Assessment within the Framework of Learning-Centered Instruction

Program assessment is an on-going process designed to monitor and improve student learning. Faculty:
- develop explicit statements of what students should learn (learning outcomes)
- verify that the program is designed to foster this learning (alignment)
- collect empirical data that indicate student attainment (assessment)
- use these data to improve student learning (closing the loop)

Learning-Centered Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Program Goals</th>
<th>Students learn:</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• The concepts, theories, research findings, techniques, and values of the discipline</td>
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<td>• How to integrate what they learn to solve complex, real-world problems</td>
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<td>• An array of core learning outcomes, such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, information literacy, and leadership skills</td>
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| Curriculum | Students construct knowledge by integrating new learning into what they already know. |
|           | • Feedback guides student improvement. |
|           | • Students can learn, clarify ideas, and develop alternative perspectives through reflection and interpersonal interactions. |

| How Students Learn | Students engage in learning experiences to master course learning outcomes. |
|                   | • Grades indicate mastery of course learning outcomes. |

| Course Structure | Based on engagement of students |
|                 | • Help students be “intentional learners” (AAC&U; greaterexpectations.org) |

| Pedagogy | Faculty use a repertoire of teaching techniques to meet the needs of diverse students and to promote different types of learning outcomes, such as |
|         | • Active learning |
|         | • Collaborative and cooperative learning |
|         | • Community-service learning |
|         | • Homework and laboratory assignments |
|         | • Lectures and discussion |
|         | • Online learning |
|         | • Problem-based learning |

| Course Delivery | Design learning environments to meet student and program needs |
|                | • Share interests and enthusiasm with students |
|                | • Provide students formative feedback on their progress; grade student work |
|                | • Mentor student development in and out of the classroom |
|                | • Assess class sessions, courses, and programs to improve their effectiveness |
Campus

- Co-curriculum and support services are aligned to support learning.
- Program reviews and campus decision-making are conducted within a “culture of evidence.”
- Recognition and reward systems value contributions to learning and encourage flexibility to uncover new ways to encourage/support learning.
- Routine campus conversations about learning

Assessment

- Faculty use classroom assessment to improve day-to-day learning in courses (Angelo & Cross, Classroom Assessment, Jossey-Bass, 1993).
- Faculty use program assessment to improve learning throughout the curriculum.
- Faculty and others assess their impact to improve institutional effectiveness.

Alignment

Curriculum Cohesion
- The curriculum systematically provides students multiple opportunities to synthesize, practice, and develop increasingly complex ideas, skills, and values.
- Students are given opportunities to find connections between courses and to consolidate their learning.
- All courses have explicit course learning outcomes that align with program-level outcomes.
- Reasonable prerequisites are established and enforced.

Pedagogy and Grading
- The pedagogy aligns with course learning outcomes.
- Students receive formative feedback on program learning outcomes as they progress through the program.
- Students are actively engaged in their learning.
- Faculty use grading as a tool to promote student attainment of course outcomes.
- Course grades reflect the extent to which students master course outcomes.
- Course exams and assignments assess each outcome at the appropriate level (surface vs. deep learning).

Support Services
- Tutoring center staff, librarians, and others on campus are aware of course and program outcomes. They collaborate with faculty to provide needed support.
- The co-curriculum provides enrichment activities that support program learning outcomes.
- Faculty and staff development programs support contributions to learning and address needs identified through the assessment of academic programs.

Basics of Program Assessment

Assessment Steps
1. Define goals and outcomes.
2. Check for alignment between the curriculum and outcomes.
3. Develop a meaningful, manageable, and sustainable assessment plan.
4. Collect assessment data.
5. Close the loop—collective reflection and action.
6. Routinely examine the assessment process.
Basic Assessment Vocabulary
• Direct vs. Indirect Assessment
• Value-Added vs. Absolute Attainment
• Embedded Assessment
• Authentic Assessment
• Formative vs. Summative Assessment

General Principles for Doing Assessment Well

Types of Leadership Required for Effective Assessment:
• Externally Oriented Leadership. A president or other leader advocates for institutional control of assessment with relevant funding agencies, governing bodies, and accrediting organizations and maintains positive relationships with these external groups.
• Strategic Leadership. A chief academic officer or other administrator advocates for and integrates assessment into campus policies and procedures.
• Process Leadership. A person or group provides training, consulting, and general support for effective assessment.
• Technical Leadership. A person or group provides technical support in assessment methodology, data analysis, and data base management. (Peterson & Vaughan, 2002)

Administrators
While there are many reasons why some institutions are engaged in assessment and others are not, assessment practitioners and scholars have found that one factor predominates. If campus leaders are committed to assessment, assessment gets done and it gets done well. If campus leaders—especially the chief academic officer (vice president for academic affairs, provost, or dean) and the chief executive officer (president or chancellor)—aren’t onboard, there may be pockets of assessment efforts across campus but assessment doesn’t permeate campus culture. (Suskie, 2004, p. 36)

Administrators:
• provide vocal, consistent support for student learning
• inspire campus professionals to “pull in the same direction”
• recruit, socialize, and reward personnel who contribute to student learning
• allocate necessary resources to support effective teaching and assessment
• communicate the value of assessment
• make assessment a core process within the institution, integrating it into decision making and planning
• create an open environment for reflecting on results and determining changes
• provide the resources required for change

Faculty and Staff Development Professionals, Assessment Personnel, and Institutional Research Staff
• provide process and technical leadership, training, and support for faculty and staff
• provide developmental opportunities to faculty and staff in learning-centered approaches to teaching and supporting student development
• provide support for implementing changes in response to assessment findings
Faculty
- define program learning outcomes
- align courses with the outcomes
- use pedagogy that supports the outcomes and that effectively engages individual learners
- use assignments and grading to motivate and to provide formative feedback to students
- use classroom assessment to monitor and improve the day-to-day operation of their courses
- collaborate to collect, assess, and reflect on program assessment results and respond to findings
- collaborate with other professionals to promote institutional effectiveness

Other Campus Professionals
- are aware of learning outcomes and provide support for student learning
- provide a co-curricular environment that promotes learning
- provide an infrastructure that allows students to concentrate on learning
- collaborate with faculty to reflect on assessment results and implement changes designed to improve learning
- assess their impact on student success and make changes, if needed

Faculty and Staff
- believe in students’ capacity to learn
- provide opportunities for students who learn in different ways
- accept a shared, mutually-respectful responsibility for supporting student development

Assessment
- focuses on important outcomes
- is meaningful, manageable, and sustainable
- is based on valid, reliable, actionable results
- is planned, but flexible
- is collaborative
- focuses on improvement

References