

# **Cultivating an Environment for Successful Assessments**



# Today's Objectives

- 1. Review of operational terms
- 2. Importance of assessment in Student Affairs
- 3. Myths of assessment
- 4. How to build an assessment culture on your campus.

## **Assessment Operational Terminology**

**Assessment:** any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, divisional, or agency effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p.18).

**Culture:** a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.

**Evaluation:** any effort to use assessment evidence to improve departmental, divisional, or institutional effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 19).

**Measurement:** methods we use to gather information for the purposes of assessment (Ewell, 2007).

**Self-efficacy:** people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (Bandura,1986, p.391).



# Two Paradigms of Assessment

#### **Improvement**

- **✓**Formative (improvement)
- ✓ Used to enhance teaching and learning (internal)
- ✓ Accomplished directly by practitioners (faculty/administrators) acting within the parameters of the teaching and learning process
- ✓Incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods

### **Accountability**

- ✓ Summative (judgment)
- ✓ Provides evidence that funded enterprise is effective and worth continuing support (external)
- ✓Information gathered from an external "objective" standpoint
- ✓ Institutional compliance
- ✓ Predominantly uses quantitative methods



### **Assessment in Student Affairs**

There has been a longstanding relationship between learning outcomes and public accountability for higher education.

The Student Affairs profession has been and continues to be under considerable pressure to demonstrate its importance and worth.

Student Affairs practitioners have felt increased pressure to conduct assessments as a way to provide evidence to compete for resources and answer questions of importance, rationale, and end results of programs.

# Why the need for assessment in Student Affairs?

- 1. **Survival** need to demonstrate effectiveness and worth of programs as vital contributors to overall learning process.
- **2. Quality** are the programs/services quality?
- 3. Affordability Can/should schools continue to fund programs? Can program be outsourced?

Assessment can be a powerful tool in linking goals to outcomes, helping define quality, and determining if quality exists in student affairs. This information sheds light on factors related to affordability.

### Five Myths of Assessment in Student Affairs

**Myth #1:** Assessments only need to be conducted every

5-6 years during the pre-accreditation process.

**Reality:** - Effective assessments are best when continually conducted. Continual assessments serve to identify potential areas for improvement of student learning and institutional advancement.

**Myth #2:** Assessments is just another Student Affairs fad.

Why bother investing time into learning how to

conduct assessments or develop learning outcomes

when a new catch fad is sure to replace it?

**Reality:** - Assessment is not a fad! There has been a learning outcomes movement within higher education since 1985 and that movement is gaining momentum. Learning outcomes are a key priority in ALL higher education accreditation agencies.

**Myth #3:** You need to assess EVERY outcome, EVERY student, EVERY year.

**Reality:** - It is neither necessary nor wise to assess every outcome, every student, every year. An assessment cycle (strategic plan) where different outcomes are assessed each year is a more manageable and effective approach.

**Myth #4:** You need to assess ALL program participants to capture enough information to determine the effectiveness of a program.

**Reality:** - Although larger sample sizes can increase confidence levels to establish generalizations, effective sample methodologies, when done correctly (i.e. are representative of your student population), can be just as effective.

**Myth #5:** Assessment is about finding fault.

**Reality:** - Assessment is not about finding fault with programs; it is about agreeing on what is most important for our students and programs, communicating that to all stakeholders, and finding out what's working and what's not. Great assessment results can and should be used to trumpet success, market programs, motivate faculty, students, and staff, and justify a program's worth. Lessthan-satisfactory assessment results indicate that changes need to be made so that our programs meet our expectations.

Myths adapted from: <a href="http://manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment/myths.htm">http://manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment/myths.htm</a>

### **Barriers to Assessment**

- Additional work "another thing we need to do"
- Time/staff restraints
- Difficult to coordinate
- Lack of expertise
- Concerns about "unscientific" or "non-valid" studies
- Fear of over assessing or survey fatigue
- Results not shared, benefits not realized
- Fear of negative findings or consequences
- Getting started
- Lack of enthusiasm from key constituents



# What other barriers have you encountered?



# Cultivating an environment for successful assessments

A culture of assessment cannot be imposed or created over night.

A culture of assessment is a result of gradual steps that serve to build trust in the process and confidence in the ability to succeed in it.

# Conditions needed to create a culture of assessment:

- 1. Trust
- 2. Assessment must be "doable."
- 3. Commitment
- 4. Support

#### **Trust**

Trust, or lack of trust is a valid barrier when trying to cultivate an assessment environment.

"How will the data be used against me/my program?"

"What if we find out that we are not doing well?

"What if the information obtained is misused by others in the division?

### Strategies to build trust in assessments:

- 1. Start by assessing Student Life as a whole, not just at individual units.
- 2. Set up the process so that the amount of effort required is relatively small and less of a risk.
- 3. Use examples from past assessments to explain how programs used the information gained to enhance their programs (i.e. Marketing funds used to purchase more plasma screens, increase tutoring hours at night/Sundays)
- 4. Exemplify reasonable uses of information. How could they use the information gained.

# Making Assessment "Doable"

Student Affairs professionals often wear many hats.

Although this allows them a rich variety of responsibilities, it also means that they may have additional time restraints.

"Where am I going to find the time?"
"How do I begin?"
"I don't have the time to do a quality assessment"

### Strategies to making assessment doable:

- 1. Start small
- 2. Team up with a colleague
- 3. Map and utilize your campus resources
- 4. Contact your StudentVoice consultant



## **Commitment**

Building commitment among those individuals whom you expect to be part of the assessment culture is key.

Emphasis should be placed on building a *sustainable* commitment measured by more than just projects completed.

### Strategies to develop commitment:

- 1. Generate and celebrate short-term wins (tangible assessment goals).
- 2. Assist staff in "sharing the wealth of knowledge" acquired through the division's assessment efforts.
- 3. Be a role model: participate in assessment projects and value work done by making data-driven decisions (actions speak louder than words)



# Support

Develop a subgroup or subculture.

Creating a team (guiding coalition) that is made of the right composition of staff members; helps establish level of trust and common objectives that lead to successful transformations (Kotter, 1996, p. 52).

This team can work together to eliminate the barriers so that clear communication of the assessment vision radiates throughout the division.

### Strategies to develop support:

- 1. Identify those who are interested in assessment.
- 2. Empower them to identify barriers and strategies to overcome them.
- 3. Provide professional development opportunities to build capacity.

#### Resources

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# **Questions/Discussion**

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Should Questions/Discussion be moved up closer to top of page? Dan Cave, 9/30/2008 DC4