Continuous Improvement in Academic Affairs

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CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
IN ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of engaging in this session, participants will

- Articulate the importance of assessment
- Differentiate between assessment and research
- Differentiate and define primary types of assessment
- Articulate the four questions necessary to build a quality assessment plan
- Explain how a program can demonstrate and verify improvement
- Draft an assessment report
ASSESSMENT BASICS
PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT

- Reinforce or emphasize the mission of your unit
- Improve a program’s quality or performance
- Inform planning and decision-making
- Assist in the request for additional funds from the college or university and external community
- Assist in the reallocation of resources
- Assist in meeting accreditation requirements, models of best practices, and national benchmarks
- Reflect on the attitudes and approaches we take in improving learning and development
- Celebrate successes
ASSESSMENT = MEANINGFUL + INFORMATIVE

“When assessment feels like a burden, it is probably being done wrong.”
- Wells
BARRIERS TO ASSESSMENT

- Time
- Knowledge/Skills
- Confidence
- Technology
- Environment/Politics
- Complexity
- Others?
Assessment Model/Cycle

Adapted from Linda Suskie (2018)
ASSESSMENT V. RESEARCH

- Assessment guides good practice, while research guides theory and conceptual foundations; Assessment typically has implications for a single institution, while research typically has broader implications for student affairs and higher education.

- Research paper outline:
  - Introduction
  - Literature, Review
  - Method
  - Findings
  - Discussion
  - Limitations, Implications, Future Research

- Assessment project outline:
  - Outcomes
  - Measures
  - Results
  - Report
  - Use of Results for Improvement
PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

A pig never fattened because it was weighed.

Measure → Change → Measure

A 5k time does not improve just because of a diet change.
BUILDING AN ASSESSMENT PLAN

- What do you want to know?
- Why do you want to know it?
- Is this the appropriate level for the students?
- How can you measure it?
- Where is there room for improvement?
FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS OF AN ASSESSMENT

Student Learning and Development Outcomes

- What is the effect of our work on students?
- How are they different as a result of interacting with our programs and services?
- How do we know?
- How do we demonstrate their learning?
- What and how do we measure?

Program Evaluation

- Is the program or service functioning effectively to achieve its mission?
- What evidence is available to support the determination?
- Learning and development outcomes are part of this evidence
- How is evidence used to make program decisions?
DEVELOPING AND USING LEARNING OUTCOMES
COVERT ACTION VERBS/PHRASES

- Appreciate
- Become aware of
- Become familiar with
- Know
- Learn
- Understand

Why are these considered covert?
EXAMPLE OUTCOMES – UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

Students will communicate effectively in writing.

Program graduates will be able to define and interpret methodological and statistical constructs.

Students will be able to explain how key values and social practices associated with American Life have evolved in distinct historical periods.

Economics majors will apply supply and demand and identify equilibrium in competitive markets.

Senior criminal justice majors will appropriately apply knowledge of the criminal justice system.

PHE majors will be able to analyze the social, behavioral, environmental, and multicultural determinants of health status that contribute to health disparities.

- Kennesaw State University
EXAMPLE OUTCOMES – MASTER’S LEVEL

- Make a contribution to the scholarship of the field.
- Learn advanced research skills
  - Synthesize existing knowledge, identifying and accessing appropriate resources and other sources of relevant information and critically analyzing and evaluating one’s own findings and those of others
  - Apply existing research methodologies, techniques, and technical skills
  - Communicate in a style appropriate to the discipline
- Demonstrate commitment to advancing the values of scholarship
  - Keep abreast of current advances within one’s field and related areas
  - Show commitment to personal professional development through engagement in professional societies and other knowledge transfer modes
  - Show a commitment to creating an environment that supports learning – through teaching, collaborative inquiry, mentoring, or demonstration
- Demonstrate professional skills
  - Adhere to ethical standards in the discipline
  - Listen, give, and receive feedback effectively

- Cornell University Graduate School
EXAMPLE OUTCOMES – PH.D. PROGRAMS

All graduates will be able to

- Critically apply theories, methodologies, and knowledge to address fundamental questions in their primary area of study. (Research, Critical Thinking, Content Knowledge)

- Pursue research of significance in the discipline or an interdisciplinary or creative project. Students plan and conduct this research or implement this project under the guidance of an advisor while developing the intellectual independence that typifies true scholarship. (Research, Critical and Creative Thinking)

- Demonstrate skills in oral and written communication sufficient to publish and present work in their field and to prepare grant proposals. (Communication)

- Follow the principles of ethics in their field and in academia. (Ethics)

- Demonstrate, through service, the value of their discipline to the academy and community at large. (Service, Content Knowledge)

- Demonstrate a mastery of skills and knowledge at a level required for college and university undergraduate teaching in their discipline and assessment of student learning. (Content Knowledge, Teaching)

- Interact productively with people from diverse backgrounds as both leaders/mentors and team members with integrity and professionalism. (Communication, Leadership)

- Washington State University Graduate School
ASSESSMENT METHODS
QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE

When numbers matter:
- Need to know how many
- Show change over time
- Requested by constituents
- Usage
- RRPG
- Dashboards and Scorecard

When stories matter:
- Curious about why
- Essence of experiences
- Seeking to understand
- Don’t know your variables
DIRECT AND INDIRECT METHODS

Direct Methods

Any process employed to gather data which requires subjects to display changes in their knowledge, behavior, or thought processes.

Indirect Methods

Any process employed to gather data which asks subjects to reflect upon their knowledge, behaviors, or thought processes.
LEARNING OUTCOME MEASURES

What are you already doing?

Examples/Options

• Coursework: Papers, projects, or required assignments
• Exams
• Thesis/Dissertation
• Portfolios
• Oral Presentations
• Field Experiences
• Professional Projects
• Essays
• Peer-reviewed Submissions for Publications
• Disciplinary Conference Presentations
• Peer-reviewed Grant Applications
THINK (Yourself)

PAIR (With a partner)

SHARE (Whole class)
SHARING AND USING ASSESSMENT RESULTS
WHY SHARE RESULTS?

- Recognition/Validation
- Responsibility/Accountability
- Increases participation
- Reduces chance of redundant data collection
- Promotes institutional transparency
- Helps others be more educated
- Combats survey fatigue
- Reinforces importance of assessment
USES OF ASSESSMENT

Internal to Institution
- Budget Allocations
- Decision Making
- Program Development
- Program Evaluation and Improvement
- Interventions
- Marketing
USES OF ASSESSMENT

External to Institution
- Accreditation Reports
- Benchmarking
- Accountability Agencies
- Publicity or Marketing
- Grant Applications
REFERENCES


QUESTIONS?