Creating an Outcomes-based Co-curricular Assessment Plan: A Concrete and Comprehensive Approach

WASC
Academic Resources Conference
April 18, 2012
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Overview

• Introductions
• Part One: How to set up a comprehensive assessment plan
  o The Seven-step model
• Part Two: Integrating Assessment into the Everyday Culture
• Part Three: How to connect assessment and budgeting
• Part Four: Comments and Questions
Part One: Setting up the Assessment Plan
Seven-Step Assessment Model

1. Mission
2. Goals
3. Research Questions
4. Program Objectives or Learning Outcomes
5. Methods and Measures
6. Findings
7. Conclusions
The departmental mission statement should focus on or support one or more University priorities.

The departmental mission guides the departmental goals in step 2 and is no more than 3–4 sentences long.
The departmental mission should contain:

- Name of the department
- Primary functions
- Primary activities / modes of delivery
- Target audience
Excerpt from University Strategic Plan:

Implement a strategically focused, campus-wide effort to improve recruitment, retention, and graduation rates.
The Academic Advising Center offers new student orientation, mandatory freshman advising, and advising on General Education and graduation requirements for all students. The Center engages students in a developmental process that helps clarify and implement individual educational plans consistent with their skills, interests, and values. Through individual appointments, group advising sessions, and presentations the professional staff, faculty advisors, and student interns help students understand the university’s academic requirements as well as its policies and procedures. As a result, students are better prepared to take responsibility for their education and persist towards a timely graduation.

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<th>Dept. Name</th>
<th>Prim. Functions</th>
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Example: Student Health and Counseling Center (SHCS) Mission

The mission of Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS) is to enhance students’ educational experience by addressing health-related barriers to learning, promoting optimal wellness, and enabling individuals to make informed health decisions. SHCS offers quality healthcare provided by compassionate staff dedicated to making healthcare accessible and affordable for students through ethically sound practice, confidentiality, and integrity.
Step 2—Departmental Goals

• Broad statements that describe the overarching, long-range intentions of an administrative unit
• Ideally, they explicitly support overall university goals
• Usually not measurable
• Primarily used for general planning as the starting point for the development and refinement of program objectives or student learning outcomes
Example: Academic Advising Center Goals

• Help students gain an understanding of the university’s academic requirements as well as its policies and procedures
• Help students clarify and implement individual educational plans which are consistent with their skills, interests, and values
• Prepare students to take responsibility for their education and persist towards a timely graduation
Step 3—Research Questions

• Home in on key issues and unanswered questions that warrant examination

• Focus on an important question to be answered, a skill to be developed, or a problem to be solved

• Shape whatever qualitative or quantitative methodology that emerges from the questions
Examples: Research Questions

• “Since filing the FAFSA on time is critical to receiving financial aid, what are the top factors that cause many students to file late?”

• “To what extent do counseling center no-shows increase delay time for new clients and/or elongate the waitlist? How can no-show rates be reduced?”

• “To what extent do our first-year students have awareness of and heed academic deadlines?”
Step 4—Departmental Program Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- Both program objectives and learning outcomes are measurable statements that provide evidence as to how well the unit is reaching its goals.
- Both should relate directly to university mission, departmental goals, and research questions.
University Priority: The University commits itself to increasing students’ retention and graduation rates and decreasing their time to degree.

Departmental Goal: Help students clarify and implement individual educational plans which are consistent with their skills, interests, and values.

Departmental Program Objective: By summer 2008 at least 90% of all FTF will have participated in the three-phase advising program that offers sessions at critical junctures in the academic year.
Program Objectives (PO)

Program objectives typically help managers determine if a program is working by focusing on improving efficiency, processes, or procedures. As such, POs address whether a program:

- was offered in a timely fashion
- was scheduled at a convenient time
- reached the appropriate target group members
- satisfied participants
- was cost-effective, etc.
Student Health and Counseling Services gathers many types of data to “measure what matters” and formulates program objectives based on these measurements.

- Number of Patient Visits
- Number of Patient Visits/Provider
- Appointment “No Show” Rate
- Wait Times
- Patient Satisfaction
- Patient Utilization rates
- Cost of Care
- Number of Students Left Without Being Seen (LWBS)
• Counselors will spend an average of 60% of their time providing direct client service.

• Medical providers will screen 90% of patients seen in the primary and urgent care clinics for depression using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ 2 and/or PHQ 9 version) over the next academic year 2011-12 and make appropriate referral to CAPS for follow-up as necessary.
New Student Orientation will increase by 200 attendees or by 10% the number of 2012 new transfer and incoming freshmen participating in the “Responsible Decision-Making Workshop” offered as a part of New Student Orientation. This increase will be measured against Summer 2011 participation (~2000 attendees).
Learning outcomes address what a student learns or how he or she changes through participating in a program or utilizing a service.
Early in the process of developing a culture of assessment, our learning objectives were rather rote—they measured short term or memorized “learning.” Additionally, they only measured “small picture” student learning, such as:

- Whether students could retain a few key ideas from a workshop
- Whether students learned processes such as how to apply for financial aid or apply to graduate
Example:
Athletics Learning Outcome

Student-athletes who complete the Intercollegiate Eligibility Workshop in Spring 2011 will demonstrate increased understanding of NCAA compliance issues.

