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An Inquiry-Based Launchpad for Developing a Meta-Assessment Program

This handout is designed to promote critical and open inquiry-based thinking in relation to an institution's journey to develop a meta-assessment program, and the questions are not designed to be sequential. The primary purposes of these questions are to:

- **Begin assembling data to build the case for a meta-assessment program;**
- **Develop a stronger understanding of what we want assessment to accomplish for an institution;**
- **Generate ideas and get more people involved in the conversation;**
- **Ensure that our assessment program reflects the individual needs of the institution and its stakeholders;**
- **Serve as the impetus for developing a meta-assessment program;**
- **Guide improvements and planning (for those institutions that have a meta-assessment program)**

I. Beginning the Journey (10 questions)

Begin by asking insightful and relevant questions of as many people as possible about your institution's assessment program. Below are ten examples:

- How do we know our assessment program is improving student learning?
- What would someone from the outside say about our culture of assessment?
- Does our assessment program account for the rapidly changing needs of our students?
- Does our assessment program account for the increased competitive environment among institutions of higher learning?
- Does our institutional assessment of student learning transform the institution?
- Does our assessment program account for statistical reliability and validity?
- Who is the primary audience for our assessment program (e.g., who is it serving?)
- What would our students say about our assessment program?
- Does our assessment program look back or does it look forward?
- How do we ensure that our meta-assessment program is inclusive and addresses equity and diversity considerations in assessment practices?

II. ARTICULATE THE PURPOSE AND DEFINE SUCCESS (5 questions)

- How will our students benefit from a meta-assessment program?
- How will our institution improve and transform because of a successful meta-assessment program?
- How will we know if our meta-assessment program is successful?

- How do we want the meta-assessment program to improve our culture?
- What does the meta-assessment program say about what we value in the teaching and learning environment?

III. SECURING COLLABORATION AND SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT (5 questions)

- How can we address potential barriers or resistance to change and ensure all stakeholders understand the value and benefits of the meta-assessment program?
- What structures or mechanisms can we put in place to promote shared ownership and accountability for the success of the meta-assessment program?
- How do we involve faculty members and staff from various departments in shaping and implementing the meta-assessment program?
- How can we foster a collaborative environment that encourages active participation in the meta-assessment program?
- How can we ensure that this initiative adds substantive value to all programs involved?

IV. RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINED SUPPORT (5 questions)

- What institutional policies or guidelines need to be established to ensure the availability and allocation of resources for the meta-assessment program on an ongoing basis?
- What training and professional development opportunities are needed to enhance the assessment literacy and skills of faculty, staff, and administrators involved in the meta-assessment program?
- What technological resources, such as assessment platforms or data management systems (either external or home-grown), are needed to effectively collect, analyze, and report assessment data?
- What human resources, such as dedicated staff or assessment experts, are necessary to support the implementation and ongoing management of the meta-assessment program?
- What types of data analysis and visualization tools are necessary to effectively communicate assessment findings to different stakeholders within the institution?

V. CELEBRATING SUCCESS AND LEARNING FROM CHALLENGES (5 questions)

- How can we recognize and celebrate achievements and milestones in the meta-assessment program to motivate and inspire engagement and improvement?
- What mechanisms or platforms can we use to share success stories and best practices from the meta-assessment program with the broader institution and stakeholders?
- How can we collect feedback and lessons learned from faculty, staff, and students about their experiences with the meta-assessment program, and how can we use this feedback to enhance future iterations?
- How can we create opportunities for reflection and dialogue among different departments and programs involved in the meta-assessment program?
- What mechanisms or structures can we establish to ensure effective communication and action on findings and recommendations for improvement?

