Assessment for beginners: Learning from current experience

Leading the Way Compact Planning Forum

Monday, March 31, 2014
Develop an Institutional Baseline

- **Small Group Activity:**
  - Describe assessment activities already in place at your institution
  - List the types of data already available at your institution
  - Describe how your division, department or area currently uses data to guide decisions
  - Discuss the meaning of the following sentence: “Our college is data rich but information poor.”
What is a Culture of Evidence?

- The commitment of everyone at the institution to assess the effectiveness of programs and services, to make data-based decisions and to demonstrate that the programs, practices and services their area offers
  - Are effective
  - Support the college’s missions and goals
  - Contribute to student development, student success, student learning and/or student completion rates
Why Create a Culture of Evidence?

- Accountability
- Accreditation
- Political climate
- Research
- Theories
- It’s the right thing to do
Key Assessment Questions

• What should our students be learning and in what ways should they be growing?
• What are our students actually learning and in what ways are they actually growing?
• What should we do to improve student learning and growth?
Why Assessment?

• Makes our expectations explicit and public
• Sharpens focus
• Sets appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality
• Creates an environment that is outcomes-oriented and data-driven
• Creates opportunities for partnerships across the college
Why Assessment?

• Makes it easier to arrive at and support decisions—and answer questions—about:
  – Program creation, expansion, redirection or elimination
  – Budget requests
  – Allocation (and reallocation) of resources
  – The value of services, programs, etc.
General Guidelines for Creating a Culture of Evidence

• Overall goal is to demonstrate that programs and services
  – Are effective
  – Assist the college to achieve its mission and meet its goals
  – Contribute to student development, success, learning and/or program completion
General Guidelines, Cont.

• There is no one-size-fits all approach
  – Questions being asked and the culture within the college dictate the approach and the tools
  – Always weigh costs in relation to benefits, staff skill sets, and the institution’s culture

• Start small. Select projects that
  – Fit skills, time available, and resources
  – Have fairly basic designs and goals
  – Focus initially on strong programs
• View as action research
  – Four steps: plan, act, observe and reflect (Upcraft & Schuh, 2002)
  – Goal is to inform and improve practices, programs, services and individual performance (Upcraft & Schuh, 2002)
  – Use to make decisions about teaching and learning (Suskie, 2009)
General Guidelines, Cont.

• Use existing data bases, multiple assessment strategies, and sampling techniques
• Help staff members borrow then grow missing skill sets
• Use results to support the decision-making process
What Does a Culture of Evidence Look Like?

• No two cultures of evidence look the same. However, most are built around these core elements:
  – An annual or bi-annual assessment calendar for major areas, programs and services
  – Programs, services, and activities with clearly defined outcomes (learning, developmental or program) and outcome measures (authentic and/or traditional)
What Does a Culture of Evidence Look Like, Cont.

• Budgeting, planning (strategic and operational), staff evaluation and staff development procedures that are data-based, action-oriented and tied to institutional goals

• Formal evaluations of programs and services conducted annually or bi-annually (faculty and students)

• Needs analysis (faculty, students and alumni) conducted every 2-3 years
What Does a Culture of Evidence Look Like, Cont.

- Point of service evaluations conducted periodically throughout the year
- Research studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of major initiatives (a Life/Career Planning course or a College Success course, for example)
- Time specifically set aside to analyze data, identify appropriate actions to take based on the data, etc.
What Does a Culture of Evidence Look Like, Cont.

- An annual report to the college community that demonstrates using hard data how the programs and services offered by your division/dept. contribute to the college’s mission and bottom line: student access and student success (student learning)

Handout: Creating a Culture of Evidence: A Snapshot of Best Processes and Practices
How Do I Build the Skill Set

- Borrow or rent expertise
- Attend on-campus professional development activities
- Attend state & national conferences with a specific agenda—and a commitment to share what you learn w/others
- Start or participate in an existing study group
How Do I Assist My Area at the College to move Toward a Culture of Evidence?

• Address major knowledge gaps
• Build capacity within the area
• Build partnerships/support across the college
• Collaborate with your colleagues to develop an implementation plan
• Begin with aligning goals and learning outcomes
Goals vs. Learning Outcomes

- **Goals**: General statements about what students should learn or how they should develop. **Example**: Students will develop strong critical thinking skills.

- **Learning outcomes**: More detailed and specific statements derived from goals. Indicates what your unit wants students to be able to do or know rather than what you will provide.
Attributes of Outcomes

- Can be measured.
- Are meaningful, manageable, and realistic.
- Focus on aspects of learning that will develop and endure but can be assessed in some form now.
- Are in alignment at the individual service or workshop level, entire cluster of services or programs within a unit, and the overall division.
Articulating Different Levels of Cognitive Skills (Bloom, 1956)

- **Knowledge** (Sample verbs: identify, define, describe)
- **Comprehension** (Sample verbs: explain, summarize, discuss)
- **Application** (Sample verbs: construct, apply, demonstrate)
- **Analysis** (Sample verbs: compare, analyze, differentiate)
- **Synthesis** (Sample verbs: create, design, revise)
- **Evaluation** (Sample verbs: judge, evaluate, defend)
Examples of Cognitive Outcomes

• Students will assess their career interests and utilize this information to identify potential career opportunities.

