

**Overcoming Obstacles in Administering
Assessment of Student Learning:
Practical Solutions for Everyday Challenges**



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Western Illinois University

- Two Campuses
 - Traditional residential campus
 - Opening year was 1902
 - Rural location (Macomb, IL)
 - Approximately 10,200 students
 - Student to faculty ratio is 16 to 1
 - Metropolitan upper-division commuter campus
 - Approximately 1,500 students
 - Four unique programs



Obstacles to Administering Assessment

- Knowledge: we have learned much from others and through trial and error
- Attitude: assessment can be daunting
- Ability: there is a learning curve
- Time: we need to make it time-effective
- Value: folks need to see the value in assessment to their program
- Administration: You absolutely must have support of upper administration

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Example 1: WIU Four Step Model

- All programs at WIU are required to use the four-step model for assessment of student learning:
 1. Two to four meaningful learning outcomes
 2. Direct measurement methods for each learning outcome (indirect optional)
 3. Results of data collection
 4. Impact: results drive improvement and change

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Importance of Defining Direct vs. Indirect Measurement:

- Direct Measurement
 - Provides clear evidence of student learning
 - Directly stem from the learning outcomes identified for each major and include, for example, content of knowledge tests and demonstrations of student skills acquired
- Indirect Measurement:
 - Results imply students have achieved learning outcomes but measures cannot stand on their own as proof of student learning

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Required Reporting Format

- Required to ensure each learning outcome may be clearly followed through all four steps when reviewed:
 - 1a. Learning Outcome #1
 - 1b. Direct Measure
 - 1c. Results
 - 1d. Impact
 - 2a. Learning Outcome #2
 - 2b. Direct Measure
 - 2c. Results
 - 2d. Impact



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Challenges?

- “Impact” is now expected to be reported for each learning outcome in the new reporting format
 - Act of integrating the results directly stemming from assessment of student learning data back into the program
 - Each year, the program report must contain an update or summary of ongoing impact
 - This can be an adjustment from previous assessment processes



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Example 2: Our At-A-Glance Matrix

- First used in 2009
- Helps us to ascertain the status of assessment of student learning in all programs across campus
- Portrays successes in assessment of student learning across the university to constituents
 - Needed to be formatted as “at-a-glance”



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The Matrix... (cont.)

- Reports and practices are evaluated and categorizes such as:
 - “Effective Assessment”
 - “Meets Requirements Minimally”
 - “No Direct Results (Indirect Only)”
 - Also indicates when grades are reported (unacceptable measure)



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College of Fine Arts and Communication

Department	Effective Assessment	Meets Requirements Minimally	No Direct Results (Indirect Only)	No Results	No Report Submitted	Grades Reported (Non-Assessment)	Plan File Report	No Updated Plan
Art (BA): (U)								
Art (BFA): (U)								
Art Teacher Education: (U)								
Broadcasting: (U)								
Communication: (U)								
Communication: (G)								
Communication Sciences and Disorders: (U)								
Communication Sciences and Disorders: (G)								
Museum Studies: (G)								
Music: (U) Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Music								
Music: Teacher Education								
Music: (G)								
Theatre: (U)								
BFA Musical Theatre: (U)								
MFA Theatre: (G)								



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Challenges?

- The first year, the matrix was a shock to those in departments that did not “measure up” to the standards at that time
- Public shaming is effective but not affirming
 - So, we want to walk a fine line here



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Challenges?

- The matrix is most useful when we can use it as an accountability measure
 - We have slowly increased our expectations using the matrix as a tool
- The matrix is only used internally



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Example 3: General Education

- Follows four step model
- There are six university-wide goals for general education
- Each department is assigned two goals to measure, which are transformed into learning outcomes
- Departments are encouraged to use embedded assessments as direct measures



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2007-2009 Implementation

- Data Collection
 - Report form created and distributed
 - Data reported for each goal, separated by each course
 - Multiple sections collapsed
 - Multiple methods (within a course) collapsed



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Sample Report Form

Assessment of Student Learning in General Education						
Data Report Form --- Fall 2013 Data						
Department	ECONOMICS		Enter data in yellow cells only.			
Goal # *	2 (CRITICAL THINKING)					
Course Number	Does Not Meet	Meets Minimally	Meets as Expected	Exceeds Expectations	TOTAL	
ECON 100Y Freq.	8	10	13	11	42	
all sections %	19%	24%	31%	26%	100%	
ECON 231 Freq.	46	140	103	57	346	
all sections %	13%	40%	30%	16%	100%	



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Challenges?

- Effectively communicating the value of general education assessment to departments
- Reinforcing the simple four steps and “rules” of assessment of student learning used in undergraduate and graduate program assessment, such as direct measures



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Challenges?

- Clarifying the reporting mechanism
- Capturing the impact of assessment of student learning in reporting



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Final Suggestions

- We have used three example areas to discuss challenges we still face on a daily basis as we work to institutionalize a culture of assessment
- Meaningful assessment is a term we use everyday
- We encourage programs to review what they are already doing to see what they might use for assessment and to see what is meaningful to them

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