Assessment in Times of Turbulence: Using Assessment Tools to Understand and Change Departmental Processes Students

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jennifer_massey/5/
The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a survey of first-year and senior baccalaureate students that gauges their involvement in many different aspects of college life. Survey responses are used by participating institutions to assess the degree to which their faculty and staff have employed empirically confirmed good practices in undergraduate education (NSSE, 2010a). NSSE is administered in the spring between late January and April. In 2009, the average response rate for all participating institutions was 33%—36% among first-year students and 39% among seniors (NSSE, 2010b). From a small institution’s perspective this is an unacceptably low response rate because it increases the overall sampling error. When the sample is too small, it affects the institution’s ability to make concrete statements about students’ responses.

Small institutions have an added burden to administer the survey in a way that attracts attention and ensures a high response rate. Good practice dictates that sampling error should be less than 5%. An institution with 5,000 first-years and seniors in the population needs 357 students in the sample (7% response) to achieve a 5% sampling error. However, a small institution with 500 students in the population needs 217 responses (43% response) to achieve the same level of sampling error.

Fontbonne University achieved a 27% response rate with its 2008 administration, which was considered too small and yielded an unacceptably high sampling error. When considering the 365 first-year and senior population for 2010, a 51% response rate was calculated to achieve the desired sampling error of less than 5%. This meant that the institution needed to create a campaign to promote the survey and stimulate participation.

**Student Involvement**

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) have stated:

“Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Furthermore, when students collaborate with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material, they acquire valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college.” (p. 193)

**Took Survey. Got Shirt: Using Effective Educational Practices to Maximize NSSE Response Rates**

Matthew L. Feldmann and Keli Jackson
This premise is actively encouraged in curricular and co-curricular activities such as student program boards, athletics, internships, and laboratory activities. The administration of NSSE represents a key opportunity to involve students, because it requires students’ responses. We believe the survey’s target audience can become, in part, its administrator. Student members of the Ad Club at Fontbonne were enlisted to assist Institutional Research and Assessment (IRA) personnel with the NSSE administration. The opportunity to engage in experiential learning in the familiar campus environment is a good learning experience for students of advertising, marketing, and communication.

Survey responses are used by participating institutions to assess the degree to which their faculty and staff have employed empirically confirmed good practices in undergraduate education.

NSSE administration is a well-defined, time-specific, educationally relevant activity that allows students freedom of expression (with some administrative monitoring). This mutually beneficial synergy is not lost on students. According to Andrew Cohen (personal communication July 7, 2010), an Ad Club member and advertising major at Fontbonne, “Not only was this experience extremely empowering for us, but we also felt that, as students marketing to our peers, we were more than qualified. Having a matching vote of confidence from our administration was great, helping us feel as though we could trust one another.”

Survey Administration

Fontbonne students were eager to be involved with a campuswide advertising project that provided them with an opportunity to employ the skills they were learning in their classes while building their portfolios. The Ad Club was given $1,000 for an advertising budget

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: In addition to standard manuscripts, news may be contributed via letter, telephone, or fax (317) 274-4651. The standard manuscript format is a 60-space line with 25 lines per page. Articles may be sent to <kblack@iupui.edu> as a Microsoft Word attachment. Please include your complete postal mailing address.

• Length: Articles should be four to eight typed, double-spaced pages (1,000–2,000 words). Annotations of recent publications for the Recommended Reading feature should be about 50–200 words long.

• 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 Trudy W. Banta, Editor, Assessment Update, Suite 140 Administration Bldg., 355 N. Lansing St., Indianapolis, IN 46202–2896.
It is the most grueling time of the year in the assessment office. We spend the month of November reviewing, summarizing, and categorizing over 200 program assessment reports for the development of our own report to our Board of Regents. Some of the reports are exciting to read—full of insight and thoughtful reflection on their students’ learning. After reading these reports I perform a celebratory spin in my chair. Other reports show less enthusiasm about assessment but give it the old college try. These reports receive a less-celebratory stretch and an occasional yawn. Then there are the frustrating, irritating, agonizing reports that show a total lack of understanding or interest in assessment and often reveal significant student-learning issues that are not addressed with any careful consideration. After reading these reports I often leave my desk and go for a walk around campus.

On these walks I find myself reflecting on the past year, thinking about the techniques I used to try to engage more programs in meaningful assessment. I often feel like I am playing the carnival game “bowler roller,” trying to provide enough push to get the program over the hump but not so much that I blast them into the stopper at the end of the hill and set off the alarm.

Recently on these walks I have been wondering if I am my own worst enemy. That is, am I doing things that are making it harder to get faculty members and programs engaged in assessment? After completing several of these walks, I decided to reflect on five self-defeating strategies in which I am engaged.

**Overpromising and Underperforming**

When I meet with some faculty members and programs I feel like an assessment salesman: Look at all these great features! It will be so easy to implement! Students will flock to your program if you show them how high your writing scores are! It will be a transformative experience for your faculty and your program!

Faculty members are often dubious of these claims at first. But by the time they have completed their first assessment cycle, these claims seem outlandish and ridiculous. The claims are true for some programs, yet they are the exception, not the norm. Instead of overpromising and overselling assessment, a better approach is to present a realistic perspective on assessment’s benefits. That is, assessment is a tool to help us learn about our students and ourselves and a process to provide us with information to inform our decision making and to demonstrate our accountability.

**Forgetting that Data Quality Matters: When ‘Good Enough,’ Isn’t**

My usual approach when meeting with faculty members and programs is to avoid the terms “reliability” and “validity.” If I mention these terms, the discussion often fixates on these two issues, and we rarely return to the practical questions of how the program is actually going to do assessment. So I tend to avoid these issues because they can make it seem that assessment is too hard, too technical, or too complex to implement.

