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

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

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
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

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

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”
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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<thead>
<tr>
<th>College of Fine Arts and Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
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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
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

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

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
Sample Report Form

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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

Challenges?

- Clarifying the reporting mechanism
- Capturing the impact of assessment of student learning in reporting
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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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Effective Assessment</th>
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<th>No Direct Results (Indirect Only)</th>
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