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

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Life Sciences has been experiencing tremendous growth
From 600 majors in 2002 to 1860 majors in 2012
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 65% 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

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 easy questions administered as part of the final exam have indicated variable writing proficiency

• UNLV is a large, urban research university with 28,000 students, and over 700 teaching faculty
• NWCCU (Nevada Board of Regents) recommended the development of a program assessment plan
• UNLV responded by charging the deans with assessment

Faculty Assessment Workshops

• Focus on improving student learning rather than accreditation
• Designed to target all teaching faculty
• Mandatory (with cooperation from deans)
• Focus on student learning efficiency 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

Department of Dance - Louis Kavouras, Ph.D.

• UNLV's Dance Assessment Initiative 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.
• In discussions we realized several things
  • We were assessing students all the time.
  • It moved, we assessed it!
  • We realized that if it MOVED, we assessed it!
• Data can be input automatically to university assessment report forms

SODA (Student and Objective Database) Online Record Advising

• Multi-relational Database system
  • Records are linked within the department and to the university's records
  • All faculty have access to the database (accessible by mobile devices and on desktop computers)
  • Data can be input automatically to university assessment report forms

School of Architecture - Kevin Kemner, M. Arch.

UNLV

SOA assessment history modeled on accreditation visits
• Typically six-year cycle with intermediate reporting
• Accreditation criteria include well-defined program learning objectives
  • This led to a checklist mentality of assessment
  • In this environment, university assessment has been historically seen as a secondary concern.

Past five years have been a shift in the accreditation process.
• Mandate from accrediting agencies to move away from the checklist
• Develop issue-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’s General Education 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

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

How will we assess?
• Workshop to determine assessment process and tools
• Assessment to engage entire faculty (N=60)

What will we assess?
• Milestone accomplishments
• Assess learning community, not individual courses.
• Emphasize on the synthesis and application of knowledge
• 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

Assessment process
• Generate electronic assessment tool.
• Professional, collaborative, and automated web-based e-assessment
  • PDF-based collection of student portfolios
  • Observations / questionnaires
• Faculty contribution to overall tool.
• Data can be input automatically to university assessment report forms

Closing the loop:
• Individual faculty response to the assessment tool during the course of the semester.
• Generate two part report based on faculty responses
  • Rubric
  • Improvement report based on faculty observation
• Assessment report presented to the faculty during pre-semester planning session.
• Improvements incorporated by faculty in upcoming academic year.

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