This outcome was measured by a short pre-test and post-test.
Furthermore, many early assessment efforts were “satisfaction” based, or otherwise relied heavily on self-reported or “indirect” data from students.
Examples:
University Union & Global Education

• 80% of student employees at the University Union will report that their leadership skills were improved through their employment.

• After completing a short online survey (usually administered late spring) 90% of the Office of Global Education’s clients will agree or strongly agree their experience with OGE is positive.
Learning Outcomes: Where We Are Now

Now, directors have been asked to tailor their learning outcomes more to “big picture” learning—that which ties into Division and University priorities such as academic success (GPA), retention, and graduation.

Some directors have even begun attempting to measure behavior change.
Example: 
Housing & Residential Life

• Sac State students living on-campus will have a higher average grade point average at the end of their freshmen year than students who live off-campus at the end of their freshmen year.

• First time freshmen who live on-campus will be more likely to persist to their second year of college than first time freshmen who live off-campus.

Note: These statements do not assume a direct cause and effect relationship between the variables; however, there may be a significant correlation between them. Such correlations warrant further research.
By Fall 2009, residents participating in the Choices Level One Alcohol Education Class will demonstrate the following:

- 50% of referred residents will be able to cite at least one thing they learned from the class & have incorporated into their drinking behavior that has reduced the risk associated with their drinking (reduction in how much or how often the student drinks, increase in use of protective behaviors).
Residents participating in Alcohol Education (cont.)

- 50% of referred residents will report a reduction in the number of occasions in which they consume alcohol.

- By Fall 2012, 65% of all first-year students will successfully view and complete the student success online alcohol tutorial program, “Zombies, Alcohol, and You” with a passing grade of 75% or better on the post test.
Step 5—Methods and Measures

Methods and measures describe:

• how the objective is being assessed
• how and which indicators will be used to create a context and chart progress
Methods are the pre-planned procedures and techniques that help the investigator carry out the inquiry, examination or research (e.g., the timelines and overall types of assessment—qualitative, quantitative).
Measures refer to both:

• the assessment **instrument itself** (e.g. pre-/post-test, rubric-scored role-play, rubric-scored portfolio, etc.)

• the overall **extent** to which a program objective or student learning **outcome was achieved**
Methods and Measures Sections Should:

• Explicitly state **how** the methods/measures guide the inquiry
• Provide short description of **assessment instrument** being used
• Identify the **population** being served and the conditions under which they are being served (i.e. “first-year Students who complete X and Y Online Training”)
• Outline a **timeframe**
• Include the **benchmarks** against which the behavior modification, or learning is compared
Direct vs. Indirect Measurement

- **Direct Measurement** - Demonstrated outcomes that students achieve—such as an increase in abilities, information, knowledge, attitudinal or behavioral changes—after participating in a program or utilizing a service.

- **Indirect Measurement** - Self-reported statements, comments, or satisfaction levels that reveal a perceived increase in understanding or appreciation. The perception is not verified through any demonstration of knowledge acquisition or observed behavioral/attitudinal changes.
Measures: Where We Started

Early in Student Affairs assessment, many directors used indirect methods to assess student learning. Many assessment instruments asked students to report on their perceived increase in understanding or their appreciation of/satisfaction with a workshop, training, cultural event, etc.
Now, many directors are trying to use more direct methods to assess student learning.

Traditionally, the most common direct measurement was a **pre-/post-test combination**, which creates a baseline for student knowledge before some kind of activity, and then measures their knowledge after taking part in the activity.
Examples:
Direct Measurement—Student Learning

Academic Statistics
• To what extent are the GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates higher for those students who have been targeted for interventions (compared to those who did not receive the intervention)?

*Note:* These statistics are rarely used to confirm a cause and effect relationship.

Direct Observation
• To what degree do student employees (who are being observed by their supervisors in a mock-situation) adequately perform the tasks he or she have been trained in?
Examples: Direct Measurement (cont.)

- Portfolios
  - To what extent do print, electronic, or multi-media collections of students’ work over a period of time demonstrate what they have learned in a particular co-curricular experience? Portfolios may be scored by a rubric and used to measure longitudinal change.

- Essays
  - How do students score (usually via a predesigned rubric) on an essay, whose response is meant to reveal what they have learned in a certain activity?
At the end of Spring 2011, all PRIDE Center student assistants will complete a survey (containing both Likert-style and open-ended questions) which asks them to reflect on the ways in which their employment has affected their leadership skills compared to what they felt their leadership skills were prior to their employment.
Step 6—Findings

In general, the findings section includes two major pieces:

• The actual data the assessment tool generates (i.e. pre- and post-test scores, rubric scores, workload estimates, and participant logistics), and

• A clear and concise summary as to whether or not (and to what extent) the outcome was met
The Findings “Write Up”

The “write-up” section of this piece includes:

• A clear, concise summary of only the most relevant data
• A summary of whether and to what extent the outcome/objective was met

Note: the findings section does not include analysis.
• Student-athletes who completed all three segments of the Division I Eligibility and Recruiting Workshop scored an average of 20% higher (the instructor’s desired minimum) on the post-test than they did on the pre-test.

