

## Departmental Assessment: **Strategies and Tools**

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## My Assessment Background

- More than 25 years of participant observation at a university where outstanding leaders used assessment to transform the university
- By the early 1980s, a number of faculty from the university traveled to work with other campuses. These experiences have added to the observations I will offer today

## Truman's Experience

- Started assessing student learning in 1973
- Outstanding leadership and assessment are widely believed to have transformed the university
- While the circumstances that led to Truman's assessment effort may be unique, many of the lessons learned are transferable.

## New President with Challenging Questions

- How do we know if our programs are of high quality?
- Are GPA and credit hours earned sufficient to assess student learning?
- Who takes responsibility for the degree as a whole?
- Are we graduating nationally competitive students?

## More Challenging Questions

- Can we reward quality instead of quantity?
- Can we define quality? Direct or indirect?
- Can we adapt the British model?
- Are we accountable to constituents?
- Can these queries be adapted to other institutions?

## What actually is assessment?

- "Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves:
  - making our expectations explicit and public;
  - setting appropriate ... high standards for learning quality;
  - systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations ...; and
  - using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. (Thomas Angelo)

## Assessment: What is it?

- Assessment practices are a reflection of the university's values ... and should further [its] basic aims and purposes. (Alexander Astin)
- Assessment is a mindset that asks questions – good questions, hard questions, about what and how students are learning. (Russ Edgerton)
- Measures of learning that go beyond a single faculty member. (Truman)

## From Presumed Quality to Evidence of Improved Quality

- Raised expectations
- Development of more intentional curricula
- Faculty responses to negative data
- Development of a self-reflective culture
- Dramatic improvements from increased student time on task to improved graduation rates

## Truman's Assessment System

- Multiple Measures
- Common model campus-wide
  - Freshmen – 2 national surveys (Aug/Mar)
  - Junior – National exam--liberal arts core
  - Senior – National exam, capstone course, liberal arts portfolio, locally-developed survey of graduates
  - Other – Annual interview project, alumni surveys, additional discipline-based assessment, student services assessment
- Do you need a comprehensive assessment model?

## Types of Tools

- Direct
- Indirect
- External
- Internal
- Quantitative
- Qualitative

## Strategy: Mix of Measures

	EXTERNAL MEASURES	INTERNAL MEASURES
Direct Measures of Student Learning – Evaluate actual student work	Nationally recognized exams e.g. MFT, PCAT, CLA Use of external examiners for senior projects, portfolios, etc.	Portfolio, Team scoring student work, problem-solving simulations, capstone measures, locally developed exams
Indirect Measures of Student Learning – Use proxies as measures for student learning	National surveys: e.g. time on task, frequency of contact with faculty, % participating in internships, study abroad, undergraduate research, volunteering, etc.	Student interviews, focus groups, locally-developed surveys, syllabi studies, % going to graduate school, % alums who donate to the university

## Overview of Specific Assessment Tools — Integrate University Data

- Traditional program data
- Student faculty ratio
  - Retention to the major
  - Number of majors, minors
  - Grade distribution
  - Transcript analysis
  - Syllabi review
  - These data can be integrated with your assessment data to add depth to your analysis

## Overview of Specific Assessment Tools

### Attitudinal and Self Assessment Instruments

- Surveys – e.g. behavior inventories, self-assessments, satisfaction
  - Enrolled students, Graduating students, Alumni, Employers, Faculty
- Interviews – e.g. exit, entrance, rising junior, employers
- Focus groups – e.g. employers
- Self-assessment rubrics of student work
- Nationally recognized surveys – e.g. NSSE, CIRP

## Overview of Specific Assessment Tools

### Course-Embedded Assessments

- Collective scoring of presentations or papers
- Simulations – e.g. Observation and team scoring of a problem-solving exercise that is part of a course
- Portfolios – Built into a course or courses
- Capstones as Assessment
- Comprehensive Exams – needs to involve more than a single classroom teacher in construction and/or scoring
- Classroom assessment techniques – excellent supplement to assessment

## Overview of Specific Assessment Tools -- Exams

- Nationally recognized examinations
  - Major field – e.g. ETS Major Field Test
- Nationally recognized exams in critical thinking/problem solving – e.g.
  - Collegiate Learning Assessment
- Locally developed examinations (could be embedded in a capstone)

## Example: Capstones as Assessment

- Variety of opportunities to embed assessment
  - Hypothesis writing
  - Debate
  - Research Design and presentation
  - Locally developed exam
  - Interview, survey
  - Portfolio
- Collected items need to be reviewed by others beyond the classroom teacher
- Difference between capstones as a course and as assessment?
- Primarily internal measures – could you add external elements?
- Content v. collegiate skills?

## Example: Assessment of Student Research

	EXTERNAL MEASURES	INTERNAL MEASURES
Direct Measures of Student Learning – Evaluate actual student work	External examiners evaluate senior research	Faculty team score senior research presentations
Indirect Measures of Student Learning – Use proxies as measures for student learning	Compare student frequency and types of writing to national data	Syllabi review of types of research assigned; survey of students on research in the major

## Example: Portfolio Assessment

- Piggyback on a university assessment project or create your own
- Ask for submissions for various goals and objectives you may have – For example:
  - Critical thinking – value-added?
  - Interdisciplinary reasoning?
  - Scientific reasoning?
  - Research of various types?
  - Most satisfying experience?
  - Creative expression?
  - Presentation skill?

## Strategy

How you approach assessment can make the difference between assessment for compliance and assessment for enlightenment

- Framing of assessment by university leaders
- Be patient, but persistent
- Use deadlines to your advantage
- Start small, keep it simple
- Ask questions of interest to the faculty
- Don't get too bogged down in the goal setting stage

## Strategy (cont'd)

- Work with the willing, bring others on board as you go
- Integrate with university and unobtrusive measures
- Embed in courses – issue of student motivation
- Establish goals, measure, revise and refine – expect this to be recursive and use it to keep moving forward
- Adapt to the posture of university leaders

## Assessment Processes?

- Create a set of principles for use – reduce fear of misuse
  - Develop faculty/student ownership of the process
  - Integrate with traditional faculty judgment processes
  - Embed faculty/student deliberation in departmental processes
  - Develop rules for reporting data

## Processes (cont'd.)

- Think in terms of strategic incrementalism rather than comprehensive rationality
- Aggregate data at the department level
- Expect faculty to show their awareness of assessment results in their annual evaluations – but do not punish individuals for results
- Assessment results should not be integrated into personnel evaluation

## Processes (cont'd.)

- Integrate assessment with university activities – annual reports, budget requests (negative data can be useful here)
- Showcase positive case studies
- Place assessment data on departmental meeting agendas – e.g. “Did you know?”
- Close the loop – embed in the assessment process

## Advantages of Assessment

- Communicates what is valued
- Increases focus on teaching and learning
- Grounds deliberation in evidence
- Role of faculty as coach rather than adversary
- Helps focus the university
- Improves student learning
- Enhances the intentionality and coherence of the curriculum
- Raises important questions
- Stores “ammunition” for future initiatives