But the data quality question is important because we expect faculty members and programs to do something with the data once they have it. If students are inconsistently scored, and if we are not able to make a case for the validity of a particular assessment approach, then it is completely reasonable for faculty and programs not to make use of the data.

Data quality is a critical issue in assessment and it is a mistake to ignore it. Of course, it is not realistic to attempt to turn every faculty member into a measurement expert. Instead, simple strategies and supports should be developed to help faculty members address the conceptual issues of validity and reliability without requiring expertise in SPSS or measurement theory. For example, data analysis support from a graduate student or a staff member can make a big difference in helping faculty members interpret the quality of their data. Multiple sources of evidence (both quantitative and qualitative) can be used to triangulate results and support the inferences faculty would like to draw from data. Clear, straightforward...
questions that encourage reflection on these issues can be included in the assessment report templates. Whatever the strategy, it is important to remember that data quality is important and should not be left out of the assessment discussion.

Using Accreditation as the Enforcer
Accreditors play an essential role in the ongoing operation of my university. If we are not accredited, we will not have any students (which would greatly improve the parking situation but nevertheless would be viewed negatively). With some programs and faculty members, I am tempted to use our accreditors as the assessment enforcers. The accreditors are forcing us to do this. Imagine our embarrassment if we lost accreditation because of a lack of participation in assessment!

Unfortunately, these statements only work well when accreditation is looming. When accreditation is off in some distant future, these threats hold little weight. Regardless, overemphasis on accreditation undermines the central focus of assessment, which is improving our programs and our students’ learning. Focusing too much on accreditation also undercuts my central message about assessment: that assessment is the responsibility of faculty members and should be an important part of the day-to-day life of our degree programs. Certainly, we will do whatever it takes to be accredited and to be accountable, but accreditation should not be the reason we do assessment.

Not Eschewing Obfuscation
I have acronyms for everything: “I need your FY11 AARs submitted to the AAIC ASAP along with your POAFR if you have them no later than June 4th.” I also catch myself using jargon that is meaningful to me but often leaves faculty members scratching their heads: “Have you closed the loop?”, “What evidence do you have for continuous improvement?”, and “Did you run Cohen’s Kappa statistic for inter-rater reliability?” I suspect some faculty members believe I am intentionally de-clarifying assessment to conceal unpleasant truths.

It can be easy to forget that faculty members spend a large portion of their time assessing the work of others, both students’ and colleagues’, and being assessed themselves. As a result they are familiar with the concept of assessment (if not with the terminology). When we ‘un-obfuscate’ assessment by using clear, simple, and straightforward communication, faculty members are able to use existing schema to scaffold their understanding and quickly develop expertise in assessment. Hmm. That sentence had a great deal of jargon in it. Let me try again. Most faculty members already have some idea about how to assess student learning, and they are more likely to jump on board when we provide simple and clear guidance on how to engage in program and institutional assessment.

Taking the Fun Out of It: Pushing Compliance Instead of Commitment
Assessment should be fun—and not ‘fun’ in the way a root canal is fun. Many faculty members pursued higher education careers because they enjoy engaging in inquiry. Assessment, as a process of inquiry into student learning, should be enjoyable, engaging, and, yes, even fun.

Nothing takes the fun out of something like making it required, except possibly our other two favorite assessment activities: standardization and template-ization. My efforts to engage all degree programs across campus in assessment takes some of the fun out of it by making it a required activity, by using a standard schedule of events and approved assessment activities, and by pushing the use of specific assessment report templates. All of these activities, although well intentioned, promote assessment as an issue of compliance (follow our rules) and not one of commitment (commit yourselves to investigating and improving student learning).

Compliance is important to me. I want program faculty to be engaged in assessment and to be accountable for student learning. We must engage in some assessment activities because our Board of Regents and accreditors ask for it. But I am afraid the harder I push for compliance, the more I will be undercutting true commitment. It may give me what I want in the short run but result in failure to achieve my longer-term goals for assessment on campus.

If I can get commitment first, then I can work toward compliance. It usually does not work the other way around. It is important to search for the proper balance between compliance and commitment. If that balance leans too far toward compliance, the excitement, energy, and fun of assessment disappears.

Conclusion
I need new dress shoes again as I have worn out another pair walking around campus this November. I hope the strategies outlined here—sharing realistic expectations, remembering the importance of data quality, avoiding the use of accreditation as the enforcer, using clear communication and avoiding jargon, and remembering that assessment should be fun—will decrease the number of campus walks I will go on next November. But I will miss the fresh air.

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Millikin University’s School of Education certifies 100 to 150 teachers each year in multiple education programs including Early Childhood, Elementary Education, and several Secondary Education programs in either the traditional format or an adult education program taught on each of three campuses.

The unit’s current assessment system was constructed between 2001 and 2004. The School of Education’s conceptual framework (an articulated rationale that gives conceptual meaning to the unit’s operations and provides direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, faculty scholarship and service, and unit accountability) and four indicators of excellence were reflected in the unit’s assessment system. It included 11 candidate assessments (CA) taught in professional development and major-specific courses. Candidate assessments are represented by assignments that have been tagged for assessment based on alignment with professional teaching standards as designated by the Illinois State Board of Education. LiveText was selected as the Assessment Management System (AMS) for collection of student work and assessments. Faculty accounts were created and students purchased and registered for an account during their first education course. School of Education faculty received initial training to use AMS to review and assess student documents that they were responsible for collecting from their students via AMS.

