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University of North Carolina at Charlotte: Using the EIA Application as a Catalyst for Intentional Improvement

Christine Robinson, Cathy Sanders, Harriet Hobbs, Elise Demeter, and Karen Singer-Freeman

Introduction

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) was honored to be recognized as a 2018 Excellence in Assessment (EIA) designee. Our path toward recognition began three years earlier, when our provost initiated a conversation about how close the university might be to submitting a compelling application. Personnel in the Office of Assessment and Accreditation conducted a gap analysis, comparing the university's current practices to the EIA rubric dimensions (Robinson, Demeter, Frederick, and Sanders 2017). Several gaps were identified, presenting the opportunity to engage a broad group of institutional stakeholders in self-study to learn, implement, and share practices that advance student learning. The EIA application became a catalyst for enacting intentional, targeted improvements on our campus. Here, we describe our institution and key elements of the university's process in developing and supporting best assessment practices.

Institutional Context

Part of UNC Charlotte's mission is to rigorously assess progress toward institutional, academic, and administrative plans, using benchmarks appropriate to its goals. Enacting quality assessment can be challenging at an urban research institution with nearly 30,000 students. Rapid enrollment growth (of 72% since 2000) has necessitated paradigm shifts across campus and new enterprise-level solutions for managing the business of the university effectively and efficiently. In 2008, gaps in the university's use of assessment were brought to the administration's attention during the school's Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC) fifth-year review. This resulted in a decade of efforts to enhance assessment on campus.

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Assessment Update

Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education

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Our Path to the Excellence in Assessment Designation

Designing Institutional Assessment Infrastructure

Prior to 2008, campus assessment activities were decentralized and inconsistent. To address SACSCOC's recommendations, rapid change was enacted over a short time span, led by an ad-hoc team. Upon receiving reaffirmation with no recommendations, senior leadership embraced the need to dedicate significant resources toward improvement. A centralized Office of Assessment and Accreditation (OAA) was established and college assessment directors (CADs) were appointed in each college. The OAA provides leadership and resources for academic planning, student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment, and institutional accreditation. CADs monitor the quality of SLO assessment and provide direct support and feedback to departments. Assessment results are shared at annual assessment retreats and meetings with departments, colleges, deans, associate deans, and the Faculty Council. The Academic Affairs Assessment Team (AAAT) brings together assessment professionals from the colleges with those from academic and student services to discuss assessment issues, data, and best practices, and to brainstorm solutions to assessment problems.

> The process of preparing for the EIA application brought together administrators, staff, and faculty to reflect on the effectiveness of the university's current assessment practices and to explore ways to bridge some remaining gaps. While institutional memories are often long and culture change can be incremental, the work we did preparing our EIA application helped shift campus attitudes toward assessment.

Identifying Gaps in the Culture of Assessment

The rapid, top-down changes resulting from the 2008 accreditation cycle were effective in creating new structures and were essential to successful accreditation. UNC Charlotte gained consistent reporting formats, demonstrated use of assessment results,

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Call for Contributions

The editor welcomes short articles and news items for *Assessment Update*. Guidelines follow for those who would like to contribute articles on outcomes assessment in higher education.

- *Content:* Please send an account of your experience with assessment in higher education. Include concrete examples of practice and results.
- *Audience: Assessment Update* readers are academic administrators, campus assessment practitioners, institutional researchers, and faculty from a variety of fields. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.
- *Style:* A report, essay, news story, or letter to the editor is welcome. Limited references can be printed; however, extensive tables cannot be included.
- *Format:* Articles may be sent to aupdate@iupui.edu as a Microsoft Word attachment. Please include your complete postal mailing address.
- *Length:* 1,000–2,000 words.
- *Copyright:* Articles shall not have been registered for copyright or published elsewhere prior to publication in *Assessment Update*.
- *Deadlines:* Each issue is typically planned four months before its publication.

Please address mailed contributions and comments to Stephen P. Hundley, Executive Editor, *Assessment Update*, Suite 4049 University Hall, 301 University Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46202. ■

Editor's Notes

The Leadership Imperatives for Assessment Excellence: An Overview

Stephen P. Hundley

This special issue of *Assessment Update* profiles recipients of the 2018 Excellence in Assessment (EIA) designation: Bowie State University, Harper College, Mississippi State University, Northern Arizona University, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Each of these institutions successfully integrates assessment practices across campus, provides evidence of student learning outcomes, and uses assessment results to guide institutional decision-making and improve student performance. More information about the EIA designation is available at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) website (http://learningoutcomesassessment.org/eiadesignationoverview.html) and is included in Gianina Baker's NILOA Perspectives column on page 12. The five 2018 EIA honorees join a roster of fifteen other institutions who were prior recipients of the EIA designation in 2016 and 2017. Collectively, these colleges and universities demonstrate exemplary commitment to and leadership for assessment excellence.

It is fitting that I use this issue of *Assessment Update* to outline a theme of the 2019 Editor's Notes: ***The Leadership Imperatives for Assessment Excellence***. Below I provide an overview of the imperatives; I will spend the remaining issues throughout 2019 delving deeper into each topic:

- **Making assessment excellence a strategic institutional priority.** This includes setting the "tone at the top" through leadership words and deeds; aligning goals for learning at institution-, program-, course-, assignment-, and co-curricular-levels; and developing the institutional infrastructure to support multiple opportunities for students to acquire and apply their learning, to scaffold and integrate that learning, and to reflect on and document learning in different ways and for various purposes and audiences. This Leadership Imperative will be discussed further in Volume 31, Number 2.
- **Attracting and retaining talent to support assessment excellence.** This involves creating conditions in which colleagues want to contribute meaningfully to this institutional priority. It involves designing recruitment and selection approaches and criteria to reinforce assessment excellence from the outset, along with providing orientation and mentoring to new hires through a variety of institutional onboarding activities. This Leadership Imperative will be discussed further in Volume 31, Number 3.
- **Developing sufficient capacity for assessment excellence.** This necessitates capacity be developed at the institution-, unit-, and individual-levels through professional development opportunities, leveraging institutional systems and processes supportive of assessment excellence, and permeating assessment and improvement for learning throughout the institution. This Leadership Imperative will be discussed further in Volume 31, Number 4.
- **Rewarding, recognizing, and promoting assessment excellence.** This requires allocating resources, valuing contributions, incentivizing initiatives, and honoring accomplishments. It also means that assessment excellence is connected to valued institutional practices and processes, and results of assessment and improvement efforts are communicated broadly. This Leadership Imperative will be discussed further in Volume 31, Number 5.
- **Sustaining a culture supportive of assessment excellence.** This compels us to align planning and budgeting practices to support student learning and success; to regularly assess progress on learning outcomes; to use credible evidence to guide ongoing improvements; and to cultivate distributed leadership for assessment excellence throughout the campus. This Leadership Imperative will be discussed further in Volume 31, Number 6.

