

Undergraduate Program Assessment

I. Introduction

- a. Biggest Challenges:
 - i. Need to establish that assessment “buy-in” – finding resistance in departments
 - ii. Difficult to create continuity in assessment
 - iii. Assessment is asking us to rethink how we teach – more than just a “gut” feeling but looking at data
 - iv. Tremendous time investment
 - v. Knowing how to get meaningful data about the department from students who are non-majors
 - vi. Knowing how to use/interpret your data to make meaningful changes in your classroom
 - vii. Knowing where to start and what questions to collect data on
- b. Greatest Successes
 - i. Brings the faculty (on the assessment committee) together – really one of the only times to get an overview of what is happening in your department
 - ii. Opportunity to see what students are learning and how
 - iii. Showing us how we need to improve the whole program
 - iv. Bringing students into assessment prompts students to reflect on their own learning, which increases their learning

II. Breakout Discussions – 3 Examples

a. Rob Bayliss, Spanish

- i. Overview
 - 1. Several years of assessing student writing as an entrance into our major and in the capstone experience – previously trying to use the same rubric to assess both projects, but we’ve tweaked it to accommodate
 - 2. In the last year we’ve started assessing oral communication, as well as written
 - a. Prompted to assess oral because dissatisfied with student writing
 - b. Creation of a rubric to identify the four skills we wanted to see (thesis, argumentation, text analysis, structure, mechanics)
- ii. Assessment:
 - 1. Started pulling sample writing because 100 writing samples per course was unsustainable
 - 2. Took time to communicate that assessment and grading are different things – we assessed separately because professors were more willing if they didn’t have to change the way they grade

3. Shift to assessing oral communication
 - a. Threw out textbooks in two communication classes to use Talk Abroad program (\$50) that allow for 5 half hour, recorded conversations with native speakers that grad students grade with a rubric
- iii. How does this feed back into instruction?
 1. Bringing results to instructors, e.g. “we’re seeing from our data that students have a difficult time coming up with a thesis”
 2. Creating a “play book” for instructors – as opposed to a set of rigid standards – to guide prompt for working on the same goals

b. Allison Olcott-Marshall, Geology

- i. Looking at how you begin assessment, what questions you ask, how you determine learning outcomes to assess, and how you use that data to track curriculum.
- ii. Started with forming learning outcomes – all faculty started with ideas of what students to know, but we collaborated to make 4 official learning outcomes (2 skills based, 2 knowledge based)
- iii. Faculty self-evaluated their own courses for addressing these learning outcomes
 1. Students were learning basic skills early, but skipping ahead to application right away
 2. This allowed us to identify problems without placing blame
 3. Also helped us determine the best sequence of courses.
- iv. Found it to be difficult to use professors final exams to assess learning outcomes – doesn’t map
 1. Plan is to give a pre and post exam test to assess (hand out exam with syllabus and exam with final evaluations to track the skills/knowledge before and after)
- v. Looking for data on what order students are taking these courses and looking for correlations with grades – goal to adapt pre-requisites

c. Lori Vanchena, German

- i. Working with a pilot program through Blackboard – the reporting process is wonderful, very efficient
- ii. Challenge:
 1. Small department, team of three instructors scoring 200 and 300-level courses, as well as the capstone
 2. Generating enough data to make it useful, is overwhelming – we are realizing we need to find another way
- iii. Where can we be more efficient? (Especially in a very small department?)

1. The only way to reduce time is to reduce the number of essays you're scoring (maybe look at smaller sample? look at fewer classes?)
2. Get as many colleagues together as you can for one day and have them score – sell this process to your department, feed them food

III. Your Own Assessment

- a. Where are we getting stuck?
 - i. English department: need to not only gather the data, but analyze it together, and need to have a conversation about whether or not we should be sequencing our courses
 - ii. Instructors support assessment, but actually getting it done is more difficult
 1. Intervening factors: budget reductions, external pressures, institutional exigencies
 - iii. Individual courses may be doing a terrific job, but is this translating to the curricular level?
- b. What has proven helpful?
 - i. Aligning our department goals with the core goals – reflects what the university has decided is important for student learning
 - ii. Helpful to become more specific about goals and grouping them together for assessment
 - iii. Interest in how we could use Blackboard more, and more efficiently
 - iv. Once we recognize that we're all doing this together – that this is a collective enterprise, not an individual course enterprise – we can gather more support
 - v. Using concrete data to generate more comprehensive “buy-in”