Five years later, faculty turnover, including the Director of the School of Education, caused lost continuity with the objectives of AMS, and there was no continuing training in use of the online system for assessment collection or analysis. The AMS held over 3,000 unassessed student documents with hundreds more in each individual faculty account. Students were graduating with no accountability for completing the designated candidate assessments. The assessment system was no longer operating.

While the building blocks of an assessment system were in place—a conceptual framework, transition points, candidate qualifications (student learning outcomes and performance expectations), and candidate assessments based on standards—the data cycle for required assessments was not being used to improve academic programs. Time was of the essence to repair this broken data cycle with National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) review and an impending site visit already scheduled.

**Restore the Assessment System**

The road to repair began with the selection of a faculty member to become an assessment coordinator. This position began as an added workload with a stipend for a faculty member already teaching 12 credits. But with the new assessment coordinator’s input and recognition of the overwhelming amount of unused documentation, the position was reevaluated and adjusted to represent three-quarter release of course load for the second semester of its existence. It currently exists as a six-credit course release for a full-time faculty member. The assessment coordinator immediately began organizing the AMS so that reports could be created efficiently. The AMS was updated to a new LiveText platform to make it easier to manage. Weekly meetings were held with the LiveText field representative to prepare the administrator of the AMS.

As the faculty in the School of Education began making changes to improve the assessment system, some looking back was necessary. Within the AMS, folders and labels were created to sort the documents already collected and to cateogize students were graduating with no accountability for completing the designated candidate assessments.

As these reports, the assessment coordinator completed a search of designated candidate assessments missing for each active student. Every effort was made to acquire the assigned candidate assessments from students. Any submitted documents that were not assessed were cataloged and an office-to-office search for all missing assessments was conducted. Paper copies of rubrics saved in office filing systems were submitted online. This year-long process produced meaningful results—four semesters of data were recovered, allowing the assessment coordinator and faculty to analyze two years of data to make important decisions.
All teaching areas are required to meet the professional standards of their discipline as part of the NCATE accreditation process. Representatives from each teacher education discipline at Millikin were involved in applying for national recognition through their Specialized Program Association (SPA). During this process, the assessment coordinator met with each of the disciplines’ teacher education representative to designate and develop the six to eight program assessments (PA) that met that program’s SPA standards, as well as to identify the best assessment collection method for each program assessment. Through this process, faculty in each of the 10 disciplines provided the directions, rubrics, and templates for the program assessments to be collected in the AMS.

Reform the Data Collection and Analysis Cycle

The decision to become paper-free and use LiveText as a web-based Assessment Management System was instrumental in reforming the data collection and analysis cycle. It was a symbol of change for the faculty. Through the simplified system of document and assessment collection, students submitted designated candidate and program assessments by attaching their finished documents to the assignments deposited in their individual accounts. Then faculty members evaluated the assessments using the attached rubric.

To complete the paper-free transition, all evaluation rubrics and forms were created as documents or forms in AMS. This included: all internship evaluations, student teaching final evaluations for each program, student teaching self-evaluations, and satisfaction surveys for collection of feedback regarding the effectiveness of the cooperating teacher and university supervisors in their roles, as well as the School of Education’s management of the student teaching experience. The evaluation of dispositions was added to all field evaluation forms to create multiple checkpoints for dispositional concerns.

To examine collected data, annual retreats are held in May and August. This day-long Data Analysis and Review Event (DARE) involves a study of pre-selected Millikin-generated reports as well as state test score reports, candidate assessment result reports and charts, GPA comparison charts, and student teaching evaluation forms. Based on discoveries within the data, small groups of faculty are formed to perform further analyses of the data. They make appropriate programmatic or curricular change recommendations, which are brought back to department faculty for further input and final vote.

Revamp the Culture of Assessment through Faculty and Student Commitment

For education faculty members change happens often. With new certification regulations, topical legislative changes, updated standards, or additional accreditation requirements, teacher education faculty are regularly bombarded with new procedures and expectations. Feelings of ownership and inclusion among Millikin faculty were important to the ultimate goal of an automated system of assessment. Several strategies were used to achieve this acceptance. Updates on system progress were reported at each faculty meeting and they were often greeted with unexpected applause.

When the updated AMS was launched, it was promoted through several training sessions scheduled at times most convenient for faculty. Full-time faculty, adjuncts, administrators, supervisors, cooperating teachers, and community advisory members were invited to attend. The assessment coordinator mentored all adjunct faculty who were teaching courses that required one of the unit assessment system’s candidate or program assessments. For each group of stakeholders within the School of Education community, a handout was created describing involvement, protocol, and instructions. These instructions proved invaluable to stakeholders’ ability to self-assess a question or issue and take ownership in the assessment process. Also produced to assist users was a “Top Ten Frequently Asked Questions” list with solutions or explanations. These tactics increased involvement in the assessment system because each member sought answers independently (and often solved them) before seeking assistance from the assessment coordinator.

The 11 candidate assessments were reevaluated by members of the appropriate School of Education committees. These assessments were judged to be appropriate evaluations of our instructional goals for students; however, several were found to be in need of revision. Faculty members most involved with each candidate assessment worked together to improve the student assignment. They were also asked to serve as the primary editor of one candidate assessment’s applicable standards, and as assistant editor to someone else for a second candidate assessment. Through this teamwork, School of Education faculty members revised and updated all candidate assessments to meet state, core, and professional association standards.

To develop a constructive culture of assessment, never underestimate the value of a positive and quick reply to questions sent via e-mail or voice mail. The assessment coordinator monitored the AMS each semester to identify faculty who had completed the assessment submissions for the candidate and program assessments within their courses. These faculty members were sent an e-mail message thanking them for their promptness and attention to the process of data collection, and this e-mail was also copied to the Director, Department Chair, and Dean. Accolades for involvement emanated from many directions.

