

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

General Guidelines, Cont.

- 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

What is the student-learning outcome?	What learning experiences do you provide that allow students to achieve stated outcome?	What assessment methods may you use to measure whether or not the outcome is being achieved?	What are your data sources?	Who will be in charge of analyzing the data?
1.				
2.				

Final Thoughts

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

E-Resources

- <http://jfmueeller.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>
- 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

- <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/> National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)
 - 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 Practices in SA* – Schuh, Upcraft and Associates, 2001 (Jossey-Bass)
- *Assessment Reconsidered* – NASPA, 2008

Print Resources

- *Assessing Student Learning* – Suskie, 2009 (Jossey-Bass)
- *Classroom Assessment Techniques* – Angelo and Cross, 1993 (Jossey-Bass)
- *How College Affects Students* (Vol. 1 & Vol. 2) – Pascarella & Terenzini (Jossey-Bass, 1991 and 2005)

Print Resources

- *Learning Reconsidered* (Vol. 1 & Vol. 2– ACPA & NASPA, 2004 and 2006)
- Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners – ACPA & NASPA, 2010
- *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* – Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005 (Jossey-Bass)
- *Building A Culture of Evidence in Student Affairs: A Guide for Leaders and Practitioners*-Culp & Dungy, 2012 (NASPA)

References

- Bloom, Benjamin S. (1956). Taxonomy of Education Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook I: Cognitive Development. New York: Longman Press.

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