Institutionalizing Assessment: Questions to Consider

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Objectives for This Presentation
- Think in short range and long range goals
- Define assessment and shared conceptual understanding
- Discuss what institutionalizing assessment would look like
- Discuss implementation barriers and strategies
- Identify resources to leverage
- Identify new resources needed
- Plan for action

First Things First
- Acknowledge why you are engaging in outcomes assessment
- Acknowledge your political environment
- Articulate a shared conceptual understanding
- Define assessment
- Define a common language
- Articulate your assessment expectation(s)

Defining Assessment
- There is no one “right” way of conceptualizing assessment. However, there are certainly more productive ways to approach it if you want to use assessment to improve teaching and learning.
- Establish a common language for assessment and a shared conceptual understanding of assessment.
- Commit to flexibility.
- Commit to “busting myths of assessment”

The Assessment Cycle
Adapted from CUPR Guidelines
- 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
By M.J. Bresciani
- Most importantly, assessment should be
  - Meaningful = faculty (i.e., expert) driven
  - Manageable = takes into account varying resources
  - Flexible = takes into account assessment learning curves
  - Truth-seeking/objective/ethical
  - Informs decisions for continuous improvement or provides evidence of proof
  - Promotes a culture of accountability, of learning, and of improvement

Purpose of Assessment
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) Manage expectations
13) Celebrate successes
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

Why are you Engaging in Assessment?
What are your institutional expectations for assessment?

Typical Components of An Assessment Plan
- Mission
- Objectives
- Outcomes
- Evaluation Methods
  - With criteria and by Outcomes
- Implementation of Assessment
  - Who is Responsible for What?
  - Timeline
- Results
  - By Outcomes
- Decisions and Recommendations
  - For each outcome and for the assessment process

First Things First, Cont.
- Identify what you have already done that is evaluation/assessment/planning (formal versus informal)
- Identify easy to access resources (data, assessment tools, people, survey methodologist, technology, etc.)
- Articulate your role in this process (will the Assessment Council be evaluating content and the assessment committee be evaluating process?)
- Establish a support system
- Establish a communication plan
- Identify short-range and long-range goals (time-line)

Just dive in!
It is an iterative process.
It does take time!

Identify what you Have already Done that is Evaluation/Assessment/Planning
- How do you plan to use the program/department assessment plans?
- What have you already done with the evaluation of general education? How can SA tie into that data or those outcomes?
- What data can you get from the academic side of the house? SA? IR? Registrars Office?
- What else?

Identify Easy to Access Resources (data, assessment tools, people, technology, etc.)
Who are these people and where can you find them?
What will the Assessment Committee's Role be?
- Support the process (train-the-trainers, provide and administer assessment resources)?
- Evaluate process?
- Evaluate content?
- Given the role, do you have the most appropriate representation on the committee?
- Other?

Questions
- Will you have a university assessment plan timeline for implementation of this process?
- Will there be someone doing the "regular" data collection (e.g., enrollment figures, retention and graduation rates, budget figures)?
- Will there be someone coordinating the assessment planning process?
- Will assessment plans be centrally located?

Questions, Cont.
- Will there be someone in charge of documentation?
- How can you use assessment to inform your enrollment planning, performance indicators, and other types of evaluation?
- Can key assessment coordinators get release time to get the process established?
- How will you manage the sometimes competing information requests from external constituents and internal constituents?
- How will you use the assessment results?

Questions, Cont.
- What will the rewards be for engaging in assessment?
- How will assessment results inform resource allocation or re-allocation?
- Will assessment results be used for personnel evaluations?
- How will all your planning and evaluation initiatives link?
- Will you have institutional learning outcomes that all programs need to assess?
- What if programs and courses cannot link to specific institutional goals?

Other Key Considerations

Establish a Support System
- Will it be the Assessment Council who is the support system?
  - Is the committee permanently identified?
  - How will you educate yourselves?
  - How will you renew yourselves?
  - How will you rotate in new members?
- Will you have "permanent" or on-going "Faculty Fellows"?
- Will you primarily be supported by the Vice Provosts? Provost?