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At Queen’s University in Ontario, Canada, most students live on campus. In 2008 Queen’s Residences (which operates 16 residence buildings and three dining halls) was merged with the Department of Community Housing (which manages two apartment buildings and eighty houses) to form the Department of Housing & Hospitality Services.

The Facilities group within Residences employs approximately 75 unionized custodial staff and maintenance mechanics to address daily cleaning, minor repairs, event set-ups, and waste management, while Community Housing employs approximately five custodial and maintenance team members. When Community Housing was added to the Housing & Hospitality portfolio, the reporting structure of Community Housing facilities staff shifted to the Residence Facilities management team.

Making Decisions on Campus: Whose Voices are Heard?

One of the least empowered employee groups is the custodial staff. Their role is critical to the effective functioning of the university, yet their voice is rarely heard. Typically, most do not have access to electronic communication nor do their work shifts align with “regular” administrative hours—making it difficult for them to attend information sessions or communicate with managers.

The lack of opportunities for custodians to inform new processes is especially problematic with regard to the organization of residence facilities. Residences are homes for students and custodians represent the residence administration and often form relationships with students. Many students consider custodians to fill the role of surrogate parent and seek their advice on matters that range from social to academic.

Consultation with custodians about these relationships and residence facilities processes, however, seldom occurs. Indeed even informing custodians about the rationale behind decisions is rare.

Many students consider custodians to fill the role of surrogate parent and seek their advice on matters that range from social to academic. Typically they receive information once decisions are made and are expected to adapt quickly. This ignites feelings of disempowerment as staff feel stressed and anxious about change and the absence of an institutional mechanism for them to influence decisions.

After the merger, Queen’s Community Housing staff, a group of long-term employees, were expected to conform to new processes that were effective in residences but did not necessarily fit within Community Housing practices. New processes that were intended to streamline and modernize facilities requests actually impeded progress, leading to complaints by tenants and stress for Community Housing staff.

From the perspective of Residence facilities staff, the additional duties were complicated by a lack of training in how to respond to various tenant requests. Along with not knowing the buildings and their particular quirks, Housing & Hospitality staff were unfamiliar with the standards and requirements within the Residential Tenancy Act—which has strict guidelines regarding access to units and length of time to complete repairs.

For student tenants, the merger resulted in delays in service response times. For staff, the merger created a sense of unease that had a strong impact on morale. Staff were unclear about the new management structure and even less confident about process. One thing was clear: the merger was not working.

Charging a Facilities Review Team

In February 2009, the director of Housing & Hospitality Services assembled a Facilities Review Team to determine if the department’s organizational structure provided for:

- effective service delivery
- a safe, consultative, and inclusive work environment
- effective communication among all stakeholders
- transparent and financially responsible operations
- assessment, evaluation, and management of issues/risks as they arise
- sustainable operations over the long term

The Review Team initiated a comprehensive and transparent examination of the department’s organizational structure.
of the Facilities Department. An initial staff meeting to discuss the review with Facilities staff outlined a six-month process that would include a final report with recommendations and a presentation to all staff.

Assessment to Understand Departmental Processes

Facilities teams in both departments are diverse, encompassing a wide range of ages, abilities, and education levels. To address this diversity, the Review team employed a number of data-gathering methods:

Surveys. The team administered two surveys:

- Employee satisfaction survey—examined staff satisfaction with training, empowerment, and the working environment.
- Student satisfaction survey—measured students’ perceptions of Facilities staff, as well as their own role in maintaining a clean environment in residence.

Interviews and job-shadows. An external Review team member familiar with the operation and staff conducted interviews at all levels of the organization, including supervisors, managers, and casual staff. When possible, the same questions were used to collect similar data and determine commonalities in themes/issues within all areas. The reviewer also shadowed employees to understand the work duties and specific challenges in each area. All interview and job-shadow notes remained confidential. Broad themes were derived from the notes, and these were used to develop conclusions and recommendations.

Current systems review. Numerous documents and processes were examined during the Review, including job overviews, organizational charts, process flowcharts, standard operating procedures, and communications examples. A number of staff also submitted reports, e-mail messages, and suggestions.

Findings

The Review revealed three key challenges facing the department.

A Maintenance Request Order (MRO) process that did not support need for service. The Maintenance Request Order (MRO) system (a computer-based process used by students and staff to report building problems) was described by all groups as having a negative impact on service levels and customer/staff satisfaction. In surveys, 86% of students felt that MROs were not handled in a timely manner.

Staff interviews corroborated this and pointed out that the system was not connected to the Physical Plant Services, which provides the trades required for repairs (e.g., plumbing, electrical, carpentry). This lack of inter-connectivity resulted in the re-entry of information by both Residence Facilities Control Centre staff and the Physical Plant Services department.

Custodians indicated that they outlined the various problems but were told by management to adapt their work habits to the new tools.

Staff did their best to keep the facility in good repair, but were held back by a repair system that was not able to address issues in a timely or satisfactory manner. The coexistence of frustration and pride is illustrated in the comments of one participant: “You can see it here—the finish on the sink is completely worn—I can clean it all day, but it still looks dirty. And I’ve been waiting forever to have the towel rack repaired.”

Need for consistent processes for information flow, from management to frontline staff and back again. The absence of consistent information flow was leading to misinformation and confusion, as well as frustration, among staff members who were not receiving the same information. Communication issues also were apparent from the management/decision-making perspective. Although 78% of Facilities staff indicated that they would like to make more decisions about their work, and 75% wanted more information about department goals and activities; interviews suggested that most did not have any decision-making authority and were unaware of department goals. Most staff felt that too many people were involved in the decision-making process, resulting in delays and inconsistent instructions.

