Building a Faculty-driven Assessment Culture: Making it Meaningful at Large Institutions

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Presentation Overview
- UNLV is a large, urban research university with 28,000 students, and over 700 teaching faculty
- How a series of 17 workshops with 500 teaching faculty in attendance helped departments improve their academic assessment programs
- Faculty from the School of Architecture, School of Life Sciences, and Department of Dance will share their stories with you

How It All Started
- NWCCU issued UNLV a recommendation on academic assessment
  - Not doing enough assessment
  - Not doing it well enough
- UNLV responded by charging the deans with assessment
  - Ensure unit leaders submitted meaningful assessment plans and reports
  - Review assessment data on a regular basis

Informal Training
- Office of Academic Assessment offered Brown Bag lunch workshops on the different phases of academic assessment

Faculty Assessment Workshops
- Focus on improving student learning rather than accreditation
- Designed to target all teaching faculty
- Mandatory (with cooperation from deans)
- Focused on assessment at two levels with emphasis on links between them
  - Course
  - Program
- Disseminated best practices on learning objectives, measurement, and closing the loop
- Emphasis on interdisciplinary information exchanges

The School of Life Sciences
Jenifer Utz
Assessment Coordinator

UNLV School of Life Sciences
College of Sciences
The School of Life Sciences

- Life Sciences has been experiencing tremendous growth
  - Approximately 600 majors in 2000
  - Approximately 1860 majors in 2012

What to assess?
- The School currently offers 8 undergraduate concentrations, however all students enroll in a common set of core courses

Determining Priorities

- Where to begin?
- Analysis of retention and student achievement throughout the core courses showed that
  - For introductory courses, about 85% of initially enrolled students completed the course with a grade and at least 70% earned a C or better
  - For upper division courses, over 90% of initially enrolled students completed the course with a grade and at least 75% earned a C or better

Unifying the Instructional Experience

- Initial program assessment indicated students were encountering markedly different instructional experiences in the same course
- Program Learning Outcomes were revisited
- Instructional guides were created for laboratory instructors and students
- Lecture instructors began holding group meetings to discuss the introductory biology courses

There are approximately 10 professors and 20 laboratory TAs that participate in the introductory biology courses

The School of Life Sciences

- Before - Students will acquire:
  - Knowledge of the scientific method and the relationships among theory, experimentation, data analysis, and interpretation
- After - All students should be able to:
  - Understand the nature of scientific knowledge
  - Describe the differences between opinions, facts, and scientific theories
  - Appropriately utilize the scientific method within the laboratory environment
  - Apply their understanding of the scientific method to successfully design an experiment
  - Critically analyze scientific content presented both orally and in writing

Lab 4 - Eukaryotic Cells and Diffusion Study Guide

Define or give an example of:
- Diffusion
- Osmosis
- Active transport
- Chemical potential
- Hypotonic
- Hypertonic

Be able to identify on a microscope slide of a cell:
- Plant cell
- Animal cell
- Cell wall

Be able to:
- Identify and explain all the parts of a compound or dissecting microscope
- Identify a solution that is isotonic, hypotonic, or hypertonic
- Identify the direction of net movement of water across a semi-permeable membrane with differing concentrations on either side
- Explain what happens in Field of View or Depth of Field at different magnifications
Where are we now?

- Students experience equivalent instruction, learning exercises, and assessment across the 32 introductory lab sections.
- Professors teaching the introductory lectures are implementing a different textbook this fall and designing common instructional and assessment plans.
  - The new text places more emphasis on fundamental concepts and provides interactive online learning resources for students.

Student responses to content questions administered as part of the final exam have indicated variable mastery of program outcomes.

Student responses to essay questions administered as part of the final exam have indicated variable writing proficiency.

What’s next?

- Incorporate skill assessments
- Restructure the writing assessments
  - Transition from a single extensive assignment at the end of the semester to many smaller assignments distributed throughout the semester
- Greater attention to the upper division core courses
- Pilot implementation of assessment metrics that allow broader comparisons

School of Architecture

- Kevin Kenner
- Assistant Director
- Coordinator School of Architecture Assessment

Creative/Technical Disciplines
• Professional Degree Programs Accredited by External Agencies

  • NAAB - Architecture
  • LAAB - Landscape Architecture
  • CIDA - Interior Architecture and Design

• SoA Assessment History Modeled on Accreditation Visits
  • Typically Six Year Cycle with Intermediate Reporting
  • Accreditation Criteria Include well Defined Program Learning Objectives
    • Checklist Mentality of Assessment
      • In this environment University Assessment has been historically seen as a secondary concern.

