assessment

Study of Behaviors, for example, being a life-long learner. In an assignment, the student might:

- Describe amount of reading
- Describe quality of reading
- Express curiosity about issues
- Describe participation in cultural or political events
- Describe plans to continue education or does so
- Describe plans for children to have good education
- Describe plans to contribute to foundation

# Reflection as Indirect Assessment

## Study of Students' Perception of their Learning:

- Why they learn
- How they learn
- What they have learned
- What is the significance of their learning
- What they were most/least comfortable with
- What they have achieved as a result of their learning

(Handout)

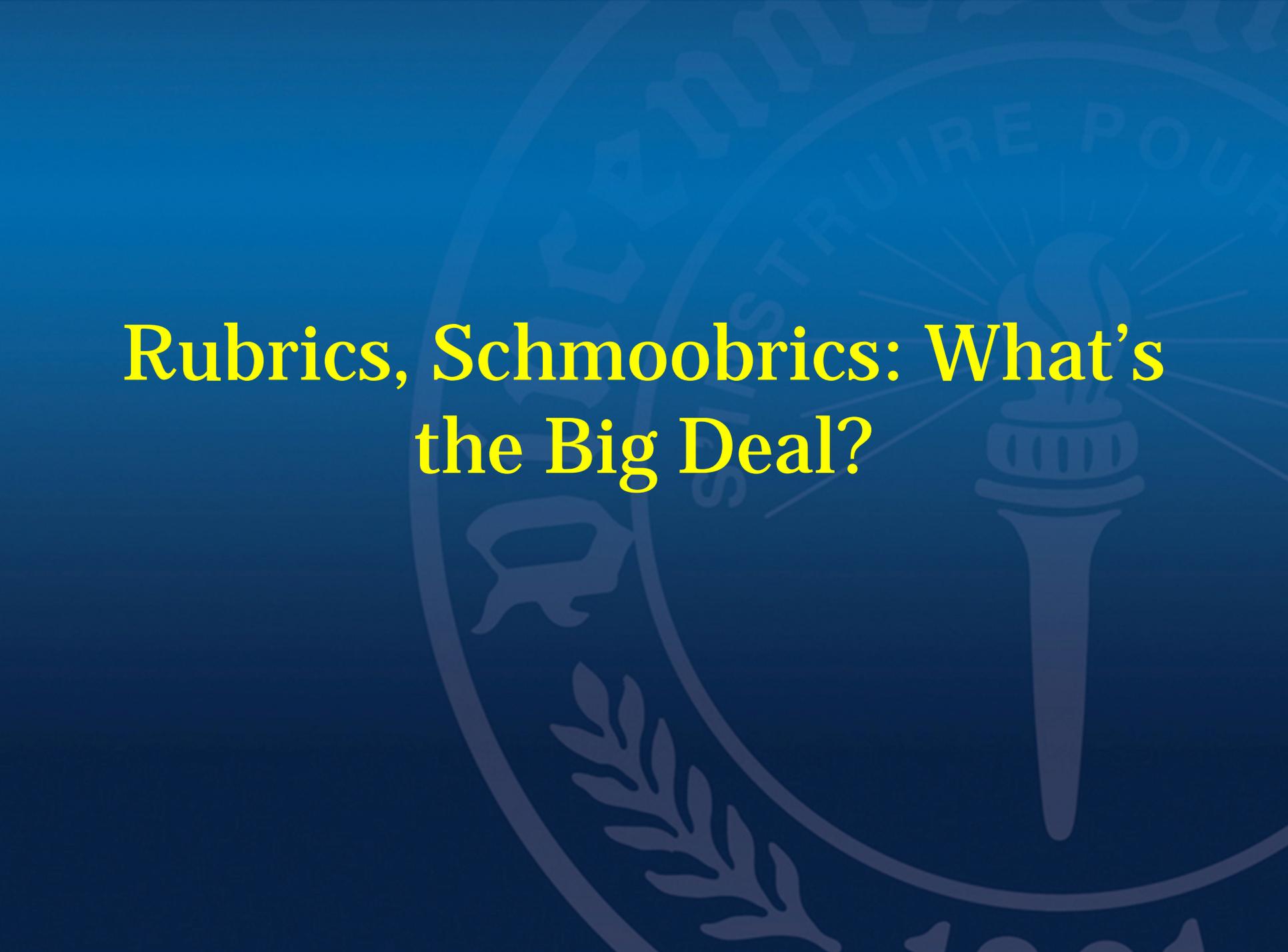
# Types of Reflective Writing

- One-minute paper: What is most significant point? What question remains unanswered?
- Three to four questions that can be answered in short answer form, paragraph or short essay
- Before-and-after reflections that can be expressed in short answer form, paragraphs, or a short essay; completed early and late in course
- Longer reflective essay, guided by prompt