Custodial staff pointed to the Building Damage policy as an example of ineffective communication. Only damages with significant costs were billed to residents. This decision, however, did not appear to be communicated to frontline staff, who felt the impact of the damages more than any other staffing group. To the frontline custodian, floor damages result in extra duties. This was illustrated by one custodian: “Students don’t take the damage system seriously. For them, it’s worth the $20 to trash the carpet. I’d like to know how much all this damage adds up to each year.”

Staff pointed out another example of lack of communication. Recently management invested in a new cleaning system, complete with new mops, brooms, and other tools for custodial staff. Queen’s Residence buildings, however, vary widely in structure and design, and the tools ordered only worked in certain buildings and areas. The comments of one custodian illustrated the shared frustration: “My hallway is 48” wide, so a 24” mop is perfect. Now, they want me to use an 18” mop, which means extra time and work. Plus, the new mop doesn’t work on the stairs in my area.” Custodians indicated that they outlined the various problems but were told by management to adapt their work habits to the new tools. They viewed this response as an insult to their professional judgment.
The organizational merger appeared to provide the “last straw” in a growing state of confusion over processes and decision making. The daily operations of Community Housing facilities staff differ from Residences, most significantly in that they are subject to the Residential Tenancy Act and must react to tenant concerns and requests in a timely manner that is set by law. The introduction of the MRO system to this area had a major impact on the group’s ability to adhere to the Act and created a new and confusing reporting process for tenants.

Need for effective communication with students. This lack of process also had an impact on the relationship between facilities staff and students. Custodial staff could not provide information on repairs or furniture replacement, even though students perceive that staff represent the department. In student surveys, 86% knew the custodial team member who looked after their floor, and 80% felt that they shared responsibility with this individual for keeping residences clean. Staff interviews revealed a willingness to provide students with extra “training” opportunities to support this shared responsibility. Many staff spoke of the need to teach students about recycling, use of kitchen/laundry appliances, and how to use floor vacuums.

Using the data to move forward
Using the information gathered from surveys, interviews, job-shadowing, and process review, the Review team developed a report outlining the feedback and recommendations to improve the situation. Recommendations included the following:

- develop communication strategies and address breakdowns in information flow
- replace the existing MRO system
- develop a structure that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities for all team members and includes process documentation
- reverse the reporting structure for Community Housing facilities pending further study
- implement a new management structure within the Housing & Hospitality Services facilities department

The report was initially shared with the director of Housing & Hospitality Services for review and determination of next steps. The director, determined that the report should be shared with all staff, personally delivered the presentation. Meetings were held with both departments, at a time that was convenient for them. For example, the midnight–8 a.m. shift received the presentation at the beginning of that shift.

Reaction to the report and presentation was primarily positive, with many staff surprised by the level of honesty within the report. The immediate implementation of a number of suggestions made by staff (“quick wins”) brought further credence to the review.

Making Progress
The review has already resulted in a number of changes within the department. A new management structure has amalgamated three management positions into one, and has provided an opportunity for partnerships with Physical Plant Services, including the implementation of a shared software system. Clarification of other roles within the department provided staff with greater responsibility and freedom in the decision-making process.

The Review team communicated regularly throughout the review period through a bi-weekly newsletter, Nuts & Bolts. This publication continues to be produced monthly to outline changes as they occur and to share other department news. A new online staff website is under development as a tool for sharing processes, policies, department goals, and staff news. A recent survey of all Housing & Hospitality staff has identified other communication opportunities as well, such as weekly e-mails and regular staff meetings.

The management team went back to the custodians to listen to their concerns and test other tools within the new cleaning system. Custodians now have a choice of tools geared to their needs. Building supervisors were given greater input and responsibility for addressing needs within their assigned buildings and a new student development project will allow staff and students to work together to identify areas needing improvement—with budget access to address the issues.

Continued Assessment
Processes continue to be documented and improved in both departments with continued input from staff. Although change will occur, staff will be consulted and involved in the development and implementation stages.

Assessment tools were a vital component to understanding and addressing change in the Facilities department. Moving forward, the department intends to continue using these tools to monitor staff and student satisfaction, with the goal of building a strong and effective environment that benefits customers, staff, and the greater Queen’s community.

Departmental reviews typically take a top-down approach, appraising the activities, structures, and policies that guide a department. They often cause staff stress by raising questions about rationalization and job losses, concerns about the reviewers’ abilities to understand the daily

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Established in 1966 at the American Council on Education, The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) surveys are the oldest, and one of the largest, national surveys of college students. The CIRP research program moved to the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA in 1973, and currently includes four surveys: (1) the Freshman Survey, administered before students begin their college work; (2) Your First College Year, administered at the end of the first year of college; (3) the Diverse Learning Environments Survey, administered at the end of the sophomore and junior years; and (4) the College Senior Survey, administered during students’ final year in college. Taken together, the surveys are designed to provide longitudinal data about students’ college experiences and their learning and development.

The Freshman Survey
The Freshman Survey is designed to provide a snapshot of an institution’s entering students. In addition to gathering information on students’ background characteristics (e.g., parental income and education, secondary school achievement and activities, and financial need), the survey asks students about their perceptions of their academic preparation, their reasons for attending college, and their expectations regarding academic success and interactions with faculty and peers. Many of these items are included on other CIRP questionnaires. As a result, the Freshman Survey can serve as a pretest for assessing program effectiveness and educational outcomes. Paper-and-pencil and web-based surveys are available, and these versions can be used together to improve response rates. Institutions that participate in the survey receive an institutional profile report that includes summary data for beginning students broken out by gender and full- and part-time status. Comparative data for similar institutions are also provided.

