



# Assessment Spotlight: Criminology & Criminal Justice Rubric Development

Spring 2019

In 2018, after evaluating a set of student work samples, the Criminology & Criminal Justice (CCJ) Undergraduate committee decided to retool their program-level assessment rubrics. The existing CCJ rubrics had dimensions/criteria (rows) and rating levels (columns) but no *performance descriptors*. They wanted to end up with something structured like this (but for learning outcomes rather than cookie quality):

Criteria	Delicious	Good	Needs Improvement
Number of Chips	Chocolate chip in every bite	Chips in about 75% of bites	Chocolate in 50% of bites
Texture	Chewy	Chewy in middle, crisp on edges	Texture either crispy/crunchy or 50% uncooked
Color	Golden brown	Either light from overcooking or light from being 25% raw	Either dark brown from overcooking or light from undercooking
Taste	Home-baked taste	Quality store-bought taste	Tasteless
Richness	Rich, creamy, high-fat flavor	Medium fat contents	Low-fat contents

Source: <https://www.slideshare.net/CynthiaSistekChandler/creating-rubrics-with-ams-chandler-fabry>

The CCJ committee (Drs. Ariane Prohaska, Ida Johnson, Brittany Gilmer, Josh Wakeham, and Stephen Clipper) knew that articulating performance descriptors would foster shared expectations, consistency in rating student work samples, and more objective, actionable data about learning. The rubrics could also be shared with students (to provide a “road map” to high-quality work) and optionally used for course-based grading and feedback.

Part of the value of an *analytic* rubric—that is, a rubric that breaks a construct down into subskills—is the potential to identify narrow strengths/weaknesses in a single student or a cohort. Contrast that with a holistic rating (a “B” paper or a “pretty good” cookie), which alone doesn’t help a student or a program figure out how to improve.

Led by Dr. Prohaska, the CCJ faculty took a team-based approach. At a series of fall meetings, they reviewed and revised their existing rubrics. This spring, they will pilot the new tools with papers from 400-level CCJ courses.

Developing program-level rubrics is not easy. They won’t be useful if they’re too narrow (e.g., assignment-specific) or too general; team members may have different ideas about the nature of subskills or what differentiates “fair” from “good” from “excellent” work (it helps to have actual samples on hand). Questions always arise about modularity, rating categories/labels, and wordsmithing. Importantly, the CCJ assessment committee found it useful to wrestle with such questions in a collegial way. They recognized that the goal was not to create “perfect” rating tools or eliminate all subjectivity. Rather, through the rubrics (and the surrounding conversations), they aim to strengthen the teaching and learning of critical skills.

Below are the typical steps in a rubric creation project: (adapted from <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment/howto/rubrics.htm>)

1. Identify the skill or construct you want to assess.
2. Identify the dimensions or subskills to be rated (*rows*); ideally, these will be mutually exclusive.
3. Determine the rating levels (*columns*).
4. Based on work samples, describe each rating level for each dimension (*cells*).
5. Enlist colleagues to help beta-test the draft rubric.
6. Discuss ratings and observations with colleagues; revise the rubric accordingly.
7. Identify anchor papers for future calibration training.

Finally, it may be strategic to modify an existing rubric (e.g., <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>) rather than starting from scratch. For assistance with rubric development, facilitation of a working session, or to obtain examples of available rubrics for various skill areas, please contact OIE.