# Evaluating Reflections

**Direct Assessment Reflection: Use a Rubric**  
(Handout)

**Indirect Assessment Reflection: Possibly a rubric, but more likely a summary of trends for a whole class, or connected to task analysis such as work in a portfolio or work on specific assignments. Can be used to determine students' progress in course and readiness to move on to next level.**



# Rubrics, Schmoobrics: What's the Big Deal?

# The Rubric—An Essential Tool for Developing Effective Assignments and Assessments

“...a rubric is a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment. Rubrics divide an assignment into its component parts and provide a detailed description of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable levels of performance for each of those parts.” (Stevens and Levi, Introduction to Rubrics)

# A Simple But Less Effective Rubric—The Checklist

## Checklist Rubric:

1. Works best for “black or white” activities, when the expectation is simply completing every step in process
2. Fails to identify the qualities of completing a task well so it doesn't explain the complexity of a complex task
3. Fails to teach students to think through an assignment in a critical way

# A Slightly Improved Checklist

## The Rating Scale Rubric

1. Useful for quick evaluation by students or external reviewers
2. Implies levels of success, but no description of levels
3. Usually fails to identify the qualities of completing a task well
4. Students don't receive specific, detailed feedback on the quality of the task

# The Best Rubric: Analytic or Descriptive Rubric

1. Gives quick feedback to students that can help reduce repetition of mistakes
  2. Gives concrete expression of task complexity
  3. Teaches students to critically think through what is required for the task to be excellent
  4. Facilitates conversation with students about the assignment
  5. Helps faculty refine teaching skills
- (Stevens and Levi, Introduction to Rubrics)

# Analytic Rubric Template

	Scale Level 1	Scale Level 2	Scale Level 3	Scale Level 4
Dimension 1	Description of Dim. 1, Lev. 1 performance			
Dimension 2				
Dimension 3				
Dimension 4			Description of Dim. 4, Lev. 3 performance	

# Constructing an Analytic or Descriptive Rubric

First rubrics are most difficult—you need to:

1. List the details of the assignment and objectives
2. Reflect on what you want from students if the assignment is done well, why the assignment is important, what happened with past student efforts
3. Reflect on specifics that made student work excellent or what made it poor

# Constructing an Analytic or Descriptive Rubric

- Identify the dimensions of the assignment (the characteristics, criteria, or basic elements)—The essential steps or elements that students need to know
- Identify levels of success without being overly negative
  - Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average
  - Accomplished, Average, Developing, Beginning

# Constructing an Analytic or Descriptive Rubric

- Describe the highest level of success for all the dimensions (characteristics or criteria) of the assignment
- Describe the lowest level of success
- For 3-level rubrics, make the middle a little of both other columns
- For 4-level rubrics, make the second column just below the first, and third column just above the last

# Constructing an Analytic or Descriptive Rubric

## Two Possible Group Methods for Constructing:

- **Post-It Note Process**—participants identify key elements of a well-completed task. Be sure you have thought about the assignment!
- **Qualitative Evaluation of Student Artifacts**—participants identify what they value, what they don't value, what they value that they don't see in the artifacts. Record comments on giant sticky notes

# Things to Keep in Mind About Analytic or Descriptive Rubrics

- Analytic Rubrics are seldom perfect on first attempt
- You have to use it to determine its effectiveness
- You have to do rubric professional development with other department members to develop inter-rater reliability and identify agreed upon learning expectations
- Plan or even schedule a refinement event

# Start Your Own Rubric

Use the template at the end of your handout:

- Think of a performance that you would like to assess—identify the task
- Identify at least dimensions in the left column
- Write in scale levels, working in either direction, going up or down the scale
- Choose one dimension, and describe the highest and lowest levels of success