• SoA Assessment History Modeled on Accreditation Visits
  • Checklist Mentality of Assessment
  • Past Five Years there has been a shift in the Accreditation process.
    • Mandate from Accrediting Agencies to move away from the checklist
    • Develop issues based structure to professional degree programs.
    • Holistic Development of the Student

• Timing of shift in Accreditation process was opportunistic for the School of Architecture as it coincides with UNLV Gen-Ed reform and new emphasis on assessment process.
  • Motivated faculty of School of Architecture to commit to revisiting school-wide learning objectives.

• Reverse engineering of SoA Learning Objectives from top down:
  • School Wide Objectives
  • Program/Milestone Objectives
    • University Accomplishment /Assessment Points
  • Learning Community Objectives
    • Courses that can work synthetically to bridge knowledge
    • Course Objectives
School of Architecture

- Generated through year-long internal SoA faculty workshops:
  - Develop Common Vocabulary for Objectives
  - Familiarize faculty with changes in Learning Objective expectations.
    - Resistance from faculty in technically oriented courses

Sample School Wide Objective

“Students will be able to develop and communicate design and planning solutions using fundamental knowledge consisting of visual literacy, precedents, spatial literacy & ordering systems, systems and components of the built environment, programming, intra + inter disciplinary communication and collaboration.”

Sample Milestone Objective

“Students will demonstrate through fundamental modes of communication the ability to analyze and utilize components and systems of the built environment: structure, materials and methods, and passive environmental controls to inform design proposals.”

Shared Vocabulary
Learning Community Knowledge

School of Architecture

- Sample Milestone Objective

“Students will demonstrate through fundamental modes of communication the ability to analyze and utilize components and systems of the built environment: structure, materials and methods, and passive environmental controls to inform design proposals.”

Shared Vocabulary
Learning Community Knowledge

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- How will we assess?

  - Workshop to determine assessment process and tools
  - Assessment to engage entire Faculty (16)

School of Architecture

- What will we assess?

  - Student generated end of year portfolios.
    - Guidelines developed to encourage students to demonstrate breadth of their achievement.
    - Broad spectrum demonstrating the integration of skills from the Learning Community.
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- Assessment Process:
  - Generate Electronic Assessment Tool.
    - PDF based collection of student portfolios
    - Improve Collection Process
    - Rubric
    - Observation / Questionnaire
    - Digital collection of responses

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- Closing the Loop:
  - Individual Faculty Response to the Assessment Tool during the course of the summer.
  - Generate Two Part Report based on faculty responses:
    - Rubric
    - Improvement report based on faculty observation.

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- Closing the Loop:
  - Assessment report presented to the faculty during pre-semester planning session.
  - Improvements incorporated by faculty in upcoming academic year.

UNLV Dance Assessment

Louis Kavouras
Chair
UNLV Department of Dance
College of Fine Arts

UNLV Dance Assessment

- UNLV’s Assessment Initiatives made us realize that assessment was going to be a fact of life
- It gave faculty tools for how to think about assessment and learning outcomes.
- It should be a useful tool.
- Rather than fight it, we should embrace it and find ways to make the endeavor and information vital and robust.

UNLV Dance Assessment

- In discussions we realized several things
  - We were assessing students all the time.
  - Studio classes and Rehearsals
  - Dance Technique Placement Auditions
  - Scholarship Auditions
  - Jury Examinations
  - Choreography showings and critiques
  - Auditions for Concerts
  - Portfolio and Resume reviews
- We realized that if it MOVED, we assessed it.
The big problem was how to make the information flow and put it somewhere where we all could see it and use it.

- Three stories
- Many more
- Embrace assessment, make it meaningful to especially help students improve their learning
- Impact of assessment workshops
  - Faculty interaction
  - Ways to make assessment effective at the course and program levels
  - Exchange ideas