

One Step at a Time! Inspiring Action Strategies to Meet Assessment of Student Learning Requirements

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Western Illinois University

- Two Campuses
 - Traditional residential campus
 - Opening year was 1902
 - Rural location (Macomb, IL)
 - Approximately 9,950 students
 - Student to faculty ratio is 16 to 1
 - Metropolitan upper-division commuter campus
 - Approximately 1,525 students
 - Four unique programs

1



Simplicity is Key on our Campus!

- We have found that we have had our best success with a consistent, simple model
- We use this model for undergraduate, graduate, and general education assessment of student learning

2



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

3



Required Reporting Format

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

4



Resistance to Assessment of Student Learning

- Knowledge
 - There is a learning curve
 - As new requirements are required or new members join a departmental assessment committee, knowledge must be obtained
 - Even administrators often come to the table needing education in assessment of student learning
- Time
 - We need to make it time-effective and doable
 - Streamlining really helps- that is what makes four step model so effective

5



Resistance to Assessment of Student Learning (cont.)

- Value
 - Folks need to see the value in assessment to their program
 - When they do not make that connection (which is also a product of educating on assessment) there is sometimes strong resistance
- Attitude
 - Assessment can be daunting
 - Sometimes we are afraid to admit we do not know how to do something
 - Sometimes assessment can be threatening
 - We are guides, mentors, and cheerleaders

6



Even Higher Order Resistance!

- Sometimes it is the case that programs have assessment processes in place that meet requirements, but when standards are raised, there is limited motivation to meet the new expectations.
 - In translating a new format to our programs, we mistakenly rushed in with changes too quickly
 - Maybe they liked the old way!
 - Maybe people dislike change! ☹️
- Regardless, we have learned that the message must be “let’s move forward”

7



So What are the Real Challenges?

- It has taken us seven years to get to the point where most programs are working fully on the fourth step, impact
 - And it seems like once we get there, sometimes we take a few steps back each time!
- What seems to be “simple” can be tough to implement as it is really asking programs to do “authentic assessment”
- This highlights the fact that the frustration of assessment of student learning is often not with the data or the application of outcomes!

8



Ways to Combat Resistance

- We have learned programs who are meeting requirements need to slowly be introduced to changing requirements (a shift in what has become routine processes for them) and for this to be done with respect to what they are already doing well
 - When evaluated at the administrative level, missing information on reports (or missing reports) do not always tell us why assessment is not thoroughly conducted
 - Sometimes you must take the slow method to move as quickly as possible with programs! (Covey, 1989)
 - We utilize time-consuming, slow methods of teaching and we work to instilling good will, glean information about processes as we work

10



Most Important Lessons Learned



- Call, don’t email



- Meet face-to-face so everyone hears the same message and can process it together

11



Ways to Combat Resistance (cont.)

- Turnover is one reason why a firm scaffolding of knowledge throughout the department or program is essential
 - Create a culture of assessment that does not leave with the individual
 - Let’s spend a few minutes in audience participation to share approaches and to strategize

12



Most Important Lessons Learned



- Requiring assessment committees be in place as well as assessment plans on file really cuts down on the impact of turnover
- Assessment may involve moving two steps forward and one step back, with forward progress as the main focus

13



Ways to Combat Resistance (cont.)

- You absolutely must have support of upper administration
 - Recent stop-gap measures at our university have included more strict repercussions for not submitting annual reports
 - A university-wide matrix indicating missing reports serves as a way to encourage programs to submit before the matrix goes to the governing bodies for distribution
 - Sometimes there's need to implement consequences for non-compliance. The fact that they exist is often enough.
 - No course curriculum from a program will be approved at the Provost's level without annual assessment reports on file
 - While these measures are helpful, they are punitive

14



Most Important Lessons Learned



- Make sure your "matrix" is correct before you send the report to governing bodies!!!
- Be realistic...you're working with real people, and we don't know everything going on in people's lives

15



Our At-A-Glance Matrix

- Birds' eye look at status of assessment of student learning in all programs across campus
- Portray successes in assessment of student learning across the university to constituents
- Very effective as a tool to facilitate improvement
- Categorizes:
 - "Effective Assessment"
 - "Meets Requirements Minimally"
 - "No Direct Results (Indirect Only)"

16



Example Matrix

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 (BEA): (U)								
Art Teacher Education: (U)								
Broadcasting: (U)								
Communication: (U)								
Communication: (G)								
Communication Sciences and Disorders: (U)								
Communication Sciences and Disorders: (G)								
Music 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)								

22



Final Suggestions

- Do not give up!
- Focus on progress
 - It really helps to compare year to year, and take a long view
 - Spend a little time with departments looking at where they have come over 5 years

17



Final Suggestions (cont.)

- Meaningful assessment is a term we use everyday
 - We encourage programs to look to what they are already doing to see what they might use for assessment, and to see what is meaningful to them
- Focus on positive, helpful solutions
 - To do so we must keep lines of communication open (this means work) and be positive in our discussion and communications about assessment in all areas



18



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23