Morehouse College, Atlanta, Ga.

Using assessments as a diagnostic tool and to measure student progress

THE CHALLENGE
Morehouse College in Atlanta, Ga., wanted to take a more targeted approach to assessing students' core curriculum competency levels and evaluating their information literacy and critical thinking skills. They needed new tools to complement their existing evaluation methods and provide a more in-depth analysis of proficiency levels for incoming freshmen as well as student learning outcomes for graduating seniors. This “profile” of student knowledge and skill levels could make instructors aware of how much their students know, and how they're applying that knowledge.

THE APPROACH
Since the ETS® Proficiency Profile assesses the four core skill areas — critical thinking, reading, writing and mathematics — in a single test, and their iSkills™ assessment measures critical thinking in a digital environment, the combination seemed promising. Dr. Hazel Ervin, Director of General Education and Associate Professor of English at Morehouse, explained that the General Education and Computer Science departments use the ETS Proficiency Profile and the iSkills assessment to provide teachers with student profiles based on proficiency levels, facilitate more targeted curriculum development, and for placement purposes.

“To determine proficiency levels in core curriculum, all incoming freshmen must take the ETS Proficiency Profile and the iSkills assessment. We use the ETS Proficiency Profile to measure student achievement and evaluate the quality and instruction level of certain courses. With the help of the iSkills assessment, we assess students’ ability to find, use, manage, evaluate and convey information in a digital environment.”

The iSkills assessment helps instructors determine if students are proficient enough in information literacy to be exempt from the College's introduction to computer science course. Students petitioning to place out of a basic skills math course must present their ETS Proficiency Profile test scores in conjunction with their SAT®/ACT® scores or AP® credits.

“The ETS Proficiency Profile has the student demonstrate knowledge, comprehension, application and synthesis of a variety of skills. Such an approach allows institutions to address the complex demonstrations of skills.”

Dr. Hazel A. Ervin
Director of General Education and Associate Professor of English
Morehouse College
Incorporating the iSkills assessment and the ETS Proficiency Profile into their evaluation program provides the General Education department with data that reflect individual student progress at the course level as well as group progress at the program level. Faculty can take this information into account when preparing their course syllabi/lesson plans, and administrators can compare their program’s performance with hundreds of institutions nationwide.

THE RESULTS
Dr. Ervin explained that the in-depth overview provided by both tests has been beneficial for everyone. "Students see value in knowing their strengths and weaknesses prior to starting a course, and teachers appreciate the insight provided by the individual student profiles."

The addition of the ETS Proficiency Profile and the iSkills assessment has played an integral role in some newly adopted practices at the College. The General Education department’s Item Review Committee — which reviews comprehensive exams for validity, reliability and fairness — now tracks and evaluates student progress following administration of the ETS Proficiency Profile. Faculty began recording and observing individual student progress using the test scores. Rubrics were revised and aligned to ensure effective teaching and assessing of basic skills diagnosed using the ETS Proficiency Profile. General Education is also considering administering the iSkills assessment to computer science students and using the results as diagnostic data for incoming computer science majors.

WHAT WE LEARNED
The College is pleased with the comprehensive level of measurement ETS provides with the ETS Proficiency Profile and the iSkills assessment. Dr. Ervin sees value in this multitiered approach. "A skill can sometimes be measured … at various levels (e.g., knowledge, comprehension, application and synthesis). Today, these levels of proficiency … are equated with accountability in student learning."

With the reliable data generated from the ETS Proficiency Profile and the iSkills assessment, the faculty and students at Morehouse can continue to reap the benefits of targeted curriculum design and better learning outcomes.

To learn more about the ETS Proficiency Profile call 1-800-745-0269, e-mail highered@ets.org or visit www.ets.org/proficiencyprofile.

For more information on the iSkills assessment call 1-800-745-0269, e-mail highered@ets.org or visit www.ets.org/iSkills.