OSU Perspective Turns 10!

Ten years ago, the OSU Perspective was published for the first time. The Division of Student Affairs had been involved in assessment since 1996 and had produced some publications for distribution to members of the Division; however, there was not a regular mechanism for communicating assessment information to the larger OSU community.

The OSU Perspective’s first article was entitled “Good Educational Practices” and described the research on those factors that seemed to point to better learning by students. These included: student-faculty contact, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations for performance, and diverse learning styles. Today, OSU has a rich history of measuring student engagement in these good educational practices through use of the National Survey of Student Engagement. It also has a rich history of using this information to improve curriculum, pedagogy, student services, and programs.

Additional research has also led to the use and measurement of engagement in high impact practices such as service learning, study abroad, internships, and learning communities. These practices have been encouraged at OSU and have begun to mature in terms of their use to better influence student learning.

In addition, during the current year OSU launched a project to begin to examine the status of the Baccalaureate Core Category Review. This has been an important step in the process of demonstrating student learning in the Bacc Core categories. The following invited article article gives initial information regarding the Synthesis Category Review. Thank you to the authors of this article, for their commitment to the process, their willingness to take time out of busy schedules to reflect on the process and share their observations with us.

Baccalaureate Core Category Review Process:
The Whole is Greater than the Sum of its Parts

By: Stefani Dawn, Kerry Kincanon, Marion Rossi, Vicki Tolar Burton, and Bill Bogley

When the Faculty Senate adopted the Baccalaureate Core (Bacc Core) in 1988, it chartered the Bacc Core Committee to conduct annual Category Review to oversee the performance of the general education program. Since the completion of a Faculty Senate review of the Bacc Core (Vitalization, 2010), Category Review has been reinvented by the faculty to feature an intentional focus on student learning. By extending the parameters beyond course content and faculty inputs, Category Review now addresses the Bacc Core in terms of how students interpret and respond to faculty expectations for learning. This learner-focused Category Review process infuses the Bacc Core with renewed coherence and consistency. Here’s how:

- The faculty is placed at the center of student learning assessment in the Bacc Core. Learning outcome assessment has always been faculty-centered at OSU. Despite outside pressures, we have so far navigated away from

Continued on Page 2
assessment models that rely on standardized tests or centralized "artifact collection" methods that yield statistics but produce little in the way of actionable information about student learning (Jankowski et al., 2012). Bacc Core assessment is centered in the courses where the learning occurs and is carried out by the faculty who teach and coordinate those courses.

- The reporting process provides a meaningful outlet for faculty to share their knowledge, experiences, and needs. Over a seven-year assessment cycle, academic units will be asked to submit one report form for each course that they teach within a given category. The process provides an outlet for instructors to communicate their experiences and needs with "decision-makers."

- The reporting process encourages instructors to communicate with each other and to reflect upon their own instruction as it relates to the Bacc Core. By focusing Category Review on outcomes rather than inputs, it especially allows for distinct instructional approaches that support student achievement of shared learning goals. The reporting form asks for a description of how academic units organize their processes of discussion and reflection around evidence of student learning across sections, over time, and in varying modes of delivery.

Instructors will now meet quarterly to discuss overall Bacc Core assessment of outcomes... We will develop a system for tracking this work."
- Category Review Report Form Comment

A Snapshot from the Synthesis Review: The Bigger Picture

The Bacc Core Committee is now wrapping up its review of the Synthesis categories of the Bacc Core (Contemporary Global Issues and Science, Technology & Society). These were the inaugural steps in a new seven-year cycle of Category Review that will encompass all categories of the Bacc Core. (Next up are Fitness, Math, Speech, and selected WICs.) The process itself is brand new and invites refinements to improve reliability and manage workload. Even so, the process itself is having positive impacts.

As the process becomes more familiar, the data and conclusions of Category Review will become more reliable. With reliability comes the ability to make "big picture" conclusions that can inform decision-makers and identify university-wide trends in student learning. While students are reportedly doing well relative to some of the Category Learning Outcomes (see http://oregonstate.edu/main/baccalaureate-core/learning-outcomes), at least three "big picture" observations emerged from the review of the Synthesis categories.

- The amount of written composition, required in all Synthesis courses, varied widely—from totally absent to full research papers.
- Faculty expressed concerns about certain student writing skills.
- Students struggle to integrate complex information drawn from multiple sources.

These observations and the assessment process itself have prompted rich conversations and responses in the Bacc Core Committee, in the academic units, and in the University Assessment Council.

- Some academic units have identified Bacc Core courses that were no longer best suited to general education; with concurrence of the Bacc Core Committee, these courses are being phased out of the Bacc Core to enable them to serve the more specific needs of students in major programs. Even with the withdrawal of a few courses, the vast majority of courses have opted to continue their contribution to the Bacc Core.

- The Bacc Core Committee is reviewing Category Learning Outcomes and Category Criteria for the Synthesis categories (see http://oregonstate.edu/main/baccalaureate-core/learning-outcomes-criteria-rationale) to see if these should be modified to clarify minimum writing expectations.

- Some questions that have emerged are:
  - What resources and support do students need in order to improve their ability to meet faculty expectations for learning as embodied by the Category Learning Outcomes?
  - What resources and support are needed to help faculty more effectively develop student abilities as writers and critical thinkers?
  - How can we expect students to integrate complex information drawn from multiple sources unless such an integrated perspective is enacted intentionally within the curriculum?

