Using Evidence to Enhance Student Learning: Examples of Good Assessment Practice

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Overview

- NILOA – who we are and what we do
- 2013 Provost Survey Findings relevant to assessment practice
- Case study lessons
- Emerging principles of assessment to improve student learning
- Questions
Since 2008, NILOA’s mission has been to discover and disseminate effective uses of assessment data to strengthen undergraduate education and support institutions in their assessment efforts.

- Surveys
- Web Scans
- Case Studies
- Focus Groups
- Occasional Papers
- Website
- Resources
- Newsletter
- Listserv
- Presentations
- Transparency Framework
- Featured Websites
- Accreditation Resources
- Assessment Event Calendar
- Assessment News
- Measuring Quality Inventory
- Policy Analysis
- Environmental Scans
- Degree Qualifications Profile

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
Far too little is known about assessment practices on campuses around the country
Findings: Institutional Examples & Practice
Provosts view: Full and abridged reports

http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/knowingwhatstudentsknowandcando.html
2013 National Provost Survey

- Sample: All regionally accredited, undergraduate degree-granting institutions (n=2,732)
- Announced via institutional membership organizations, website, newsletter, mailing
- Online and paper
- 43% response rate (n=1,202)
- 725 schools participated in both 2009 and 2013
Encouraging Findings about Using Assessment Results to Improve Student Learning

1. Persistent appetite in higher education for information about using assessment to improve student learning
2. Stated learning outcomes are the norm.

What % of institutions “have adopted or developed an explicit set of student learning outcomes common to all undergraduates, across all majors?”

84%
Findings About Using Assessment Results

3. The range of tools and measures to assess student learning has expanded.
How many different assessment approaches are used at institutions?

• In 2009, Provosts reported: 3

• In 2013, Provosts reported: 5

More assessment activity!
Let’s share

• At your institution, and thinking about the various ways student learning is assessed – has there been a shift in approaches in the last four years?

• What measures does your institution use?
Most Valuable Assessment Approaches

The top three...

✓ Classroom-based assessment
✓ National Student Surveys
✓ Rubrics

What approaches to assess student learning are most valued on your campus?
Findings Most Relevant to Using Assessment Results

4. Substantially more student learning outcomes assessment is underway now than a few years ago

And, Meeting accreditation expectations heads the list for how assessment evidence is used, but internal use by campuses is growing and is considered far more important than external use.
Uses of assessment results - 2009 vs. 2013
Let’s Share

- Do you have an example of when assessment results were used on your campus to enhance student learning that you would like to share?
What do We Know about the Quality of this Assessment Activity?

What are the characteristics of “good assessment work”? What does it look like?
NILOA Case Studies: Examples of Good Assessment Practice

- Purpose
- Selection process
- Case Study approach
- Institutions involved

http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/CaseStudies.html
Case Study Purpose

• Most institutions collect evidence of student learning, but it is not clear how results are being *used to improve student outcomes*
  ➢ We can learn from campuses that are using assessment data for improvement and decision making
  ➢ Serve as examples of ways to report and take action on assessment results
Case Selection and Design

- **Selection criteria**: CHEA Assessment award winners and nominees; Recommendations of experts in the field; Institutions identified via Webscans

- **Design**: Interpretive case studies focus on meaning participants make of their actions and experiences

- **Data gathering techniques**: interviews, web scan and document analysis
1. Augustana College
2. Capella University
3. Carnegie Mellon University
4. Colorado State University
5. Juniata College
6. LaGuardia Community College
7. North Carolina A&T State University
8. St. Olaf College
9. Texas A&M International

http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/CaseStudies
Case Study Themes

• Inspirational, instructive accounts of assessment to improve student learning; provide specific examples of practices associated with good assessment.

• Case themes:
  • Augustana – assessment review committee’s role in engaging faculty
  • Capella – assessment infrastructure and administrative support
  • Carnegie Mellon – assessment fostered through Center for Teaching & Learning; creative faculty work
  • Colorado State – online planning to support improvement
  • Juniata – assessment as scholarly inquiry; publicly shared data
  • LaGuardia CC - assess assessment; culture of assessment
  • North Carolina A&T – professional development and culture of inquiry
  • St. Olaf – faculty-led utilization-focused, backward-design
  • Texas A&M University – openness and student focused
Cross Case Study Report

Synthesis of insights and promising practices in using information about student learning from case study sites

www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/UsingAssessmentResults.htm
Broad Findings About Assessment Across Cases

- Institutional behavior is generally consistent with the Principles of Effective Assessment Practice identified (Banta & Associates, 2002)
  - Embedded assessment
  - Administrative leadership for assessment
  - Engaged faculty
  - Wide sharing
- Institutions aligned their assessment work with organizational structures and *cultures*, and focused their assessment efforts on specific problems or questions.
Assessment Activity Emphases at Case Sites