Your First College Year
Your First College Year (YFCY) was introduced in 2000 and is designed to provide information about students’ college experiences and academic and personal outcomes during the first year of college. The YFCY survey includes questions about students’ experiences with a wide variety of academic programs (e.g., orientation, honors courses, first-year seminars); their participation in co-curricular activities; satisfaction with campus life, institutional facilities, and student services; and ratings of their academic abilities and intellectual skills. Both web and paper versions of the survey are available, as is a combination web and paper. In addition to standard institutional profile reports broken out by gender and full- and part-time attendance status, institutions that administer the YFCY in conjunction with the Freshman Survey receive a longitudinal profile report that can be used to assess change over time.

Diverse Learning Environments
The Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey is the newest CIRP product, and it is to be administered at the end of the second and third years of college. The survey is designed to measure the campus climate (e.g., discrimination and harassment, cross-racial interaction, institutional commitment to diversity, and sense of belonging), institutional practices (e.g., diversity in the curriculum, co-curricular diversity activities, and student support services), and educational outcomes (e.g., integration of learning, commitment to social action, and civic engagement). In addition to a core survey, the DLE includes optional modules concerning the classroom climate, transition to the major, intergroup relations, and the climate for transfer students. The DLE is available as a web survey. Participating institutions receive an institutional profile report, broken out by gender. Comparisons with similar institutions are also provided.

College Senior Survey
The College Senior Survey (CSS) is designed to provide a summative
Prominent 21st-century liberal education initiatives are calling on us to re-map the educational landscape by integrating the major fields of study and common general education, or core essential, outcomes (AAC&U, 2007). Thus, faculty who teach science, math, or English must also function as general education faculty. While faculty members teach their discipline-specific content with enthusiasm and expertise, they are often reluctant to fully develop and assimilate the general education component of their courses, thereby creating a “siloed” approach within the disciplines rather than a connected approach that fosters deeper learning:

The disciplines are taught as ends in themselves, and so too are most courses. Yet students are taking courses in many different disciplines, and often at two or more institutions. For many, the result is a fragmented and incoherent educational experience rather than steady progress toward deeper and more integrated understandings and capacities. (AAC&U, 2007, p. 19)

Converting faculty who teach general education courses into general education faculty is a process that requires a planful, balanced approach; administrative buy-in; and institutional support in the form of professional development, faculty recognition, and meaningful feedback.

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) implemented a comprehensive learning outcomes assessment model in 2001 and has been recognized as a national assessment leader by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, the League for Innovation in the Community College, the Community College Futures Assembly, and a number of other important groups. Key characteristics of CCBC’s model are that it is risk free, faculty driven, externally validated, and based on research design. CCBC has presented its assessment model widely through presentations at national conferences and at other colleges by invitation. As a result, many institutions around the country have adopted this approach to assessment. Despite this external recognition from other institutions and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, many CCBC faculty remained skeptical of the need to conduct assessment. Even harder to convey was the value of conducting assessment in general education, where faculty had much less ownership of the courses and of the program as a whole.

To address this challenge, CCBC adopted a number of strategies to enhance faculty engagement with and ownership of general education and assessment.

Assessment: A Planful Approach
The Dean of Instruction for Curriculum and Assessment coordinates all aspects of general education and keeps the program at the forefront of the institution’s priorities. CCBC’s General Education Review Board oversees the implementation and assessment of the general education program. In addition, a faculty member receives six credits of reassigned time per semester to provide direct, hands-on assessment support to faculty and administrators. CCBC has instituted a highly successful general education assessment process, which has been in place for almost 10 years. One reason for this success is its multidimensional design, including a nationally normed standardized test; an instrument for collecting student feedback; and faculty-designed, faculty-scored, course-embedded assignments.

Including a strong faculty component in general education assessment was critical to creating a sense of faculty ownership. Course-embedded assignments provided a comprehensive approach to reach all faculty teaching general education courses. Known at CCBC as GREAT projects (GeneRal Education Assessment Teams), faculty discipline teams create common-graded assignments, which are implemented in Key characteristics of CCBC’s model are that it is risk free, faculty driven, externally validated, and based on research design.
all sections of a course and are specifically designed to assess all six general education program skills. Assignments have accompanying six-point analytic rubrics (Mince & Mason, 2009). The General Education Review Board approves the assignments and rubrics that each discipline uses for its assessment project to ensure that general education objectives are present and identified in the assignment, aligned with course objectives, and evaluated using a succinctly articulated rubric. This approval process demonstrates the institution’s commitment to a strong general education program and has contributed to CCBC’s success in securing faculty involvement in the assessment process.

Faculty participation in the data review is a powerful component of the GREAT assessment project. The data generate significant insight into what is actually occurring in the classroom. Strengths and challenges revealed inspire interventions for improved general education outcomes. Disaggregation of data by student demographic variables provides faculty with valuable information that deepens thinking about interventions and, when indicated, targets specific populations. An intervention reporting process follows data reporting and analysis. GREAT team leaders outline the steps faculty will take to increase student success in each of the general education skills, with emphasis on those where data show the greatest need for improvement. These interventions provide the blueprint for building the improvement plan. After the plan is implemented, the course is reassessed; and the impact of the interventions is analyzed. The assessment process for each course occurs on a three-year cycle.

In spring 2010, CCBC faculty administered an online general education survey to elicit data to improve faculty support. This survey was anonymous and asked both Likert-scale questions about the degree that general education program skills were addressed and assessed in courses and open-ended questions about what type of support and faculty development would be most useful. Faculty reported that they wanted help with using assessment results to inform pedagogy and improve learning and with designing assessable assignments. They also indicated a need for discipline-specific general education training. The survey data provided a guide for creating professional development opportunities, and led to the development and delivery of a collegewide General Education Symposium in fall 2010.