I look forward to focusing more fully on each of these five topics in Editor's Notes throughout the remainder of 2019 in *Assessment Update*. I also invite you to share with me specific examples of these Leadership Imperatives from your own context. Please send your ideas and feedback to shundley@iupui.edu.

Northern Arizona University's Journey to Meaningful Assessment

K. Laurie Dickson and Melinda Treml

Northern Arizona University (NAU) is honored to be recognized by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment with the Excellence in Assessment designation. As a public state institution, NAU's established commitment to undergraduate student success aligns with the Arizona Board of Regents' goal to ensure educational access and affordability in serving the needs of Arizona and its citizens. Over the past decade, NAU has experienced 45% growth in its student population (from 21,352 students in fall 2007 to 31,057 students in fall 2017). Throughout this growth, NAU has worked to continue its proud tradition of engaging in assessment and continual improvement efforts.

NAU's Assessment Journey and Approaches

A university does not attain excellence in assessment overnight. At NAU, achieving excellence in assessment has been an almost two-decades-long process of developing and improving the structures, procedures, and uses of assessment, while simultaneously nurturing a culture of assessment. The success of our assessment approach rests upon a single factor: making assessment meaningful by connecting assessment findings to student learning improvement efforts. NAU's assessment plan has three components: degree programs, a liberal studies program (NAU's general education program), and co-curricular programming.

Fifteen years ago, the areas of academic assessment, institutional research, and student affairs partnered to sponsor the first annual NAU Assessment Fair. Over 30 posters evaluating topics such as student learning and satisfaction were presented, and over 100 people, including the NAU president, attended this inaugural event. Over the next several years, NAU cultivated a growing appreciation for the value of assessment. For example, in 2008, personnel in the Office of Academic Assessment initiated an award program to celebrate outstanding academic assessment efforts. In addition, they published an assessment guide and began offering individualized consulting for unit leaders and committees. In 2009, NAU received recognition from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) for strategic use of assessment data to track and improve the effectiveness of educational programs and activities. Meanwhile, participation in the Assessment Fair was growing; by 2010, the number of both posters and attendees had increased more than 50%.

The success of our assessment approach rests upon a single factor: making assessment meaningful by connecting assessment findings to student learning improvement efforts.

Assessment momentum was building. In 2012, NAU faculty and staff recognized the need for coordinated, institutionwide assessment, and a team was formed to develop student learning outcomes that synthesized the foundations of an NAU education. Framed by NAU's mission to provide an outstanding undergraduate education, the institutional learning outcomes define the essential educational expectations for all graduates, regardless of major. The outcomes explicitly state our shared goals for what students will know, what they will be able to do, and how they will approach problem-solving and decision-making after successfully completing academic requirements and co-curricular experiences. The "NAU Graduates Can" statements provide the foundational breadth from which our in-depth degree program, liberal studies program, and co-curricular outcomes align.

A prerequisite to meaningful student learning outcomes is a shared understanding of the *purpose* of learning outcomes. The institutional student learning outcomes serve three key purposes and constituencies:

- *For students,* the outcomes explicitly describe what students are learning in their curricular and co-curricular experiences and how their NAU education contributes to their future careers and opportunities as citizens of the world.
- *For faculty and staff,* the outcomes provide direction for the intentional design of specific student learning outcomes at the degree program level, in the liberal studies program, and the development of student affairs programming.
- *For the state of Arizona and future employers,* the outcomes highlight the skills and knowledge NAU graduates possess and contribute to the world.

In the years following receipt of the prestigious CHEA award, members of the University Assessment Committee and Of-

fice of Academic Assessment recognized the need to change due to striking differences in program assessment. Programs with strong cultures of assessment intentionally linked their assessment of student learning to curricular design, primarily through the creation of explicit learning outcomes and curriculum maps. Connecting curricula to assessment increased the usefulness of assessment, as faculty linked assessment findings to curricula. Based on these findings, NAU faculty and staff developed a system of common curriculum design and assessment expectations that, after extensive institutionwide feedback and review, received Faculty Senate approval. Per the degree program expectations (DPEs), all NAU degree programs must achieve and maintain:

1. A degree program purpose,
2. Degree program learning outcomes,
3. An intentional curriculum design with curricular maps,
4. Strategic course design of all courses,
5. Systematic assessment of degree program student learning outcomes, and
6. The use of assessment findings for continual improvement and dissemination.

In conjunction, Academic Program Review processes were improved with the inclusion of faculty peer review of program's DPE efforts. More specifically, a unit's curriculum design and assessment efforts are reviewed and feedback from reviewers is compiled and discussed with the academic unit, resulting in the creation of a Curriculum & Assessment Action Plan. NAU uses its annual planning and reporting process to monitor academic units' progress and provide just-in-time consultative support. In this manner, assessment becomes a conversation focused on the teaching and learning experiences of faculty and students.

All undergraduate majors at NAU culminate in a required capstone course. The capstone is intended to integrate degree program and liberal studies learning, and many capstones are experiential. Analysis of capstone syllabi revealed a lack of alignment with liberal studies program capstone requirements. As a result, in 2015–16, an institutionwide effort to improve and align capstone courses was implemented. Through the "Capstone Refresh" initiative, faculty intentionally revised capstone courses to ensure they culminate student learning in the major and the liberal studies program. Now, with the help of NAU assessment experts, capstone courses include authentic assignments that can be used to meaningfully assess student learning. Given that the capstone course reflects program learning outcomes in a meaningful and authentic setting, faculty are able to use findings to identify strengths and weaknesses within the program's curriculum, by tying findings to the curriculum map.

Liberal studies program assessment plans have similarly evolved over time. Previously, NAU evaluated achievement of skills by pairing data from the National Survey of Student Engagement and Faculty Survey of Student Engagement with standardized tests, including the Collegiate Learning Assessment (2006, 2009) and ETS-Proficiency Profile (2012, 2014). These instruments assisted in identifying broad areas for improvement. The need for improved student performance in writing and quantitative reasoning led NAU to establish a writing center, an interdisciplinary writing program, and a math center.