• After streamlining key processes and protocols, Financial Aid was able to decrease its application review time from 5 days to 3 days, which is an acceptable period.
Scores recorded on the post-test were better than the pre-test in general, and can be broken down as follows. 85% of student-athletes who completed all three segments of the workshop answered question 1 correctly. 78% of students correctly answered question 2 regarding academic probation GPA, but the staff feel this lower percentage reflects the imprecise wording or the question. Conversely, 95% of student athletes answered question 3 correctly, etc.
Include “Raw” Data as Attachments

In the interest of brevity and readability, charts, examples of participant responses, student work, etc. should be relegated to a “Supporting Documents” section.
Step 7—Conclusions

The conclusion (sometimes called the “closing the loop” section) is the part of the report that tells the story.
In telling the story—even if it’s not yet over—this section explains:

- “Here is where we started (the research question that shaped early work)”
- “Here is what really happened”
- “Here is what we learned”
- “Here is what we will do next”
More specifically, the conclusion section reiterates whether outcomes or objectives were or were not achieved.

- Do not be defensive or “beat around the bush” if outcomes were not met.
- Rather, try to explain why that might be the case if there is a plausible reason; if not, do not “push it”—sometimes, it is acceptable to just present the data.
Conclusions (cont.)

Explain how the findings will shape what you will do next. If there is anything in the findings that suggests you should modify the program or its delivery, explain how you might enact those changes.
Next steps

• An important part of any conclusion section is identifying appropriate “next steps”
• There are many different ways to approach “next steps” depending on your assessment findings
Possible “Next Steps” When Objectives or Outcomes Were Achieved

• Develop new objectives or outcomes
• Expand the research or examination to include a longitudinal study that builds upon current objectives or outcomes
• Raise the criteria for achievement
• Develop more stringent measures
Possible “Next Steps” When Outcomes Were Not Achieved

- Modify program in ways that increase the likelihood of achieving the outcome
- Modify policies or procedures to support the desired change
- Clarify or tweak program objective or learning outcome
- Design measurement tools more aptly suited for the task
- Rethink the methodology
- Improve collaboration
- Improve communication
Example: “Good” Conclusion

Based on an aggregate score, over 80% of student-athletes rated athletic advising services as good or excellent; thus, the outcome was achieved. Some specific areas scored lower than 80%, most of which corresponded to areas less-emphasized in orientation.
Athletic Advisors will review how they currently provide information in those low-scoring areas, which include information about summer school, handbooks, and other orientations (eligibility, etc.). Advisors may consider further assessment and feedback measures with student-athletes regarding these topics to improve student-athlete satisfaction, and to create an even more comprehensive program.
In the “not very good” conclusion example presented on the following slide, the Women’s Resource Center (WRC) presented a series of movies, and after viewing each movie, students wrote brief response papers which WRC staff scored based on rubrics.

The assessment activities and methods are not bad—but the write-up and analysis need improvement.
Conclusion

There are several issues that could have impacted results. We used different raters for the different movie presentations, who also were different from the person who developed the rubrics. It is a very subjective evaluation as to whether or not the students actually “hit” the points in their post papers. Some attention to “rater training” might be helpful in the future.
Problems:

- Doesn’t “tell the story”
- Not enough context for the reader; section doesn’t stand alone
- Doesn’t reiterate whether the objective was or was not met (was it met, or was it not?)
- “Beats around the bush;” sounds a bit defensive
There are several issues that could have impacted results; these should be explained and presented clearly.

- Women’s Resource Center staff used different “raters” for the different movie presentations.
- These “raters” were different from the staff who developed the rubrics.
- The evaluation itself was very subjective as to whether or not the students actually “hit” the points in their post papers.

Providing some type of “inter-rater reliability training” might be helpful in the future.
Conclusion

When first introduced in Fall 2006 only 63% of student participants reported learning key points from the movie presentations they attended; in Fall 2007 that number increased to 73%. Thus, the objective was met, though just barely. (Continued on next slide.)
Though the scores seem to indicate student learning, WRC staff acknowledges some potential problems with the assessment instrument itself: the rubric proved highly subjective; different raters were used at different points in the assessment; and there was no “norming” of raters to establish a common method of interpreting the rubric. These initial results indicate the WRC movie series shows promise for demonstrable student learning; however, the WRC will continue to refine both this assessment and the program itself in upcoming semesters.
Assessment Efforts Can Also Help Directors or Administrators:

• Improve programs or services that are aligned with the university’s priorities
• Understand and eventually increase student learning
• Make better planning or budgeting decisions