"...future plans involve initiating discussions among the instructors (on-campus, Ecampus, Cascades)....a more systematic approach to this issue (assessment) could work to improve our delivery."
- Category Review Report Form Comment
Baccalaureate Core Category Review . . .

◊ How much assessment data is enough? Rather than taking data from every section of every course during every term, we must invest time and energy to reflect on sampled data, make changes to improve learning, give those changes time to work, and then take more data.

The evidence from the Synthesis Category Review is a start but lacks detail. The Bacc Core Committee is refining the assessment reporting form to ensure that as educators, we are asking ourselves the right questions. Review data from the other Bacc Core categories is needed to better understand the connection between the student experience in lower division courses and their performance in the upper division. Faculty engagement and intentional alignment of assessments with the Category Learning Outcomes are essential to the production of meaningful and reliable evidence.

The bottom line is that if this process yields valid and reliable information, then the data can be presented to decision-making and resource-allocating bodies for consideration. Thus, the submission of the course review form is not just about the course, it is a contribution to a larger whole.

References


Vitalization of General Education at OSU, http://oregonstate.edu/senate/committees/other/bcr/reports/VitalizationofGeneralEducationalOregonStateUniversityMembers.pdf.

For further information contact the authors of this article and visit the Baccalaureate Core Assessment website at: http://oregonstate.edu/admin/aa/apaa/assessment/baccalaureate-core-assessment

“The Bacc Core course review process provided critical information for course improvement, resulted in a clearer vision of our course, and stimulated intra-faculty interest and attention to the educational goals we all sought. While our time-intensive process challenged us and felt uncomfortable at times, it also motivated us to discuss with each other pedagogical designs and successes leading to student development in areas such as critical thinking or ethical practices. These discussions enhanced an already lively collegiality among faculty.”

–Judy Bowker, School of Arts and Communication

Student Engagement Software for Students

For a number of years the Division of Student Affairs has wanted to find ways in which to help students document and expand upon their outside the classroom learning. Such learning occurs through participation and leadership in clubs, organizations, service and volunteer opportunities, on-campus employment, recreational activities, counseling, and a myriad of other student life experiences.

Making sense of these experiences, being able to talk about them as they relate to the student’s own development, maturation, and career goals is an advantage as our students graduate, launch a career, and go on to serve the communities in which they live.

Beginning this fall, a new web-based student engagement platform will be launched. As the modules “go live” they will allow students to login, document their involvement in clubs and organizations, service learning experiences as well as out of classroom learning pathways.

These programs will not only allow students to track their involvements and learning but also to download a portfolio of these activities and the consequent learning which could be incorporated into employment portfolios, resumes and other materials used to launch a career.

Employers looking for not only classroom learning but also experiences from which students have learned to work in teams (club sports), honor differences (diversity learning pathway), thrive in a fast paced environment (student government), and contribute to the well-being of the community (service activities).

Students who can demonstrate their learning in these various venues and who can discuss their learning with potential employers will be a step ahead of their peers. The Student Engagement Software will allow students to do this and much more—24/7! As an added benefit students will also be able to work toward certificates in various pathway programs. This new way of looking at the out of classroom experiences will allow students to design the kind of learning experiences that suit their interests, time, and goals. They can strengthen their learning in an area or pursue learning in an area in which they are a novice.

Only a handful of other universities have offered students this sort of opportunity and comments from students and student affairs professionals have been overwhelmingly positive. More information will be coming as the program comes to life at OSU!
Dr. Rebecca Sanderson Retiring as Director of Student Affairs Research, Evaluation and Planning at OSU

After over 35 years of working in higher education in various divisions of student affairs, Rebecca Sanderson is retiring. In 1994 Rebecca moved to OSU from Kansas State University and began her tenure here first, as the director of the OSU Counseling and Psychological Services and later as the director of Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Planning. In addition to her regular positions at OSU she also held interim appointments as director of Career Services and director of Institutional Research.

When asked to reflect on some of her successes at OSU, Rebecca commented on seeing the University Exploratory Studies Program grow from being an unfunded program of the counseling center to having full-time professional faculty advisors available to assist undecided students. The first dedicated funding for that program occurred during Rebecca’s time as director of the Counseling Center. Next would have to be working to gain the first accreditation ever for the Counseling and Psychological Services by the International Association of Counseling Centers and positioning CAPS to eventually gain APA accreditation of the pre-doctoral training program initiated during Sanderson’s leadership.

However, both the most rewarding and enjoyable success has been working with the Student Affairs Assessment Council for the last 10 or so years. As the first director of Research, Evaluation, and Planning Rebecca commented that working with the Student Affairs Assessment Council has been the greatest joy of her career at OSU. Rebecca said, “Together we created an environment where people could thrive, express themselves, lead, and learn together—all while setting some of the standards for best practices in Student Affairs assessment nationally.” In her words, “the people in the Student Affairs Assessment Council are some of the most committed, professional, and engaging people in the Division. They strive to improve our services and programs through the use of data-based decision-making and good educational practices.” Lastly, Rebecca mentioned that she feels she is leaving a firm foundation upon which to build an even stronger unit that can continue to improve the quality of the data that we use in our decision-making.

Rebecca commented that whatever success she has had in her career at OSU, she has many colleagues and friends who supported her during the struggles and celebrated with her in the accomplishments and for this she is very grateful.

Rebecca’s home base will still be Corvallis though she expects to do some traveling during her free time!