Faculty recognized limitations with this approach, including relatively low survey response rates, little motivation for students to take the standardized tests earnestly, and lack of alignment to liberal studies learning outcomes. These shortcomings led the liberal studies program faculty to adapt AAC&U VALUE rubrics to evaluate the essential skills and distribution blocks within courses. NAU conducted a scaffolded, comparable assessment in First-Year Seminar courses and senior capstone courses by assessing an aspect of liberal studies each year using a stratified sampling of students across the colleges. Following a pilot in 2016–17, full-scale assessment of effective writing occurred in 2017–18, with dissemination of findings and institutionwide conversations planned for 2018–19. A similar approach is underway for the other essential skills. The use of the rubrics for the discipline-specific authentic assignments in the capstone courses provide degree program and liberal studies program faculty with meaningful information that can be used to improve course and curriculum design.

Lessons Learned in Our Assessment Journey

A positive culture of academic assessment begins with a focus on student learning. Faculty and staff begin by intentionally designing and scaffolding courses into programs. Once curricula are designed to accomplish the end goal of student learning, then assessment becomes a tool to inform faculty and staff about the quality of their curriculum, or program, design. Authentic assessment motivates students to do their best work, engages faculty in substantive conversations about teaching and learning, and provides actionable data for continuous improvement. Our success is a result of our sustained commitment to discussions that involve faculty, staff, students, and external constituencies in examining, discussing, and applying assessment findings to student learning and programmatic and institutional decision-making.

Excellence in Assessment Application Process Recommendations

We recommend using the application prompts to tell your institution's story of assessment. While it is important to address each of the criteria, we attempted to tell our journey in a manner that highlighted the evolution of our thinking about assessment, from a stand-alone mandate to an integrated curriculum and course design effort that improves student learning.

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Grassroots Faculty Initiatives Grow a Culture of Assessment at Bowie State University

Becky L. Verzinski, Gayle M. Fink, Lynn Harbinson, Gail S. Medford, Patricia Westerman, and C. Janise Williamson

As Maryland's first historically black public university, Bowie State University (BSU) empowers a diverse population of students to reach their potential by providing innovative academic programs and transformational experiences as they prepare for careers, lifelong learning, and civic responsibility. The institution has evolved from a normal school into a comprehensive university that offers an array of programs with selective studies at the doctoral level. Currently, the university offers 22 undergraduate majors, 19 master's degree programs, two doctoral programs, 12 post-baccalaureate certificates, one post-master's certificate, and three certificates of advanced study. The university's 2018–23 Strategic Plan emphasizes the imperative of incorporating high-impact practices (HIPs) into academic programs, with the goal of increasing college retention and completion rates for all students.

The university continues to honor its heritage of providing access to higher education for underrepresented populations with an ongoing commitment to African Americans. BSU is located on a scenic 300-acre campus in Prince George's County, Maryland, conveniently located between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The university serves over 6,300 students and is a leader in Maryland for producing graduates with degrees in biology and information technology fields.

Successful Assessment Strategies

After the last Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) self-study in 2010–11, BSU recognized that a systematic and sustainable assessment structure was needed in order to ensure future institutional success. The major areas of focus included assessment structures to drive practice at all levels; faculty and administrative assessment initiatives to improve student learning and the student experience; strong internal and external collaborations to investigate best practices in assessment; and funding for personnel, professional development, and faculty resources.

- The four key factors for building a capacity to sustain assessment were:
  1. Two faculty-driven and administratively supported committees (University Student Learning Assessment Committee, or USLAC; General Education Committee, or GEC) that coordinate the assessment of program/course learning outcomes and the assessment of institutional student learning outcomes (Figure 1);
  2. The appointment of an assistant vice president for assessment (AVPA);
  3. The creation of a new office, the Center for Academic Programs Assessment (CAPA), that includes two additional support positions (general education assessment coordinator and program administrative specialist); and
  4. College assessment and accreditation coordinators.

All personnel and operating budgets were made possible through Title III funding.

- The assessment structure facilitated collaboration and trust between administration and faculty members, which was necessary for the culture of assessment to grow. Because CAPA operates independently from the Office of Planning, Analysis and Accountability (OPAA), which is responsible for faculty course evaluations, federal and state reporting, and institutional research, faculty felt secure discussing and reporting assessment processes

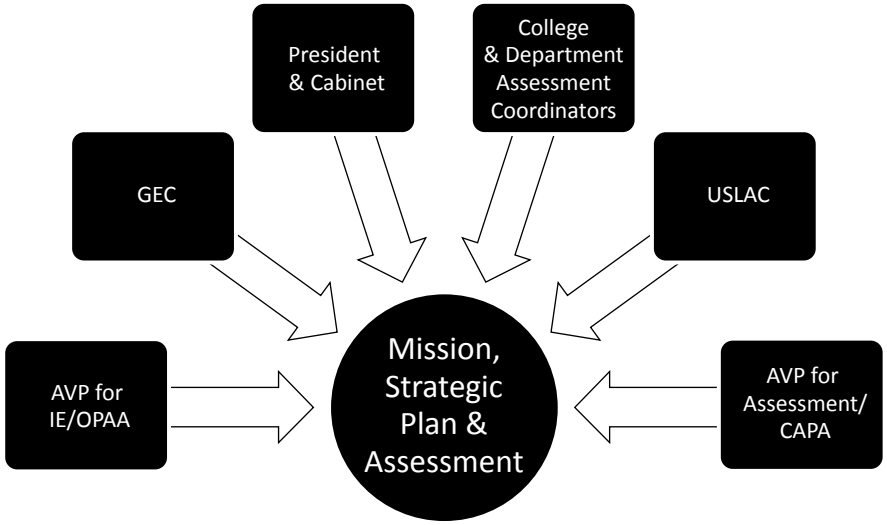

Figure 1: Key Factors for Building a Capacity to Sustain Assessment

and findings openly to the new AVPA, who was not party to any aspect of faculty evaluation that may have implications for tenure and promotion review. Although OPAA and CAPA consistently collaborate, the separate and distinct offices have proven to be the right formula for the institution.