Advanced assessment practice by:

1. Focusing assessment efforts
2. Harnessing accountability for internal improvement
3. Communicating widely about assessment
4. Allowing time for internal stakeholders to make meaning of and to reflect on assessment results
1. Focusing Assessment Practice

- Specific problem/question regarding student learning, or emphasize interests of faculty
- Fosters faculty engagement & ownership, and creates a culture of inquiry
- Carnegie Mellon University: values and fosters diversity in how student learning outcomes assessment is undertaken within colleges/departments. Driven by questions raised by faculty about student learning and effective teaching and is informed by departmental curricular interests, goals, and the particular discipline.
2. Harnessing accountability for improvement

- Initial response was for accreditation. Then shifted to intentionally embed assessment into institutional culture and, specifically, institutional planning and improvement efforts.

- Augustana College: Shared an accreditation report with faculty during a retreat. Faculty found results acceptable, but felt the institution could do better. Formed 20 study groups, involving many faculty, to examine aspects of the college. Led to meaningful improvement that helped to advance assessment activities.
3. Communicate Widely

- Share results, successes, feature assessment results widely on websites.

  - St. Olaf College: posted a video of its president speaking about the college’s assessment efforts, and uses several different means on its website to disseminate assessment results to multiple audiences including students, faculty, and staff.

  - Colorado State: PRISM system (online portal for assessment results) is intentionally designed to be accessible to visitors but also has a login for faculty and staff.
4. Making Meaning & Reflection

- Build in time for reflection on evidence of student learning; make shared meaning of the data.

- LaGuardia Community College: has been a leader in the area of ePortfolios and has a well-established process for assessing student artifacts. Even so, the institution takes time to review this process and consider new projects.
Using Evidence to Improve

• Case study sites did not have common approaches to using evidence, but shared a strong desire to improve student learning and to critically examine institutional processes and practices from the classroom to extracurricular activities and everything in between to inform decisions to enhance student learning.
Additional Lessons Across Sites

• Assessment is a scholarly activity worthy of faculty attention and institutional respect
• Support is necessary - less in assessment techniques and more in fostering the use of results to improve
• Embed assessment in existing activities, no “add on”
• Involve a range of faculty, staff & administrators in assessment; spread responsibility
• Report widely on action taken on results
• Accreditation to facilitate good work
• Forefront assessment goals and desired changes in student learning
To Ponder: Your Campus Assessment Practice

• What does assessment mean to your institution based on your history, values, mission, educational priorities, and student population?

• Who is currently involved in and engaged with assessing student learning?
Taking Stock: Reflection Questions

- What does assessment mean to your institution based on your history, values, mission, educational priorities, and student population?
- Who is currently involved in and engaged with assessing student learning? Who needs to be?
- What resources are available and what is needed to move your assessment work forward?
- How do internal stakeholders view assessment of student learning? How are examples of good assessment practice shared?
- How do our external stakeholders view assessment of student learning?
- How are results communicated and to whom? Time to reflect on and make sense of results from assessment?
- How effective are our assessment processes in meeting desired institutional and program goals?
Emerging Principles of Effective Use of Assessment Results

Actually using assessment results to make informed decisions that enhance educational quality is an unmet promise on most campuses.

What principles influence use?
Principles of Effective Use of Assessment Results

• Distinct levels of use – assessment at the institution level is different than program, and curricular and course level
Distinct Levels of Use

- **Institution-level** – structured framework, aligns strategic planning, assessment, resources...
- **Program-level** – more connected to faculty, the curriculum, and student learning needs
  - Focuses on specific problems or questions regarding student learning, emphasizing what is of most interest to faculty

*Clarify the intended level of use for assessment at the outset - helps connect assessment activity more directly to use!*
Begin with Use in Mind

• **Influences:**
  - Utilization focused evaluation (UF-E) model – *what will effect and ensure usefulness?*
  - Backward design from classroom instruction – identify intended learning outcomes and then align instruction, practice, assignments that support them and the evidence to demonstrate

• **Assessment results are a means to an end, rather than an end in themselves**
Leverage External Processes

• Provost survey and focus groups identified most common use of assessment data is related to accreditation
• Taking full advantage of quality improvement aspects of accreditation processes
• External influences – grants, AAC&U LEAP ELOs, DQP,
Let’s Share

What are some leverage points or opportunities of initiatives that assessment data might be connected with on your campus?

Where have you struggled with making connections?
Link Assessment to Internal Processes

• Need to “normalize” assessment processes
• Make assessment a part of routine, reinforcing processes
The Quest to Close the Assessment Loop

• Take time to reflect on assessment results, document changes made, examine whether implemented changes have been successful
• Weave reflection on evidence into assessment processes
Discussion and comments

- What else do you want to know about institutional assessment practices?
- What is the most positive outcome of your student learning assessment activity?

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