

Assessing Student Learning Outcomes: The Why and What?

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Presentation Overview

- Overview of Outcomes-Based Assessment (OBA)
- Importance of OBA
- Why Focus on Assessing Student Learning
- Examples of Assessing Student Learning
- Questions



Ask Yourself These Questions

- What decision did you make about your program last year?
- What evidence did you use to inform that decision?
- What was it that you were trying to influence about your program when making that decision with the stated evidence?

That is Outcomes-Based Assessment

- Most people do capitalize on their innate intellectually curiosity to find out what works
- Most people just don't articulate their intended end results (e.g., outcomes) ahead of time
- Most people don't document the decisions made based on their results
- Most people don't follow up later to see if their decisions made the intended improvement



The Assessment Cycle (Bresciani, 2003)

- The key questions...
 - What are we trying to do and why? or
 - What is my program supposed to accomplish?
 - How well are we doing it?
 - How do we know?
 - How do we use the information to improve or celebrate successes?
 - Do the improvements we make work?

The Iterative Systematic Assessment Cycle

Adapted from
Peggy Maki, Ph.D. by
Marilee J. Bresciani, Ph.D.



Assessment (Bresciani et alia, 2006)

- Most importantly, it should be
 - Understood = by professionals and students
 - Inclusive = involve as many professionals as possible
 - Meaningful = professional (i.e., expert) driven
 - Manageable = takes into account varying resources
 - Flexible = takes into account assessment learning curves
 - Truth-seeking/objective/ethical
 - Iterative and systematic
- Inform decisions for continuous improvement or provides evidence of proof
- Promote a culture of accountability, of learning, and of improvement

What are you already doing that could be considered outcomes-based assessment?

Why is outcomes-based assessment important?



The Purpose

- Outcomes-Based assessment does not exist for assessment's sake
- It is taking what most of us already do, and making it systematic
- It is NOT personnel evaluation



The Purpose, Cont.

- Its purpose is to reflect on the end result of doing - - are we accomplishing that which we say we are?
- All types of assessment have value (e.g., needs, utilization, satisfaction, learning and development) but we have to pay attention to evaluating student learning



Purpose of Assessment, Cont.

By M.J. Bresciani

- 1) Reinforce or emphasize the mission of your unit
- 2) Improve programs and/or performance
(formative)
- 3) Compare a program's quality or value to the
program's previously defined principles
(summative)
- 4) Inform planning
- 5) Inform decision making

Purpose of Assessment, Cont.

By M.J. Bresciani

- 6) Inform policy discussions at the local, state, regional, and national level
- 7) Evaluate programs, not personnel
- 8) Assist in the request for additional funds from the University and external community
- 9) Assist in the re-allocation of resources
- 10) Assist in meeting accreditation requirements, models of best practices, and national benchmarks



Purpose of Assessment, Cont.

By M.J. Bresciani

- 12) Celebrate successes
- 13) Manage expectations
- 14) Reflect on the attitudes and approach we take in improving teaching and learning
- 15) Create a culture of continuous improvement
– a culture of accountability, of learning, and of improvement

Drivers of Outcomes-Based Assessment (Ewell, 2001)

- To improve the underperforming student
- Competency Movement in Business and Industry
- International Trade Agreements
 - Affecting higher Education - Competition for new providers in Postsecondary or Tertiary Education
 - Transnational Education or Globalism
 - Massification of Education



Drivers, Cont.

- Federal Government Conversation, 1985
 - The Higher Education Re-authorization Act Testimonies in USA, 2002 and 2006
 - Response to NCLB Legislation
 - Regional Accreditation – flexibility
 - CRAC – 2003, 2004
 - Both documents focus on student learning
- National Commission
 - Public Information about Performance
 - Transparency of outcomes and results



Drivers, Cont.

- Bologna Declaration of 1999
- Other Research on Collaborative/Integrated Learning
 - NSSE Deep Learning Project
 - National Research Council
 - AAC&U Greater Expectations
 - NASPA/ACPA Learning Reconsidered
 - Sweden and Norway

Why is it so important to focus on evaluating student learning?



The Focus on Assessing Student Learning



- “The concepts of learning, personal development, and student development are inextricably intertwined and inseparable.”
- The Student Learning Imperative



The Importance of Student Learning

“It is important for student development professionals to inform the academic side of the institution of their desire to establish, maintain, and assess functional collaborations. Among these should be collaborations that

- promote measurable student learning
- promote student engagement and socio-academic integration
- provide training to student affairs staff about learning environments and learning outcomes.”

-James A. Anderson
Bresciani, M.J.



Some Questions about Student Learning and Development

- What do you expect your students to know and be able to do by the end of their education at your institution?
- What do the curricula and the co-curricular “add up to?”
- What do you do in your programs to promote the kinds of learning and development that your institution seeks?

Some More Questions

- Which students benefit from which co-curricular experiences?
- What co-curricular processes are responsible for the intended student outcomes the institution seeks?
- How can you help students make connections between classroom learning and experiences outside of the classroom?
- How do you intentionally build upon what each of you fosters to achieve?

Questions that Direct the Development of Synergy between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs

James A. Anderson, Ph.D.