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Characteristics of an Effective Meta-Assessment Program

An effective meta-assessment program at a college or university encompasses several key characteristics that contribute to its success. Here are some possible characteristics of such a program:

1. **Clear Objectives and Purpose:** The meta-assessment program should have well-defined objectives and a clear purpose. It should outline the specific goals it aims to achieve and the areas of assessment it intends to cover. This clarity ensures that the program's efforts align with the institution's broader mission and strategic objectives.
2. **Rubric:** A rubric in a meta-assessment program provides structure, consistency, and guidance for evaluating program-level assessment plans. It fosters transparency, communication, and improvement, ultimately contributing to the effectiveness and impact of the meta-assessment program in enhancing teaching, learning, and institutional quality.
3. **Comprehensive Scope:** A robust meta-assessment program considers various dimensions of assessment, including but not limited to student learning outcomes, teaching effectiveness, program or curriculum evaluation, institutional effectiveness, and student support services. It takes into account the diverse stakeholders and their assessment needs across different levels of the institution.
4. **Collaborative Approach:** Effective meta-assessment programs encourage collaboration among faculty, administrators, students, and other relevant stakeholders. Collaboration fosters a shared understanding of assessment processes and facilitates the integration of multiple perspectives. Engaging stakeholders in the design, implementation, and interpretation of assessment data helps to build buy-in and promote meaningful change.
5. **Rigorous Data Collection and Analysis:** The program should employ rigorous data collection and analysis methodologies. It should use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather relevant data, such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, and direct observations. Robust data analysis techniques should be applied to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.
6. **Continuous Improvement:** An effective meta-assessment program emphasizes continuous improvement. It should provide mechanisms to collect feedback and recommendations from stakeholders and use this information to refine assessment practices. Regularly reviewing and revising assessment methods and processes based on evidence and best practices helps to enhance the effectiveness of the program over time.
7. **Transparent Reporting and Communication:** The program should prioritize transparent reporting and communication of assessment results. This includes sharing findings, interpretations, and recommendations with relevant stakeholders in a timely and accessible manner. Clear and concise reports should be produced, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Open and transparent communication builds trust and facilitates informed decision-making.
8. **Integration of Findings into Decision-Making:** An effective meta-assessment program ensures that assessment findings are integrated into decision-making processes. The program should facilitate the use of assessment data to inform policy development, programmatic changes,

curriculum improvements, and resource allocation. The goal is to close the assessment loop and create a culture of evidence-based decision-making throughout the institution.

9. **Professional Development and Support:** To foster a culture of assessment, the program should offer professional development opportunities and support for faculty and staff. Training sessions, workshops, and resources should be provided to enhance assessment literacy and build capacity in assessment design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Ongoing support and guidance are essential to empower stakeholders to engage effectively in the assessment process.
10. **Evaluation of the Meta-Assessment Program:** Lastly, an effective meta-assessment program incorporates an evaluation component to assess its own effectiveness. Regularly evaluating the program's processes, outcomes, and impact helps identify areas of improvement and ensures that the program remains responsive to evolving needs and challenges.

Meta-Assessment Sample Rubric

Criteria	Beginning (1)	Emerging (2)	Proficient (3)	Exemplary (4)	SCORE
Program Learning Objectives (PLOs)	The PLOs do not reflect any discernible professional or discipline-specific standards, or PLOs do not exist at all	The PLOs are based on some normed standards but have not been reviewed recently. Outside feedback from industry professionals was not obtained.	The PLOs are based on professional standards and feedback from industry professionals.	The PLOs are based upon professional standards, feedback has been obtained recently (within three-five years), and multiple stakeholders (e.g., students, peers, or colleagues) are involved in some manner.	
Assessment Alignment with PLOs	There is no evident alignment with PLOs or the assessment methods in the program-level assessment plan.	Some alignment exists with a limited number of PLOs but not all. Some PLOs have not been assessed in recent years, or alignment is unclear.	There is clear alignment between all PLOs and assessment methods, but some have not been assessed in recent years or regularly.	Each PLO has its own specific assessment method, and all PLOs have been assessed in recent (3-4) years.	
Assessment Structure	The Program-Level Assessment Plan (program-level assessment plan) has only one of the following attributes:	The program-level assessment plan contains two of the following attributes: 1) multiple direct and indirect assessments (other	The assessment plan has all of the following attributes: 1) multiple direct and indirect assessments (other than course grades) are used.	The program-level assessment plan has all of the following necessary attributes: 1) multiple direct and indirect assessments (other	

