



Board of Trustees Community-Technical Colleges

Assessment in Student Affairs: To Survive and Thrive

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Connecticut
Community
Colleges



My Assumptions

- ◆ there is no new money
- ◆ you are already very busy
- ◆ most Student Affairs staff members aren't experts in assessment
- ◆ most institutional research staff members aren't experts in Student Affairs functions

My Assumptions

- ◆ you have a genuine desire to improve the quality of students' lives, to highlight the good work that you do now, and to improve where you can
- ◆ you are already doing many things that can be built upon for assessment purposes



Reasons for Assessment

- ◆ Age of Accountability
- ◆ economic downturn plus cost drivers that increase at a greater rate than the rate of inflation lead to state concern over its support and student/parent/employer/media/ accrediting agency concern over tuition

Reasons for Assessment

- ◆ increased questioning over the value of and equity in higher education
- ◆ internal concerns over effectiveness and efficiency



Reasons for Assessment in Student Affairs

- ◆ skepticism about the value of Student Affairs, particularly in times of financial challenge, leads to the “protect the academic core” reaction
- ◆ students and parents demand accountability for funds spent on anything not viewed as essential

Reasons for Assessment in Student Affairs

- ◆ little understanding that out-of-the-classroom experiences and use of programs, services, and facilities have significant impacts upon student learning, development, and persistence

Good Reasons for Developing an Assessment Program

- ◆ communicate to internal and external audiences the worth, importance, and effectiveness of Student Affairs
- ◆ provide a basis to retain and increase funding

Good Reasons for Developing an Assessment Program

- ◆ provide a basis for strategic planning
- ◆ provide a basis for policy development and decision making
- ◆ respond to political pressures and realities

Bad Reasons for Developing an Assessment Program

- ◆ Damage Control
- ◆ Crisis Management

Definition of Assessment

- ◆ Assessment is a systematic effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence that describes effectiveness at any level.

Assessment as Part of Program Review

- ◆ purpose, history, and description of the unit
- ◆ activities
- ◆ resources
- ◆ assessment
- ◆ planning

Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning (Hutchings, 1993)

- ◆ Assessment begins with educational values.
- ◆ Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of organizational outcomes as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
- ◆ Assessment works best when it has clear, explicitly stated goals.

Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning (Hutchings, 1993)

- ◆ Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also, and just as important, to the processes that lead to them.
- ◆ Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
- ◆ Assessment works best when all stakeholders are involved.

Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning (Hutchings, 1993)

- ◆ Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
- ◆ Assessment should be part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
- ◆ Through assessment, we meet responsibilities of students, the institutions, and the public.

Key Questions to Ask in Assessment

- ◆ Why are we doing this assessment?
- ◆ What will we assess?
- ◆ How will we assess?
- ◆ Who will assess?
- ◆ How will the results be analyzed?
- ◆ How will the results be communicated and to whom?

Quantitative Methods

- ◆ involves the assignment of numbers to observations
- ◆ used to fit varying perspectives and experiences into a limited number of predetermined categories
- ◆ detached, deductive, starts with hypotheses that do not change
- ◆ generally larger scale
- ◆ concerned with representativeness and generalization of a sample to a larger population



Quantitative Methods

- ◆ surveys (commercially-available or locally-developed), campus records
- ◆ see Astin (2002), Gall, Gall & Borg (2003), Coughlin & Pagano (1997), Suskie (1992) for details

Qualitative Methods

- ◆ involves detailed descriptions of people, behaviors, etc. in natural settings using the researcher(s) as the instrument
- ◆ concerned with the research process and the researcher(s) perspectives
- ◆ inductive, no hypotheses up front, questions may change
- ◆ generally smaller scale



Qualitative Methods

- ◆ concerned with rich description, often from a purposeful sample
- ◆ interviews, focus groups, observation, document analysis
- ◆ see Bogdan & Biklen (1998), Lincoln & Guba (1985), Merriam (1998), Miles & Huberman (1994), Patton (2002) for details



Three Dimensions of Assessment in Student Affairs

- ◆ Assessment of Service Functions
- ◆ Assessment of Students' College-Wide Experiences and Perceptions
- ◆ Assessment of Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Six Approaches to Assessment in Student Affairs

- ◆ Utilization
- ◆ Needs
- ◆ Satisfaction
- ◆ Professional Standards
- ◆ Benchmarking
- ◆ College-Wide Student Experiences and Perceptions
- ◆ Assessment of Student Learning and Development Outcomes

Tracking Utilization

- ◆ determine how often programs, services, and facilities are used
- ◆ determine whether subgroups are systematically using programs, services, and facilities less or more often than others
- ◆ collect data on attributes such as gender, race, age, major, GPA, etc. along with degree and nature of utilization or collect a student identifier and get help from institutional research in merging with these demographic and educational data