**Professional Development and Faculty Recognition**

The importance of a strong general education professional development program cannot be overstated. Educating faculty in not only the assessment process itself but also in successfully implementing pedagogical improvements is essential to closing the loop, documenting enhanced student learning, and advancing faculty metamorphosis from marginal to active participation. CCBC supports both full-time and adjunct faculty by providing a wide variety of professional development opportunities to help faculty become familiar with national initiatives on the general education front, to understand their role in the general education assessment program, and to learn about interventions that have made a difference in the classroom.

Since 2002, CCBC has required new full-time faculty to attend a year-long New Faculty Learning Community that orients them to the academic culture at CCBC and the role of the faculty member. An important goal of this experience is to acclimate faculty to the culture of assessment at CCBC. As a result of this intensive development initiative, faculty over the past 10 years have entered the classroom valuing and practicing assessment as a means to improving student learning. During that same time frame, veteran faculty, having experienced positive results in the classroom from participating in a variety of assessment projects, grew to trust the process. As a result, CCBC has achieved a positive balance among faculty with regard to perceptions of assessment.

Adjunct faculty are required to participate in learning outcomes assessment projects that encompass all sections of a course. To educate adjunct faculty about these projects, CCBC offers a workshop entitled “Assessment Essentials for Adjunct Faculty” at its yearly adjunct faculty professional development conference. Adjunct faculty members are introduced to each of the CCBC assessment initiatives and given specific examples of both course-level and general education assessment projects to demonstrate how they would be required to participate. In addition, this workshop emphasizes to adjunct faculty that while they are hired to teach discipline-specific courses, their role in integrating general education skills is critical. To reinforce this, adjunct faculty are invited to serve on GREAT teams and to participate in the scoring of general education assessment assignments.

Course-embedded assignments provided a comprehensive approach to reach all faculty teaching general education courses.
Faculty participate in several major professional development activities during the academic year that offer workshops by both guest presenters and CCBC faculty and staff. The Learning Outcomes Assessment Advisory Board (LOAAB) hosts workshops for faculty to present on best practices in teaching, assessing, and implementing change. The fall 2010 General Education Symposium addressed faculty concerns identified in the general education survey and refocused faculty on the value of general education. Faculty panelists from a variety of disciplines presented workshops on topics such as student perspectives on how to make general education more relevant, how to prepare adjunct faculty to teach general education courses, and CCBC’s participation in a national rubric development project for essential learning outcomes spearheaded by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. These sessions provided opportunities for faculty to make stronger connections between general education skills and their course content.

Participation in assessment initiatives is highly valued at CCBC and is acknowledged in evaluation and promotion processes. For example, faculty who serve as GREAT scorers can be paid a stipend or count their work as college service on their annual professional summary. Additionally, LOAAB events are purposefully designed around themes that address specific faculty needs.

There are many types of assessment projects at CCBC. The planning and implementation of these projects is coordinated by LOAAB so that when possible, one effort supports another, such as using a GREAT project as part of a course-level or program-level assessment initiative. The Advisory Board is committed to recognizing faculty who engage in learning outcomes assessment projects. One way is by hosting a collegewide Assessment Appreciation Day that provides faculty and staff an opportunity to showcase course-level, program/department-level, or general education assessment projects. This event provides various constituencies from across the college an opportunity to come together to celebrate assessment and signals to faculty that assessment is an important institutional goal.

Institutional Interventions and Support
Reports and data from all assessment projects are collated into an annual Learning Outcomes Assessment Report. Examining the general education assessment data, even when results are not what are hoped for, is a powerful means to help faculty see exactly what students’ strengths and weaknesses are, not just in their own classes but across an entire department and the college as a whole. This process moves the conversation well beyond anecdotes and individual grades to effective institutional change. CCBC is fortunate to have a dedicated research professional assigned to support learning outcomes assessment. This is a major allocation of institutional resources and reflects the degree to which the administration supports assessment and its culture of inquiry and evidence.

Many institutional interventions have been developed in response to assessment data. For example, in response to consistently low mean scores in cultural skills, the institution created a Global Education Advisory Board. The Advisory Board guides the college’s efforts in fostering global perspectives in a holistic and comprehensive way. Specifically, the curriculum subcommittee of the Advisory Board works with the General Education Review Board to ensure that common course outlines include global education objectives. In addition, CCBC’s Culturally Responsive Teaching program trains faculty in using the various cultures of students to enhance learning in the classroom.

Summary
Over time there has been a slow and steady shift toward faculty accepting and, in many cases, embracing the dual role of content specialist and general education teacher. Faculty at CCBC have come to appreciate the way general education program skills support and foster deeper learning in all disciplines, and they look for ways to embed these skills in their courses. Increasingly, faculty members have joined committees and participated in professional development workshops to learn about best practices in teaching and assessing general education skills. The metamorphosis from disinterest to full ownership of the General Education Program is not yet complete, but certainly great strides have been made.

References

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Repairing a Broken Assessment System
(continued from page 6)

Student acceptance follows student understanding. It was imperative to explain to education students the purpose of national accreditation and the value of a highly functional assessment system. After all, this is important work for an educator. The first step in gaining student commitment was to change the frame of mind most students had developed regarding candidate assessments. Candidate assessments were viewed as additional work rather than an integral part of a course’s student learning outcomes. Class visits were scheduled by the assessment coordinator in order to demonstrate the AMS and engage students in a conversation about the selection of the assignments to represent candidate and program assessments based on the state and national standards these assignments met. Every student in the School of Education was given directions on submission and involved in dialogue about how teachers at any level use assessment.