Establish a Communication Plan
- Who will articulate assessment expectations?
  - How?
- How will you inform the university community about the plan? ...the resources that are available?
- Will the university community have an opportunity to comment?
- How flexible will you be?

In Regards to University Outcomes or Division Outcomes/Objectives
- Will you articulate institutional or division outcomes or objectives?
- Will you require each unit or program to articulate outcomes and its own means of assessment for each institutional/division objective?
- Will you require common means of assessment?
- Will you require that each unit be able to evaluate each division or institutional objective/outcome?

Barriers and Resources
An Example - -
What is applicable to Oregon State?

Barriers to Assessment
- Limited time to conduct assessment (67.7%)
Limited resources to put toward assessment (58.1%)
Limited understanding or expertise in assessment (48.4%)
Benefits of assessment are not substantial enough (22.6%)
Don’t want to bother the students with completing several surveys (20.4%)

So we Asked, What do You Need?
- Easy to access on-line tools (surveys, rubrics, portfolio design and evaluation) to help me gather evidence of learning outcomes (45.5%)
- Provision of "no cost," on-campus, identified facilitators to assist me with identifying appropriate assessment methods (38.3%), assessment tools (37.1%), to assist in writing an assessment plan (35.9%)
- One course release time to develop assessment plans (35.3%)

What do You Need?, Cont.
- Electronic means to manage the assessment process (31.7%)
- Easy to access on-line data about my program’s students and their opinions (31.1%)
- Research Assistant or temporary staff member assigned to my department to assist with managing the assessment process (30.5%)

What did we Provide?
- An Expectation that Outcomes-Based–Assessment will be conducted
- On-line assessment tools and assistance
  - Assessment for Undergraduate Affairs
  - Undergraduate Academic Program Review
  - Advertisement of University Planning and Analysis Nationally Known Assessment Resources
- Workshops on all assessment topics

What did we Provide?, Cont.
- Train-the-trainer Workshops by Peggy Maki, Director of Assessment at AAHE
- UAPR facilitators
- Matching Mini-Grants
- TracDat (UGA paid for first 120 users) and provided iWebfolio at a discounted rate
- Advertisement of UPA’s rich source of easy-to-access data
- A Symposium to celebrate our assessment accomplishments

What are Your Barriers?
- All the aforementioned?
- Documentation?
- What else?

What Resources can you Provide?
Now and then Later

Helpful Reminders
- Clearly communicate assessment expectations
- Go ahead and write every program outcome down but…
  - Don’t try to assess every program outcome every year.
- You may want to start with course outcomes and build program outcomes from those.
- You can start with institutional, college, or departmental outcomes and see each program or course ties to those.
- Then, move to implementing the entire assessment cycle one outcome at a time making everything for that systematic – In other words, we want to begin to form “habits” of assessment.

Helpful Reminders, Cont.
- Faculty must understand the purpose of assessment – it is not assessment for assessment’s sake
- Faculty must value what is being measured
- Faculty must have ownership of the process
- Respect varying disciplines’ academic freedom
- Recruit influential faculty to lead the process
Suggestions to Promote the Process
- Be flexible
- Remind each other of the benefits of assessment
- Share examples with each other
- Celebrate assessment victories
- Advertise your assessment learnings and decisions made
- Nudge and Retreat (Maki, 2001) or Scratch and Sniff (Richardson, 1998)
- Incorporate students in all facets of assessment planning and implementation, if your program is ready

Suggestions to Aid The Process Continued
- Articulate your assessment expectations
- Acknowledge and address barriers to assessment
- Pay attention to varying demands and resources
- Understand your role as an Assessment Council member
- Answer the question, "What happens if I don’t engage in assessment?"

How Will you Know how Well You Are Doing?
- Visit the Commission on Higher Education’s website for Levels of Implementation matrix found at http://www.ncahighered.org/resources/assessment/index.html
- Use or adapt self-evaluation tools found at http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/files/evaluation/evaluation.htm
- Look at what your assessment plans and results are telling you
- Ask your faculty and students

Questions?
http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/assess.htm

One Minute Evaluation
- What is the most valuable thing that you learned from this workshop?
- What is one question that you still have?
- What do you perceive to be your next step in implementing continuous systematic assessment at Oregon State?