• Students will be able to locate, understand, and use career information effectively.

• Students will evaluate various financial aid options and determine which options are viable given their financial circumstance.
Cognitive Gains Result From:

- Student-faculty interaction
- Involvement in a learning community
- Balanced academic and social involvement
- Involvement with peers in course-related and non-course-related activities
- Living on campus
- Social leadership roles
Articulating Different Levels of Affective Dimensions (Bloom, 1956)

- **Receiving** (Sample verbs: interest, open, willing to engage. Sample outcome: Students will listen to others with respect.)

- **Responding** (Sample verbs: reflect upon, interact, participate. Sample outcome: Students will question new ideas and concepts in order to understand them.)

- **Valuing** (Sample verbs: value, justify, demonstrate. Sample outcome: Students will propose a plan for social improvement and follow through with commitment.)
Articulating Different Levels of Affective Dimensions Cont.

- **Organization** (Sample verbs: Contrast/compare, defend, formulate. Sample outcome: Students will prioritize time effectively to meet the needs of the university, family, and self.)

- **Internalizing Values/Characterization** (Sample verbs: Modify, act, verify. Sample outcome: Students will revise judgment and change behavior in light of new evidence.)
Affective Gains Result From:

- Leadership roles
- Paraprofessional experiences
- Interaction with faculty outside of class
- Study abroad
- Involvement in the co-curricular
Measuring Outcomes

• Choose assessment methods based upon what you are trying to assess, not what method is the most appealing to you.

• Consider what method will be most meaningful to your unit, students, and other constituencies.

• Consider what method will provide you with the information to make decision.

• Be able to justify your choice of multiple assessment methods.

• Interpret data so that it informs decision making.
What to Consider When Choosing Methods

• Budget
• Who will conduct assessment?
• What is the timeline?
• What are my analysis capabilities?
• How will this fit into daily/annual professional duties?
Direct Evidence vs. Indirect

• Methods that provide direct evidence:
  • Student work samples; rubrics; collections of student work over time; observations of behavior; student actual academic performance; pre- and post-tests; writing samples.

• Methods that provide indirect evidence:
  • Alumni, employee, and student surveys; focus groups, interviews; job placement statistics
## Session Activity

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<th>What is the student-learning outcome?</th>
<th>What learning experiences do you provide that allow students to achieve stated outcome?</th>
<th>What assessment methods may you use to measure whether or not the outcome is being achieved?</th>
<th>What are your data sources?</th>
<th>Who will be in charge of analyzing the data?</th>
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Final Thoughts

• Regularly evaluate your assessment practices utilizing formative and summative approaches.
E-Resources

http://jfmueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/

- Easy to read, follow and apply. Lots of examples
- Definitions of authentic & traditional assessment
- Guidelines for using authentic assessment
- Guidelines for designing and implementing authentic learning tasks and assessing these tasks
- Guidelines for developing rubrics
E-Resources

• [http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/archives/assmt/resource.htm](http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/archives/assmt/resource.htm)

• Comprehensive site that offers links to outcomes assessment sites of national organizations as well as 46 colleges and universities
  - Provides information on writing student learning outcomes, developing rubrics, and assessing outcomes
E-Resources

• http://www.sa.psu.edu/SARA/pulse.shtml
  – Penn State Pulse – data on SA programs and services since 1995
  – 2-4 page reports that are easy to read

• http://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/kcs/assessment-evaluation-and-research/resources
  – NASPA’s Student Affairs Assessment Websites
  – Links to over 50 institutions SA assessment websites
E-Resources

  – Connects to a variety of data sources, reports, and articles
  – Contains some downloads from AIR (Association for Institutional Research)
Print Resources

- Assessment Clear and Simple – Walvoord, 2004 (Jossey-Bass)
- Assessment Methods for Student Affairs – Schuh and Associates, 2009 (Jossey-Bass)
- Assessment Reconsidered – NASPA, 2008
Print Resources

- *Assessing Student Learning* – Suskie, 2009 (Jossey-Bass)
- *Classroom Assessment Techniques* – Angelo and Cross, 1993 (Jossey-Bass)
Print Resources

• Learning Reconsidered (Vol. 1 & Vol. 2– ACPA & NASPA, 2004 and 2006)
• Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners – ACPA & NASPA, 2010
• Building A Culture of Evidence in Student Affairs: A Guide for Leaders and Practitioners-Culp & Dungy, 2012 (NASPA)
References

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