- With the Faculty Senate's approval of the USLAC as a senate standing committee and the stipulation that faculty assessment coordinators (ACs) receive one course release per semester, the culture of assessment expanded at the course and program levels. The ACs are responsible for working with faculty in their departments to produce annual assessment reports that are evaluated by their peers across campus. Every other year, CAPA recognizes their efforts at the advanced, intermediate, and developing levels of assessment practice. Faculty assessment awards are presented at the Faculty Institute by the provost and vice president for academic affairs and are showcased on the CAPA website and in the biannual assessment newsletter.
- Additionally, the GEC supports the assessment of institutional learning outcomes and the general education core competencies. Faculty have been key collaborators with CAPA in collecting data on core competencies using multiple, nationally normed assessment instruments that included the CLA+, Proficiency Profile, iSkills, SAILS, and several HEIghten assessments. From 2012–18, BSU assessed over 3,000 students using these tools. The results were utilized to design internal pilot studies or to selectively participate in external pilot studies in writing, critical thinking, information literacy and research skills, civic competency and engagement, and intercultural competency. The majority of these pilot studies were longitudinal in nature and will be concluded within the next year. This will culminate in the comprehensive revision of institutional student learning outcomes.
- In high-enrollment/low-performance courses, faculty facilitated redesigns to improve student learning in targeted general education offerings and selected core courses such as principles of accounting, where the student pass rate nearly doubled with the redesign interventions.
- Training and professional development opportunities have accelerated the growth of assessment practices on campus. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) sponsors two faculty institutes per year and frequently includes assessment topics within the program slate. Each fall, CAPA sponsors a small group of faculty to attend a regional assessment conference to investigate and identify strategies for assessing HIPs. Furthermore, at the request of the University System of Maryland (USM), BSU sponsored the first assessment conference for USM institutions in spring 2017 with over 150 participants from across the state.
- Fostering strong partnerships with the USM's Center for Academic Innovation, external stakeholders that include the U.S. Department of Education, Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), and Educational Testing Service were instrumental in supporting pilot studies focusing on assessing general education core competencies, HIPs, assessment technologies, soft skills/career readiness, and civic engagement.

Lessons Learned and Future Initiatives

Bowie State appreciated the external feedback received from the Excellence in Assessment (EIA) reviewers, which provided the 2019–21 MSCHE Self-Study Steering Committee with invaluable insight as they prepare for reaffirmation. It also provided faculty and assessment administrators the opportunity for self-reflection and recognition of how much was accomplished in the last eight years. This acknowledgment is a point of pride that has energized faculty to expand their assessment activities. The external feedback also confirmed that the assessment action plans designated for the next five years contained legitimate and attainable goals. The initiatives planned are designed to continue supporting faculty as they develop new strategies to improve student learning, to strengthen institutional assessment practices, and to continue building internal and external collaborative relationships that prioritize best practices in assessment.

> The assessment structure facilitated collaboration and trust between administration and faculty members, which was necessary for the culture of assessment to grow.

Faculty and CAPA Initiatives

- A Faculty Assessment Fellows (FAF) program is currently in the developmental phase and will launch in fall 2019. Each FAF will be compensated for two years of service to the Division of Academic Affairs, where he/she will work directly with faculty members to improve assessment practices at the course, program, and college level; offer training sessions to campus members; and develop a faculty assessment handbook.
- A designated assessment lab, also known as the Virtual Instruction, Training, and Assessment Lab (VITAL), will open in spring 2019 for faculty training and student assessments. VITAL includes office space for the FAF as well as a faculty assessment resource library. Furthermore, VITAL will house the mobile assessment lab , which is a self-contained charging station that holds 25 tablet computers that can be deployed into any classroom to conduct national standardized student assessments or

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Assessment Through Shared Governance at Mississippi State University

Tracey N. Baham

Mississippi State University was recognized with the 2018 Excellence in Assessment (EIA) designation, and this article explains more about its assessment strategies and lessons learned along the way. Located in Starkville, Mississippi, Mississippi State is a public land-grant university with a Carnegie Classification of Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity. Accredited through the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, MSU offers degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, specialist, and doctoral levels. In fall 2018, the university enrolled 22,201 students in academic programs from eight colleges.

The university has a strong shared governance policy and culture that relies on committees with diverse representation from across the institution. These committees do not use the term "assessment" per se, but they discuss assessment data and develop necessary implementation plans. This work contributes to curricular modifications related to assessment data, as well as academic and operating policies that affect student learning. The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) is charged with shepherding the assessment process, which requires flexibility and coordination among the many levels of assessment, from course, major, department, college, and committee to the university as a whole. The OIRE team provides training and guidance for those working on assessment reports, and members of the office sit on almost all university-level committees to ensure that assessment results are incorporated into the decision-making process.

Highlighted Assessment Strategies

For nearly 15 years, the institution has engaged in an annual assessment process that has grown from printed Word documents to a centralized data system to encapsulate its activity. Today, the entire institutional effectiveness process involves 100 percent participation from 276 academic, academic support, and administrative units across campus. In 2017–18, one in six Mississippi State employees, from administration to faculty to professional and support staff, contributed directly to some form of assessment, whether through annual reports or in committee work. With a formalized assessment process in place, the institution can delve more deeply into strategies and activities that generate meaningful data that contribute to useful analysis. Several assessment strategies highlight why Mississippi State was selected for this award.

Developing the University Learning Outcomes

Mississippi State University has engaged in formal learning outcomes assessment since the early 2000s. Through this process, individual academic programs, academic support units, and administrative support units identified learning and program outcomes to improve their teaching practices and administrative services. The current university learning outcomes evolved through a grounded methodological approach based on several years of individual assessment reports. The advantage of this approach to developing outcomes is that they are already threaded into every assessment effort on campus, connecting course, program, and co-curricular experiences to university values. OIRE developed a protocol to conduct this content analysis, as well as a map that connects every layer of outcomes from the programs, through the colleges and divisions, to the university learning outcomes.

These outcomes are now part of the university's strategic plan: State of Excellence. By aligning current and future assessment activities with the strategic plan, the institution can identify opportunities for collaboration and areas that need improvement from an institutional level. Furthermore, the university has tied its annual institutional effectiveness process directly to its mission and strategic plan.

Although it may seem the outcomes are new to Mississippi State, they actually existed on hundreds of assessment reports dating back to the early 2000s, and in many cases before that in less formal ways. The themes have changed slightly with every iteration of the university's strategic plan; however, the academic programs and the co-curricular experiences have documented student learning through a mature assessment process for nearly two decades.

Institutional Effectiveness Committee

Another strong point for Mississippi State's assessment is its Institutional Effectiveness Committee, which is composed of about 50 members from across the university. This standing committee reports to our provost and executive vice president to serve as a peer review body

for all annual assessments. Using an evaluation rubric that the members developed, teams of two or three members review all annual reports, provide feedback to the units, and supply data for OIRE's analysis of the overall assessment process. This committee's work is valued at the institution, and its input has strengthened the process, which is documented longitudinally based on data from the committee rubric.