Tracking Utilization

- ◆ can do sampling
- ◆ be very up front about why the data are being collected and how they will be kept confidential
- ◆ Subsequent types of assessment, such as satisfaction assessments and assessment of student learning and development outcomes, assumes tracking of utilization has taken place

Needs Assessment

- ◆ surveys
- ◆ interviews and focus groups
- ◆ observation
- ◆ document analysis

Needs Assessment

- ◆ Don't ask about needs that can't be addressed.
- ◆ The political process may intrude upon the results.
- ◆ needs vs. wants
- ◆ Don't use a needs assessment to respond to a crisis.
- ◆ Coordinate needs assessments across units.
- ◆ Consider needs of subpopulations.
- ◆ example in handout

Assessing Satisfaction

- ◆ Aspects of Satisfaction (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990)
 - appearance
 - reliability
 - responsiveness
 - competence
 - courtesy
 - credibility
 - security
 - access
 - communication
 - understanding the client

Assessing Satisfaction

◆ Ways to Measure Satisfaction

- participation
- student newspapers
- institutional records
- secret shoppers
- surveys (example in handout)
- interviews and focus groups



Assessing Against Professional Standards

- ◆ The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education has developed professional standards for nearly all Student Affairs functions.
- ◆ *The Book of Professional Standards in Higher Education* (Miller, 2003) and the *Self-Assessment Guides* (CAS, 2003) are available at www.cas.edu

Assessing Against Professional Standards

- ◆ The CAS standards were not written specifically for two-year institutions, but are broad enough to still be useful.
- ◆ Those using the CAS standards decide on methods to evaluate current practice against the standards, determine discrepancies between the two, note corrective actions, and prepare an action plan.
- ◆ see handout and Bryan, Winston, & Miller (1991) for details

Benchmarking

- ◆ compare assessment results across functional areas
 - within the same college
 - across colleges within the system
 - across other institutions
 - ◆ true peers, aspirational peers, competitors, predetermined groups

Benchmarking

- ◆ Peers can be determined by data, judgment, or a combination of the two.
- ◆ Benchmarking can be a very political process.
- ◆ Data exchanges can range from very formal to very informal.
- ◆ Determine guidelines for use of data, confidentiality, etc. in advance.
- ◆ see Teeter & Brinkman (2003) for details

College-Wide Experiences and Perceptions

- ◆ Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire
- ◆ Community College Survey of Student Engagement

College-Wide Experiences and Perceptions

- ◆ collect data on student experiences and perceptions that are known through prior research to be strongly linked to learning, development, and persistence.
- ◆ covers both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs areas
- ◆ compare results with expectations, benchmark institutions, over time, across student subgroups
- ◆ serves more as the basis for informed discussions and strategic planning than as an assessment of individual functional areas

Assessing Student Learning and Development Outcomes

- ◆ not appropriate for strictly service areas
- ◆ takes into account prior characteristics, knowledge, perceptions, etc.
- ◆ assess differences in outcomes across different environments (e.g., programs and services) while controlling for inputs
- ◆ often associated with Astin's IEO Model (see Astin, 1991)

Assessing Student Learning and Development Outcomes

- ◆ usually associated with quantitative methods and requires moderate statistical skills
- ◆ often uses multiple regression
- ◆ institutional research colleagues can help
- ◆ best technique for determining whether programs and services really make a difference

An Integrated Student Affairs Research Database

- ◆ data from various Student Affairs assessments
- ◆ student unit record basis
- ◆ also integrated with institutional demographic and educational records
- ◆ maintained in partnership with Institutional Research
- ◆ easy reporting and querying capability
- ◆ see Astin (2002) and Upcraft & Schuh (1996) for details

Reporting and Using Results

- ◆ Before carrying out an assessment activity
 - Do not do assessment if no one is prepared to act on the results.
 - Determine how confidential the assessment will be.
 - Determine who should be involved in the assessment.
 - Conduct a good study.

Reporting and Using Results

- ◆ Before carrying out an assessment activity
 - Produce a good report or series of reports.
 - Develop and follow a plan for disseminating the results.
 - Develop and follow a plan for using the results.
 - see Astin (2002), Bers & Seybert (1999), Suskie (1992)

Ethical Considerations

- ◆ do no harm
- ◆ informed consent
- ◆ confidentiality
- ◆ fair return
- ◆ honesty
- ◆ responsibility

Ethical Considerations

- ◆ data access and ownership
- ◆ role conflicts
- ◆ accuracy of secondary data
- ◆ Institutional Review Board policies
- ◆ see handout from Upcraft and Schuh (1996)

Final Thoughts

- ◆ your IR colleagues can be a huge help
- ◆ The references cited here are included in the handout.
- ◆ Having a systematic assessment program today can help you to avoid crisis management tomorrow.

Final Thoughts

- ◆ concentrate on outcomes before worrying about measures
- ◆ don't try to do everything every time
- ◆ multiple methods are almost always better
- ◆ approach this as a system
- ◆ this is going to take time

