

Assessment at the Modern Research University

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Introduction

- Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs
- Office of Assessment – responsible for assisting with and reporting on:
 - ✓ Undergraduate program review/assessment
 - ✓ General education assessment
 - ✓ Assessment of units within DUAP
 - ✓ Annual Undergraduate Assessment Symposium



What is Assessment?

- Intentionally gathering information which illuminates student achievement of stated learning outcomes
- Using that information in course, curriculum, and program planning and development
- Ultimate goal is to enhance student learning and development



What is Assessment?

- It may include indirect measures such as surveys
- But it should rest primarily on direct measures of student learning – papers, projects, specific exam questions, or other student performances
- Course grades will not typically provide enough detailed information for decision making



The Research Culture

- Decentralization is the hallmark of the research culture
- Faculty members often identify more closely with their disciplines than with the university
- “More feudal than bureaucratic”
- Research production is rewarded more than undergraduate teaching



Implications for Assessment

- Decentralization implies that assessment “mandated from above” is unlikely to be successful
- Programs with national (disciplinary) accrediting agencies that use an outcomes assessment approach (ABET, NCATE, AACSB, and others) are generally most receptive to assessment



Implications...

- Resistance runs the gamut, from:
 - o “This cannot be done with the resources we have” to
 - o “This is not worth doing even if we had the resources” to
 - o “We are already doing this – we call it grading” to
 - o “It is not possible to measure what I/we teach”



Implications...

- These can be usefully placed into three categories:
 - Faculty members at research universities are not rewarded for doing assessment – the rewards are in research (extrinsic value problem)
 - We have not made the case that assessment is worth doing, and that grading as usually practiced is a poor substitute for assessment (intrinsic value problem)

Implications...

- We often leave the impression that assessment is about measuring rather than about judgment (science experiment problem)



Assessment at NC State

- Assessment at NC State is decentralized
- The Associate Dean in each college is responsible for ensuring that undergraduate program assessment takes place
- The Associate Deans are in a position to recognize (and perhaps reward) faculty members who are involved in assessment activities



Assessment at NC State

- By freeing the assessment professionals on campus from being “assessment cops”, we can focus on assisting faculty with developing efficient and effective assessment processes



Assessment at NC State

- Each year, each program and DUAP unit reports (to the Associate Dean) on assessment activities that year
- Undergraduate academic programs undergo a comprehensive review periodically, typically involving outside reviewers



Assessment at NC State

- The purpose of assessment at NC State is formative – to enhance student learning
- It is critical that the assessment process provide meaningful, useful information to faculty members and program directors
- Thus, the Associate Deans have a great deal of latitude in determining how assessment will be carried out in their respective colleges



Assessment at NC State

- Disaggregated information is most useful to individual faculty members and programs
- Institutional level data tends to be less compelling
- Thus we focus on course, program and unit level assessment that is developed by the faculty and program directors



Future Directions

- Spellings' Commission and the national push for accountability
- States are also calling for higher education to be more accountable
- The implied unit of analysis of these discussions is the institution (or even the system)



Future Directions

- There is also a role for accountability within institutions
- Programs must show that they are (or will be, if funded) fulfilling a need in an effective manner
- Assessment for improvement can fulfill that role in addition to providing information for enhancement



Future Directions

- It is not clear how assessment for improvement will provide information for accountability when the institution is the unit of analysis
- A strategy is to search for common outcomes across curricula and programs and “roll up” results for those outcomes



Final Thought

“Here is the reality plain and simple...People are questioning our mission and questioning who we are. They claim we cost too much, spend carelessly, teach poorly, plan myopically, and when we are questioned, we act defensively.”

Thomas Kean