Enhancement Spotlight

Mississippi State is working to highlight some of the mutually beneficial aspects of continuous improvement and teaching and learning. The institution sponsors several faculty awards, and evidence of student learning and use of assessment results are the primary components of the criteria for achieving an award.

OIRE also celebrates those who are engaged in meaningful assessment to serve as a model for others. The office posts articles on its Twitter feed every other week to highlight great assessment work using #EnhancementSpotlight. These posts, along with other forms of communication, are among the institution's efforts to communicate assessment results to the public and, in particular, to our constituents.

Lessons Learned

Mississippi State submitted its application twice: the first met with rejection and the second was selected for the EIA designation. The first attempt was very instructive in improving how the institution tells its story, particularly with the wonderful feedback we got from our reviewers.

Given the many constituencies and pathways to governance, not all assessment follows the exact same process and may not even be formally considered assessment. Mississippi State had to be creative about what constitutes evidence that assessment has been used to make improvements. When we first applied for this award, we looked specifically at annual assessment reports, which appeared disjointed; however, the reality was that our university committees also contribute to assessment work. This evidence is not captured by annual reports but is embedded in the minutes. For example, we have student representatives in these committees who have brought forward ideas for improvement that were then implemented through these committees. Because these improvements happened at the broader university level, they weren't necessarily recorded in an annual report. We have now become more cognizant of how this work is documented for future use. As a result of this mindset, we uncovered a culture that requires no policy for enforcement and is authentic to the improvement work being done.

The first iteration of this submission changed our perspective about the overreliance on the assessment process as an end unto itself. Assessment exists beyond annual reports stored in a document repository. As a result, Mississippi State is now better able to tell its story not only for accountability purposes, but within the university to train new professionals or those new to the assessment process.

Future Endeavors

Completing the application has advantages like any self-study beyond consideration for EIA designation. Following the suggested questions within each section of the application called attention to areas that were less developed than others. Just like all of our assessment units have strengths and weaknesses, so, too, do our own assessment processes. However, the application process was inspiring and has generated opportunities for future exploration. One reviewer wrote, "Mississippi State's discovery process of its strengths and weaknesses was an exciting read."

A current focus is to incorporate faculty reflection on teaching into the faculty productivity software so that the reflection is recognized not only in the annual faculty evaluation process, but also in the annual assessment reports. This effort will hopefully incentivize faculty to consider how assessment data in their classes can benefit the students, as well as the institution's academic programs and learning activities. Ideally, data from these reflections could be synthesized for public benefit.

OIRE is also hoping to infuse more data into existing operations to reduce the shadow work of data collection. One opportunity includes harnessing data from our learning management system and incorporating it into the assessment system. It would seem that this linkage has not been fully developed within many of the existing assessment software systems; therefore, Mississippi State would have to develop its own process to make this connection. This way, units could spend more time on data analysis and interpretation, as opposed to data collection.

> By aligning current and future assessment activities with the strategic plan, the institution can identify opportunities for collaboration and areas that need improvement from an institutional level.

Mississippi State has incorporated assessment into the culture of the institution. Fortunately, the wide representation in shared governance, combined with the public nature of the institution, emphasizes transparency. The EIA application process has highlighted the potential to leverage these existing networks and systems to intentionally communicate and use assessment data that advance the university's programs and initiatives. ■

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Excellence in Assessment at Harper College

Faon C. Grandinetti

Harper college is located in Chicago's northwest suburbs and serves more than 35,000 students annually. The college is named for Dr. William Rainey Harper, a pioneer in the community college movement and the first president of the University of Chicago. The college's academic programs prepare students for careers and for transfer to four-year universities. Harper offers associate degrees and certificates, advanced career programs, workforce training, professional development, continuing education, and developmental education.

Assessment at Harper

Learning assessment at Harper reflects a commitment to continuous improvement. After challenges integrating assessment processes in the 1990s and early 2000s, an Outcomes Assessment (OA) Office and Learning Assessment (LA) shared governance committee were established in 2009. These groups support and promote assessment and ensure use of assessment results for improvement. Annually, Harper conducts general education, program, course, and noninstructional assessment.

General education assessment is led by the LA Committee and its workgroups. The general education outcomes provide student learning goals for all associate-degree programs. Instructional departments identify connections between courses and these outcomes in a curriculum map. The college focuses on one outcome each year, and faculty members measure the outcome within their courses. Faculty and student participation are ensured through the use of random sampling, focusing on students who are nearing completion.

After administration and analysis of the general education assessment, the LA Committee communicates the results to the campus community, including presentations at all-faculty meetings, faculty/staff workshops, an internal Assessment Conference, an employee e-newsletter, and in the Student Learning Showcase blog. Harper's assessment webpages provide access to the General Education Assessment Plan, recent results, and current assessment status, including standardized visualizations and improvement plans for each outcome. Direct assessment results are triangulated with indirect results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement and direct measures from program/course assessments mapping to each general education outcome. These visualizations are designed to ensure a comprehensive view of assessment and improvement for stakeholders. Additionally, the student communication manager helps ensure communication of assessment information with students.

After sharing results and gathering feedback, the LA Committee develops improvement plans. The partnership between the LA Committee and the OA Office ensures these improvements will be implemented and sustained. Improvement plans include evidence of student learning, descriptions of the assessment, what was learned, and what steps will be taken to improve student learning. Follow-up assessments are conducted the year following improvement plan implementation, ensuring adequate time for improvements to occur before reassessment.

Program/course assessments are conducted within academic departments, organized by a faculty lead. Faculty develop assessment plans in collaboration with the dean during the fall semester. Results are collected throughout the academic year and analyzed in summer. Faculty discuss results early the next fall semester to identify areas for improvement. Departments are required to identify how they will use results for improvement when the criterion for success is not met, but many make improvements even when the criterion is met. This practice indicates an advanced culture of assessment among departments that choose to implement changes, even when not required.

Harper faculty connect program/course assessments to general education outcomes when their plan is entered in the assessment management system. This mapping allows for continued conversation regarding the appropriateness of the general education outcomes, ensures faculty control of program/course assessment, and supports the sharing of assessment information to stakeholders.

