Beyond Accountability: Creating a Learner-Centered Culture of Assessment
International Assessment and Retention Conference
June 10-13, 2009
New Orleans, LA

Presenters
- Rebecca Sanderson, PhD
  - Student Affairs Research and Evaluation
- Patricia Ketcham, PhD
  - Student Health Services
- Melissa Yamamoto, MEd
  - Student Leadership and Involvement
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Goals

- Discuss the value of focusing on student learning vs. accountability.
- Share strategies for ways to engage colleagues in dialogues to shift your assessment culture.
- Explore various strategies to move through resistance to participating in assessment.

Assessment Continuum

Accountability/ Mandated  Learning centered/ Part of our work
Iterative Assessment Process

Take action (Activity) → Did that work? (Question) → Make meaning of the evidence (Analyze) → Gather needed evidence (Collect data) → What information is needed? (Define methods) → Mission Goals Intended Outcomes

Iterative Assessment Process

Where we started

- Counting and numbers
  - How many
  - How much
  - How satisfied

- Used to show how busy we were and how happy students were—a way to demonstrate our worth
  - (i.e., Accountability)

- Did not lead to telling us about our impact
Shift in Our Conversations

- Do students learn from us?
- Are we educators?
- If we are, what are we teaching?
- What are students learning?
- How do we know?

How Would You Answer These Questions?

- Do students learn from us?
- Are we educators?
- If we are, what are we teaching?
- What are students learning?
- How do we know?
Cycle of Intentional Learning

- Program or Departmental Goals/Intended Outcomes
- Mission
- Planned learning experiences (Curriculum)
- Planned strategies to deliver the learning experiences (Pedagogy)

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Questions and Challenges

- What is our role/place in the educational mission of our university?
- If we have a role in the educational mission—what is it and how do we know if we are having an impact?
- What is our curriculum (planned learning experiences) in student affairs?
- What are our pedagogies (strategies to deliver the learning experiences)?
Starting to Create the Culture

- Educating ourselves
  - Reading together
  - Bringing in consultants, speakers
  - Attending conferences (NASPA, AAC&U, NCState)
- Division-wide professional development
- Consultations
- Assessment Council
  - Consistent and frequent meetings
- Use of language

This Language

- To improve student learning in essential areas (e.g., multiculturalism, leadership).
- To improve programs and services.
- To ensure that students are learning that which we intend.
- To focus efforts.
- To inform decision-making and clarify intentions.
Versus This Language

- Accreditation
- Administrative mandates
- Accountability
- Spelling’s Commission
- Expectations from professional organizations

How Do We Bring Unit Thinking Along?

What about a White Paper?
White Paper 101

- Historically white papers take their roots in government policy.
- Useful tool to introduce innovative thinking.
- Used to educate a specific audience.
- Should focus on the need(s) of your readers.

Why a White Paper

- To tell our story
- To clarify to ourselves why we do assessment
- To reinforce the learning aspects of assessment
- To use as a means of engaging others in dialogue
- To prompt conversation and clarity in units
- To reinforce learning
Using the White Paper

- Reflection and writing clarified our own thinking and unified our message
- Student Affairs Leadership Team
  - Prompted conversations and further expectations
- Other units and departments (e.g., SLI)

Engaging Colleagues

- Narrative is powerful
- Current—personal struggles
- Need organizational narrative
- Need to emphasize reflection
- Units what is your story of assessment? Or rather your story of student learning?
Tips on Sustainability

- Involve others & foster transparency
- Decide how leadership will occur
- Start small and practical
- Build from small successes
- Develop a common language
- Tie to improvement rather than merely to accountability
- Provide consistent feedback on assessment efforts

Tips on Sustainability

- Make training and education available over time
- Ensure visible and vocal support from the top
- Consider Resources (fiscal, energy, personnel, time, knowledge, tools, etc.)
- If you collect it use it
- Seek input over and over again
- Include students
So...

- What is your approach to assessment for learning?
- How do you talk about assessment?
- What has been successful at your institution?
- Does this seem like we are on a “right” track?
- Do you have ideas for further development?
- Is there anything here that might be useful to you? Or that you could try?
- What are 2-3 key steps with which to begin?

Questions/Comments
Feedback

- What one thing did you learn?
- What aspects were most valuable?
- What aspects were least valuable?
- What could we have done to improve this program?