Closing the Loop in Assessment

By Daniel Bubb, Ph.D.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
“Closing the Loop” is the third component of the assessment cycle

1.) Establishing a set of learning objectives
2.) Designing instruments to measure learning outcomes
3.) Closing the loop – how departments respond to learning outcomes results. This can range from adjusting a quiz question to major curricular changes
“Closing the loop” is not a kneejerk reaction to student learning outcomes results, but is part of a larger, faculty-centered, fluid process of continuous assessment improvement.
• Example: Department of History’s 2011 annual report
  - Created an environment of shared community
  - Created workshops designed to help students improve their research paper writing skills
  - A possible additional way to “close the loop” is to give a writing assignment with an embedded question to students to gage their comprehension of the material, and simultaneously measure their critical thinking skills (a core competency)
A Second Example: Department of English’s 2011 annual report

- Made course and curricular changes based on survey results
- Considered other methods of assessment including portfolios and a capstone project

- Might consider designing a rubric, especially for upper-division courses, including a capstone course, which will provide considerable information about student learning
• “Closing the loop” should reflect course or programmatic changes and the Department’s Mission Statement
• Do the results and departmental response reflect what the Department is attempting to achieve with its students?
• Make gradual, incremental changes to a course or program.
  • Easier to do
  • Better assessment program
Challenges to Closing the Loop

- Different student aptitudes
- Meeting students’ needs
- Budget cuts
Possible Solutions

- **Strong set of Core Competencies**
  - The University, in its Year One Peer-Evaluation Report has identified a set of University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs)
  - Provide peer feedback from faculty who have assessed the learning outcomes
  - Asking department Chairs to make “closing the loop” an agenda item for discussion in department meetings
  - For libraries, respond to outcomes results from the information literacies
In closing:

- Many ways to do meaningful assessment, but all must “close the loop” in some way.
- Changes in “closing the loop” would be gradual so they are more manageable and measurable.
- Faculty assessment work must be supported through professional development by the university administration.
Sources in addition to those listed on the UNLV Assessment Website

- National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)

- [http://openedpractices.org/resources](http://openedpractices.org/resources)
- [http://www.winona.edu/AIR/rubrics.htm](http://www.winona.edu/AIR/rubrics.htm)