Noninstructional (student support, co-curricular, administrative) areas also engage in the annual assessment cycle. High-level assessment information for all forms of assessment is reported in the annual Outcomes Assessment Report.

Participation and Support

Harper involves a wide variety of stakeholders in assessment and improvement. Adjunct faculty participate in assessment alongside full-time faculty. Adjunct faculty are expected to participate in general education, program, and course assessment, as well as actively engage in discussing results, improvement planning, and implementation. An adjunct faculty member also serves on the LA Committee. Each career program has an advisory committee, consisting of local professionals, that reviews curricula, outcomes, and results. Dual-credit

instructors are also expected to participate in assessment and improvement work.

Harper's assessment processes are assisted by a robust support network. Departments report activities through the management system, which allows Harper to collect and maintain standardized assessment information while granting users flexibility in building assessment plans. The system also provides current and historical information, ensuring continuity over time. The LA Committee, OA Office, and Academy for Teaching Excellence members collaborate to provide professional development, including the Annual Assessment Conference, offered since 2010. Workshops are provided on topics including writing learning outcomes, self-assessment, and classroom assessment techniques. Further support is provided through training and reference materials on the employee portal and Harper website.

Faculty interested in specialized assessment experiences can apply for additional opportunities. These experiences began as fellowships in 2010, allowing faculty and OA Office members to partner to implement an assessment project. From 2010–16, 12 faculty were awarded fellowships. In FY2017, the fellowship converted to a Community of Practice (CoP) format, which allows more faculty to engage in innovative assessment projects and develop a commitment to improving student learning.

Harper recognizes faculty who prioritize and show excellence in assessment. For example, faculty include their assessment work as "instructional service" in their application for promotion/tenure. Faculty often note their participation with the assessment CoP, conference, and workshops in the Professional Development section. Similarly, peer reviewers and deans report excellence in these activities as part of their review and feedback to faculty.

Lessons Learned

Over the past decade, Harper's assessment culture has grown considerably. The following insights are provided for institutions that are working to grow their cultures of assessment:

- *Be persistent.* Harper's assessment work began in the 1990s, and the college continues to make improvements today. This work is vital for our students, but improving the assessment culture does not happen quickly, nor without challenges.
- *Be helpful.* If you are a campus assessment leader, make your job about assisting others by helping faculty help students learn, helping ensure the assessment process is not cumbersome, and helping ensure assessment data is being used appropriately to make improvements.
- *Focus on students.* Faculty/staff are dedicated to the well-being of students and to their learning. Our focus can sometimes shift to concerns of compliance, security, budgets, etc., but if we focus on the well-being of our students, we can often find common ground from which to build our work.
- *Use your campus culture to your advantage.* Harper increased its focus on data-informed decision-making starting in 2009. This change expanded the institutional culture in a way that also supported using assessment data to inform improvements for students.
- *Gather input and participation from a wide variety of stakeholders.* Multiple communication techniques ensure as many stakeholders as possible are involved in assessments, review of results, and improvements. Harper provides multiple opportunities for faculty/staff to increase knowledge and use of assessment, including the Assessment Conference, CoP, workshops, and targeted consultations.

Excellence in Assessment Application and Feedback

Harper was able to use the Excellence in Assessment (EIA) application process to review the assessment culture at the college. In 2017, members of the LA Committee reviewed the application materials and rubric, and applied the rubric through a self-assessment. In 2018, the LA Committee determined the college's assessment case was strong enough to warrant submission of the application materials. Through this process, we learned:

- *Tell your story, even if it doesn't fit perfectly with the EIA rubric/application.* As a community college, not all portions of the EIA application materials aligned with Harper's experiences. Explain what's different and why it makes sense for your institution.
- *Excellence does not equal perfection.* Do not be afraid to share what makes assessment work at your institution—and where you still struggle. The intent of learning outcomes assessment is to identify strengths and weaknesses and implement changes in an effort to make meaningful improvements.
- *Use the EIA process for self-assessment and reflection.* Like all assessment work, the process is what you make of it. Harper used the process to identify areas needing attention. Accordingly, the LA Committee and OA Office members developed an improvement plan that included implementation of a General Education Assessment Advisory Committee, similar to those that already work with career programs, improving communication with student government and adjunct faculty, and extending general education outcome

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At Harper College, faculty and staff work together to measure student learning and, more important, ensure the results of those measurements are used to improve the learning experience for future students. The college has a strong assessment model and broad participation across stakeholders.

NILOA Perspectives

Assessment Committees: Lessons from Excellence in Assessment Designees

Gianina Baker

Since 2016, 20 institutions have been recognized as Excellence in Assessment (EIA) designees for their assessment work. The initiative, known as the EIA designation, is jointly sponsored by the Voluntary System of Accountability, the Association of American Colleges & Universities, and the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). The EIA designation recognizes exemplary efforts across the six components of NILOA's Transparency Framework (2011), including the explicit specification of learning outcomes; plans for gathering evidence; resources and supports provided to faculty and staff to help them understand, develop, implement, communicate, and use evidence; information on assessment activities under way; results from assessment; and the use of evidence to improve student learning.

Institutions are awarded on one of two tiers—*Excellence* and *Sustained Excellence*. *Sustained Excellence* designees have maintained a solid foundation and track record of integration of assessment data from throughout the institution and used assessment results to guide programs and curricula for a period of five or more years. *Excellence* designees are institutions who demonstrate strong leadership and commitment to a culture of evidence-based decision-making centered on the use of institution-level assessment results.

Roles of Assessment Committees

Groups and individuals engaged in assessment are integral to assessment work being successful throughout an institution. Representative diversity of internal and external stakeholders engaged in assessment of student learning is necessary for institutions intending to "close the loop," and institutions have increased representation of various stakeholders on assessment-related committees. Table 1 shows the dimension and standard of excellence on which EIA applicants are expected to reflect and "provide evidence of substantive participation in assessment activities by individuals that represent a variety of roles across and off-campus" (EIA 2018, p. 12).