	<p>1) multiple direct and indirect assessments (other than course grades) are used.</p> <p>2) assessments are used regularly (i.e., not just given once to get initial data).</p> <p>3) assessments provide comprehensive information on student performance at each stage of their program's curricula</p>	<p>than course grades) are used.</p> <p>2) assessments are used regularly (i.e., not just given once to get initial data).</p> <p>3) assessments provide comprehensive information on student performance at each stage of their program's curricula</p>	<p>2) assessments are used regularly (i.e., not just given once to get initial data).</p> <p>3) assessments provide comprehensive information on student performance at each stage of their program's curricula</p>	<p>than course grades) are used.</p> <p>2) assessments are used regularly (i.e., not just given once to get initial data).</p> <p>3) assessments provide comprehensive information on student performance at each stage of their program's curricula,</p> <p><u>AND</u> there are at least three years of consistent use of each attribute.</p>	
<p>Curriculum Mapping and Staging of Assessment in the Program</p>	<p>No curriculum map exists.</p>	<p>A curriculum map exists, but it is not reflective of current courses.</p>	<p>A curriculum map is in full use, and it has been updated to reflect courses in the curriculum; all PLOs are mapped in the curricula. Not all PLOs have been assessed, though.</p>	<p>The curriculum map identifies where/to what extent each PLO is addressed and offers evidence that students have sufficient opportunity to demonstrate the objectives. The map also indicates the associated assignment/project/event/task.</p>	
<p>Data Collection and Submission</p>	<p>Data are not collected across multiple points and are not submitted to a centralized location as determined by each school or program. There is no</p>	<p>Data are collected at some points and are only reported periodically, with gaps over time. There is some but minimal rationale regarding that data's</p>	<p>Data are systematically collected at multiple points, and there is a strong rationale regarding the data's</p>	<p>Data are systematically collected at multiple points and provide a strong relationship between assessments and student success. Data are directly</p>	

	<p>rationale regarding the data's relationship to student success.</p> <p>Data has no methodology for ensuring reliability (the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results or validity (how well a test measures what it is purported to measure)</p>	<p>relationship to student success.</p> <p>Some methods of reliability and validity are under consideration or in the development phases but not fully deployed.</p>	<p>relationship to student success.</p> <p>At least one of the assessments demonstrates either reliability and validity demonstration.</p>	<p>linked to outcomes and show trends over time.</p> <p>Two or more assessment measures consist of sound methods of demonstrating reliability or validity.</p>
<p>Program Improvement</p>	<p>Data are generated for surface-level purposes but not linked to any signs of program improvement or changes. The data may be oriented primarily toward grades or GPAs.</p> <p>No evidence that data is used to improve the program or inform changes therein.</p>	<p>Data are generated and linked to limited program improvement or changes.</p> <p>Measures might gauge student progress within a program, but their use to improve the program or inform changes is limited</p>	<p>Data are generated and part of ongoing efforts to improve the program.</p> <p>A few assessment plan measures are used to inform program improvements or changes therein, but there might not be a multi-year track record of such measures.</p>	<p>Data are generated and a part of ongoing efforts to improve the program. There are clear examples of program changes as a result.</p> <p>All measures are directly linked to changes, interventions, or activities at various levels. There is clear evidence that the program is aligned with national standards of some type. There are examples of student outcome data (e.g., student employment, graduate school placements, etc.)</p>

				linked directly to changes to the program.
Assessment Data Sharing	Assessment data are not shared with students, colleagues, or the dean.	Assessment data is shared with colleagues or dean, and feedback is sought. Data is not shared with students.	Assessment data is shared with colleagues, my dean, and feedback is sought. Data is shared with students.	Assessment data is shared with colleagues, dean, and feedback is sought. Data is shared with students, and they are invited to provide feedback regarding the methods of assessment.
				Total Score