- What is the thinking task, intellectual experience, and/or co-curricula experience that needs to be designed relative to the preparation level and diversity of the students at your institution?
- Can the interpersonal transactions that occur in the everyday life of the student and that reflect cultural orientations serve as a basis for potential new models of critical thinking? What curricular experiences will promote this skill development?

Questions that Direct the Development of Synergy between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Continued

James A. Anderson, Ph.D.

- What structures need to evolve to assure that students have the opportunity to enhance academic self-concept and understand their role in the culture of learning at your institution?



Additional Questions

- How are you directly or indirectly contributing to student learning?
- How are you directly or indirectly supporting student learning?
- How are you directly or indirectly interfering with student learning?



Why Move Away from Student Satisfaction Assessment?

- Student satisfaction, utilization, and needs assessment are very important
- However, they don't help you understand the contributions of your program
- They don't tell you how your program contributes to student development and learning
- It seldom helps you make decisions for continuous improvement of your programs

Why Move Away from Student Satisfaction Assessment? Cont.

- All the previous documents
- The Higher Learning Commission
- CRAC
- CAS



Example of Satisfaction to...

- 97% of the career service participants will agree or strongly agree that career service programs provided information and assistance that were helpful to their preparation to leave the University.



...Development and Learning

- Students will demonstrate appropriate interview skills during video-taped mock interviews.
- Students will identify steps of informed decision-making when selecting their career.
- Students will document their qualifications for a position in their resume and performance portfolios.



Compare Assessment Methods for Satisfaction

- Self-report satisfaction survey
- Maybe interviews
- Maybe observations



Compare Assessment Methods for Dev. and Learn.

- Self-report Survey
- Interviews based on criteria
- Observations based on criteria
- Standardized career service assessment instruments
- Student Portfolios
- Peer evaluation
- Self evaluation
- Evidence of knowledge of discipline in portfolio



Another Example of Satisfaction to ...

- 85% of the student recreation participants' needs for recreational activities will be satisfied.



... Development and Learning

- Students completing the wellness class will demonstrate the proper use of the cardiovascular and weight lifting equipment.
- Student workers will articulate a concern for student participants' safety and wellness.
- Graduate students will summarize how undergraduates generally learn about wellness issues.



... Development and Learning

- Student recreational center users will exhibit respect for the recreational center equipment.
- In partnership with student health, student participants in the jointly offered workshops will articulate an awareness of nutrition and stress' impact on wellness.



Compare Assessment Methods for Satisfaction

- Self-report satisfaction survey
- Self-report needs survey
- Utilization statistics
- Maybe interviews
- Maybe observations

Compare Assessment Methods for Dev. and Learn.

- Self-report survey
- Utilization statistics
- Interviews based on criteria
- Observations based on criteria
- Performance reviews
- Student portfolios
- Peer evaluation
- Self evaluation
- Student essays
- Evidence of knowledge of discipline in portfolio



Questions to Ask Yourself

- Which outcome and assessment methods will help me understand what it is that I am doing that is leading to the outcome?
- Which outcome and assessment methods help me understand why I am doing what I am doing?
- Will this kind of evidence help me make the decisions I need to make?



Interactive Time

What is Your Example?



Re-Casting Services

- In some cases, you may need to re-cast your services so that you can provide opportunities to assess or evaluate that which you are attempting to evaluate.
- Or you may just need to sit down and articulate the criteria that describes that which you want demonstrated (i.e. What does problem solving look like?)

If You are Still Having Trouble...

- Diagram or map which activity, program, project, or workshop is delivering or is producing each intended outcome.
 - Once you have identified how you are delivering each outcome, you can list out the activities and literally map them to the outcomes, which they are delivering.

An Example of an Outcome Delivery Map

	Activity/Project/Workshop 1	Activity/Project/Workshop 2	Etc.	Etc.
Outcome 1				
Outcome 2				
Outcome 3				
Etc.				



Closing the Assessment Loop

- Briefly report methodology for each outcome
- Document where the students are meeting the intended outcome
- Document where they are not meeting the outcome
- Document decisions made to improve the program and assessment plan
- Refine assessment method and repeat process after proper time for implementation



Reporting Strategies

from Gary Hanson, Ph.D.

- Know your data
- Know your audience
- Tell the story
 - Identify meaningful indicators to shape the story
 - Examine indicators for patterns
- Begin with the end in mind
- Involve the end users in the process

Take-Home Messages

- You do not have to assess everything you do every year.
- You don't have to do everything at once-start with 2 or 3 learning outcomes
- Think baby steps
- Be flexible
- Acknowledge and use what you have already done.
- Assessment expertise is available to help - -not to evaluate your program
- Borrow examples from other institutions to modify as appropriate
- Time for this must be re-allocated
- We allocate time according to our priorities

Resources

- Each Other
- University Planning and Analysis (UPA) Assessment website
 - <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/>
- Undergraduate Assessment website
http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/assess.htm
- Higher Learning Commission Website
<http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/>



Questions?



One Minute Evaluation

- What is the most valuable lesson that you learned from this workshop?
- What is one question that you still have?
- What do you think is the next step that your division/program needs to take in order to implement systematic program assessment?

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