Evolved from its once "formulaic quality" (Banta 2002, p. 13), the functions of assessment committees entail "a committee charged with leading assessment … var[ies] from one campus to another, depending on campus culture, mission, history, and governance structure" (Suskie 2009, p. 91). Thus, structure depends on context. Ensuring representation at the institution, program, department, and unit levels serves to "demonstrate the level

Table 1. EIA 2018 Evaluation Rubric: Groups and Individuals Engaged in Assessment Activities

Dimension	Standard for Excellence
Diversity of institution representatives participating regularly in institution assessment activities	Groups and individuals engaging regularly include representatives from (a) senior leadership, such as a member of the president's or chancellor's cabinet; (b) personnel responsible for the oversight of institution and program/unit assessment activities; (c) personnel responsible for the oversight of institution and program external accreditation activities; (d) tenured/tenure-track faculty from a variety of departments and/or representing a faculty governing body; (e) adjunct and/or part-time faculty from a variety of departments and/or representing an adjunct and/or part-time faculty governing body; (f) noninstructional staff responsible for student support, such as advisors, student service personnel, and the library; and (g) students from a variety of majors and years, and/or representing a student governing body.
Representatives from the community or other external stakeholders participating regularly (at least annually) in institution assessment activities	Representatives from the following groups are substantively engaged in institution assessment activities regularly: (a) alumni from a variety of majors and years, and/or representing a broad/institutional alumni group; (b) employers and/or business presidents from the community; (c) admissions or faculty from programs frequently applied to by graduates of the institution, including schools and programs that accept students as transfers or for graduate study; (d) members of institutional oversight or governing bodies; and/or (e) community-based organizations and/or community partners.

of institutional understanding of and commitment to integrated assessment" (EIA 2018, p. 12), ultimately providing a bigger picture of student learning at the institution.

Assessment Committees from EIA Designee Institutions

EIA designees continuously referenced assessment committees throughout their applications, as the committees were central to oversight and communication of what was happening around assessment. While the committees varied in structure and diversity of representation of faculty, staff, and students, across-the-institution involvement was evident in the applications—particularly institutional assessment committees. Nearly all of the EIA designees involved students, both undergraduate and graduate (if applicable), in institutional assessment work. Although there were a variety of configurations to conduct effective assessment work at institutions, there are lessons to be learned from careful examination of membership on the committees tasked with supporting assessment of student learning.

While the names of institution-level assessment committees varied in each of the EIA applications, nearly all discussed institutional assessment committees with similar charges. Words such as "support," "foster," "assist," "advisory," "monitor," and "guidance" were consistent in the applications of EIA designees. The language utilized confirmed a main charge of institutional assessment committees is serving in an oversight role of assessment at all levels, thus ensuring that the corresponding assessment plan aligns with the scope of the institution's mission, learning outcomes, and policies. While the overall purpose of the assessment committee is often consistent among institutions, secondary responsibilities of such committees vary. Additional responsibilities included the following words: "lead," "plan," "implement," "design," "ensure alignment," "provide direction," "serve as a resource," "communicate," "make recommendations," "build institutional capacity for assessment," "engage [with key stakeholders]," and "establish policy."

Faculty, for the most part, chair EIA institution-level assessment committees allowing for direct input on teaching and learning. Suskie (2009) states that "incorporating an assessment committee into the governance structure sends a powerful message that assessment is not a fad but a permanent part of the fabric of campus life" that conveys "faculty are responsible for leading student learning assessment" (p. 91). A consistent part of the agenda on such committees included sharing data and best practices to inform faculty development opportunities such as curriculum and teaching. Additionally, with a direct line to the Provost and/or President's Office, this ensures that what is learned in these meetings finds its way into recommendations and policies that are built with consensus and can then be communicated to several audiences.

Groups and individuals engaged in assessment are integral to assessment work being successful throughout an institution. Representative diversity of internal and external stakeholders engaged in assessment of student learning is necessary for institutions intending to "close the loop," and institutions have increased representation of various stakeholders on assessment-related committees.

Lessons Learned from EIA Designees

There are several takeaways from the EIA designees that are useful to institutions looking to improve their assessment committee efforts. Considerations of time, space, and commitment of groups and individuals to the work are key to the structure and function of the committees. Most, if not all, of the institutions had at least one formal committee dedicated to the institution's assessment efforts. The committee membership and charges make clear how the different committees are aligned to support student learning. While these committees are often in charge of conducting institution-level assessment, they also have supportive roles regarding program-/unit-level assessment. In fact, the institutional assessment committees often serve in an oversight role because committees are able to divide and align the assessment work throughout the institution. Another takeaway is the role given to students on the committees. While not all had voting capability, they were given space on the committee to voice input and provide direct evidence of teaching and learning. It is also apparent that there is no set time for committee work, as some meet biweekly and others monthly. Still, the mission of the committee is quite clear—provide evidence of student learning, and use that evidence to improve. ■

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Excellence in Assessment at Harper College

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mapping capability in the assessment management system to noninstructional departments.

- *Use reviewer feedback to inform improvements.* Harper received meaningful feedback from the EIA reviewers. The LA Committee reviewed that feedback and is implementing additional improvements based on the information. These steps will build on Harper's assessment strengths and provide substantial improvements.

Conclusion

At Harper College, faculty and staff work together to measure student learning and, more important, ensure the results of those measurements are used to improve the learning experience for future students. The college has a strong assessment model and broad participation across stakeholders. However, as a college dedicated to continuous reflection and improvement, we are committed to that same level of excellence in all assessment processes. We are using the EIA designation and feedback to inform those improvements. ■

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Grassroots Faculty Initiatives Grow a Culture of Assessment at Bowie State University

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into any conference room to train faculty during departmental or college meetings. The mobile assessment lab will be operational by AY19–20.

Institutional Assessment Practices

- In conjunction with CETL and as a precursor to the spring 2019 Faculty Institute, faculty assessment coordinators, accreditation liaisons, assessment administrators, chairpersons, and deans will participate in a training day with a NILOA assessment mentor.
- The piloting of SPOL, an integrated strategic management software linking planning, accreditation, assessment, credentialing, and budgeting, is currently under way and is anticipated to become a valuable tool in advancing institutional effectiveness and assessment.
- In spring 2019, the GEC, including faculty, staff, administrators, and students, will initiate a comprehensive review of the institutional learning outcomes to ensure that they align with the new strategic plan, reflect program and course learning outcomes, and are relevant for today's global market.

Partnerships

- New USM partnerships include digital badging, civic engagement assessment, HIPs, and demonstrating return on investment. In spring 2019, BSU will become a partner in the USM project on academic integrity.

Recommendations to Other Institutions

Bowie State University recommends that other institutions that are applying for the EIA designation consider the following:

1. Develop an EIA mini self-study committee with appropriate campus representatives to:
   a. Study the NILOA Transparency Framework and evaluation rubric, and employ both to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for growth;
   b. Conduct a mock self-study process and review rubric scores to determine readiness for application;
   c. Determine a timeline for the application and allocate adequate time for the campus self-study process and writing of the application (at least one year); and
   d. Ensure that senior administration supports the initiative.
2. Begin drafting/writing the application as early as possible. The May deadline can be a challenge because of the demands at the end of the academic year.
3. Identify an external reader who can provide feedback on the application *prior* to submission.
4. Utilize web links in the application, as well as the appendix, to maximize assessment storytelling. A 3,000-word narrative is brief!
5. Update the university assessment website throughout the review and application process and finalize all changes no later than the beginning of June. ■

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Have an idea for an article or special issue of *Assessment Update*? Let us know. Email the executive editor at aupdate@iupui.edu

Northern Arizona University's Journey to Meaningful Assessment

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Perfection in assessment is not necessary in order to achieve excellence. An organization's candor in describing how they identified and solved assessment issues is key to an institution's narrative. The rubric is a fantastic resource to apply to any assessment office's annual and periodic strategic planning initiatives. NILOA's approach will guide your institution to sustain its assessment goals, because it transforms assessment into a relationship-building experience. ■

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University of North Carolina at Charlotte: Using the EIA Application as a Catalyst for Intentional Improvement

(continued from page 2)

and scaled assessment activities to match enrollment growth. However, some campus stakeholders were resistant to the new, rapidly enacted changes. Some faculty felt they had not been included in important conversations, or that assessment results were artificial and lacking in meaning. Faculty and staff also reported there was little return on investment after the preparation and submission of assessment plans and reports. This created a culture in which some—or many—faculty lacked personal investment in the assessment plans and expressed reluctance to modify familiar processes to adapt to possible changes. The OAA endeavored to intentionally shift local culture toward the view that assessment is a useful tool for improving student learning. When done well, the assessment process itself encourages reflection and collaborative discussion. To initiate a culture shift, we strategically supported special projects that were of interest to faculty and impactful to students. We also increased the supportive services provided by our office, including educational opportunities, financial support, consultations, and public recognition.

Creating Culture Shift by Recognizing Efforts and Building Community

To disseminate best practices and create opportunities for faculty and staff to discuss assessment, the OAA created Assessment Academy workshops. Workshop topics have included ensuring alignment between program assessments and objectives, using analytic rubrics to identify areas of learning improvement, and implementing formative classroom assessment techniques. The over 100 faculty who have attended workshops have enjoyed opportunities to discuss ways in which assessment can improve their efforts. To increase support for quality assessment work, we established an "excellence in assessment" program with monetary value, in which colleges, departments, and units that embrace best practices were publicly recognized. To create additional financial support for high-level assessment work, we offered competitive scholarship of assessment grants to individuals who develop and initiate program changes for improvement in student learning and success. We also provided summer stipends to Assessment Faculty Fellows, a group of faculty mentors who provide assessment expertise and disseminate best practices among other faculty in their home colleges. To date, the OAA has awarded 15 models of excellence in assessment recognitions, 13 scholarship of assessment grants, and five faculty fellowships.

Enhancing Campus, Program, and Course Alignment

Perhaps the most difficult gap identified during preparations for the EIA designation is the limited alignment between course-, program-, and campus-level learning outcomes. First, review of outcomes, evidence, and the use of evidence are conducted within courses, programs, and divisions. However, assessment processes are not scaffolded to build from or

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support the levels below and above. Some colleges used a curriculum mapping process to address this substantial gap. In addition, CADs worked with program coordinators and department chairs to demonstrate how course outcomes support program outcomes. Second, explicit course objectives did not appear on some syllabi, or mapping revealed concerns with the sequencing of courses. The AAAT developed a plan to map, aggregate, and examine existing program-level (general education and undergraduate programs) assessment data with institutional-level assessment data (standardized exams and surveys) to improve program- and institutional-level alignment. The process of creating alignment is ongoing, but it is anticipated that adjustments to curricula will contribute to and enhance student success.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Work Toward Best Practices, Not Designation

Using the EIA application and rubric for self-study and improvements should be the goal of participants' efforts. Do not attempt to implement improvements simply to attain the EIA designation. Instead, focus on addressing weaknesses that are of interest to faculty and impactful to students. Improvements are most likely to be implemented and sustained when they are broadly supported.

Engage Multiple Stakeholders

The broader the involvement at the start of the process, the greater the potential for institutional improvement. Changes in the current process must be aligned with the values of participants, and every participant must understand the purpose and potential impact of adopting best practices. A high level of participation in the process and an understanding of the return on investment can lead to positive changes in campuswide assessment culture.

Educate Stakeholders

In order to truly engage stakeholders, it is essential to create a shared terminology and to make explicit the ways in which improved assessment contributes to student success. Do not make assumptions about participants' beliefs or their understanding of assessment. Creating shared knowledge and understanding may require the education or re-education of stakeholders.

Create Institution-Based Plans for Improvement

Do not attempt to address all gaps simultaneously. Create an improvement plan that is attainable and has broad support, as well as a time line for achieving plan goals. Recognize that institutional culture and higher-level administrator support will dictate what can be successfully addressed.

Celebrate Strengths

As you identify your institution's strengths and weaknesses from a gap analysis, be sure to communicate and celebrate your strengths. Too often, institutions focus on areas for improvement but forget to applaud areas of success. A celebration of strengths can provide a community with the energy and optimism required to tackle difficult challenges.

Start Early and Stay Late!

The EIA Designation Evaluation Rubric has 33 dimensions. Recognize that improvement and success will take time to achieve. Change cannot and should not be rushed. Every hour of useful effort spent improving assessment and every person who contributes meaningfully to the effort will increase the long-term benefits to the institution.

Conclusions

The process of preparing for the EIA application brought together administrators, staff, and faculty to reflect on the effectiveness of the university's current assessment practices and to explore ways to bridge some remaining gaps. While institutional memories are often long and culture change can be incremental, the work we did preparing our EIA application helped shift campus attitudes toward assessment. Today, the assessment professionals on our campus are less likely to be perceived as accreditation police enforcing accountability, and more likely to be viewed as invested partners working to support student success. Our campus's assessment culture now includes a broader range of stakeholders, a growing emphasis on authentic and holistic data and analysis, and a student-centered view that quality assessment is central to student success. UNC Charlotte's future improvement efforts will focus on increasing student and adjunct involvement in the assessment process, integrating learning outcomes data from Student Affairs and academic support units with data from Academic Affairs, and triangulating data from multiple sources for campus-level outcomes. ■

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