Beyond Repair … Preservation
Many times we were told that it is nearly impossible to meet NCATE Standard 2: Assessment with no recommendations for improvement during an initial review. Nevertheless, we did. At this point, using our online data management system, we are able to disaggregate data in a multitude of ways—gender, major, endorsement area, ethnicity, program, campus location, and assessor. We are engaged in streamlining Banner and LiveText for candidate evaluations and certification purposes. Expected annual or semiannual events now define our assessment system: new and veteran faculty training sessions, Data Analysis and Review Events (DARE), Exhibit Center updates, and Assessments in the Majors reports. These events and activities are scheduled times for closing the loop in the assessment cycle.

General Insights
Virtually all disciplines in higher education are held accountable to constituents such as regional accrediting bodies, state governing boards, and P-20 assessment commissions. Any department or institution may find itself with an assessment system in some stage of disrepair. The choice to abandon the current assessment system to begin anew may not be the best decision. Choosing to repair a system can build trust with faculty. Moreover, involving faculty in the process of restoring standards-based assessments and data analysis increases everyone’s sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, and ownership.

No matter the discipline or institution, several strategies for repair are constructive. Appoint a coordinator to manage assessments, data collection, and data review. Investigate ways to update data collection for more efficient procedures. Communicate procedures in writing to all stakeholders. Build ownership in the assessment system. Review required assessments to assure they meet current standards. Develop job responsibility lists for all stakeholders in the assessment system. If using an online data management system, make friends with the company representative—and then make weekly phone appointments. Be positive when faculty members are learning new processes. Plan annual events to analyze data and seek improvement. Send “well done” e-mail to all faculty who complete assessments prior to the due date and copy the director, dean, and VP on that e-mail. Student understanding of the assessment system is vital; do not underestimate their capacity to value the standards-based assessments and the process used to evaluate the data.

Much time and effort within a two-year time period was applied to the ultimate goal of restoring an established system of assessment rather than creating a new one. It could be argued (from this writer’s perspective) that repairing is more tedious and challenging than starting over, but it is also more satisfying. Contact the author for more information regarding master task lists, schedules, stakeholder communications, and more.

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Assessment in Times of Turbulence: Using Assessment Tools to Understand and Change Processes in Student Services
(continued from page 9)

realities of staff, and anxiety about transformations to organizational structure.

While it inherently makes sense for organizations to harness the knowledge and expertise of all staff to improve processes, the ability to capture and synthesize this information is often challenging. At Queen’s University, assessment has provided an effective means of improving departmental reviews by empowering voices that are traditionally excluded. Assessment tools gave facilities staff system-
and an incentive plan to increase NSSE participation: a 30% response rate would result in $300 for the student organization; 40% – $400; 50% or higher – $500. Part of the Ad Club’s challenge was to advertise the survey without directly contacting any of the students in the survey sample in order to comply with human subjects protocols. The five points of direct contact with survey respondents were reserved for one letter from Fontbonne’s president and four contacts directly from the survey developer—the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University. The student team acted like an advertising agency. Under the supervision of their faculty advisor they identified promotional strategies and arranged weekly “client meetings” with the director of IRA to discuss options and to seek approval for funding.

Ad Club members spent most of their budget on professionally printed banners and T-shirts to give away to completers designed around the slogan, “Took Survey. Got Shirt.” The image was, in part, homage to the wildly successful “Got Milk?” campaign by the California Milk Processors Board. The Ad Club and IRA members placed laptops at tables outside campus dining halls to facilitate immediate survey completion for willing participants during the first two weeks of survey administration to capitalize on early buzz and coincide with NSSE’s release to students. This promoted the importance of the survey, allowed students in the sample to volunteer to take the survey (without provocation), and enabled completers to pick up their T-shirts. This promoted the importance of the survey, allowed students in the sample to volunteer to take the survey (without provocation), and enabled completers to pick up their T-shirts. The team later learned that more seniors might complete the survey if tables were located outside the library computer lab. In addition to arranging for a table in the library, the Ad Club sought to boost the NSSE response rate by posting fliers around campus and generating free publicity with an article in the student newspaper.

IRA personnel worked with faculty to promote the survey. In February, notes were sent to faculty who teach predominately first-year students or seniors. In late March each of these faculty members received a reminder note and a free T-shirt in his/her mailbox.

Conclusion
Administration of NSSE presents a great opportunity to employ effective educational practices with undergraduate students. Fontbonne University went from a 27% response rate in 2008 to 54% in 2010 through the creative involvement of the Ad Club. Practically speaking, these students had better insight than we do into the effective motivation of their peers, driving increased survey completion. Financially, $1,500 was a small price to pay for a statistically valid response rate. Educationally, this presented the students with an opportunity to apply learning from advertising classes in a creative endeavor and enabled an administrative department to support the institutional vision to “promote thoughtful experiential … learning” (Fontbonne University, 2010, p. 1).

References


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Assessment Measures (continued from page 10)

evaluation of students’ college experiences and educational outcomes. The CSS includes questions about a wide range of college experiences and outcomes such as: academic achievement and engagement, student–faculty interaction, satisfaction with college experiences, students’ perceived cognitive and affective development, and their degree aspirations and career plans. The survey is available in web and paper versions, as well as a combined web and paper version. The institutional profile report is broken out by gender and full- and part-time enrollment status. Comparisons with similar institutions are also provided. Institutions participating in the Freshman Survey, YFCY, or DLE also receive a longitudinal profile report.

Using CIRP Constructs and Items

Using item response theory, Higher Education Research Institute staff members have developed several constructs (groups of items representing an underlying trait) for the Freshman Survey, YFCY, and CSS. Some constructs are specific to a given survey and others are common to two or more surveys. For example, “College reputation orientation” and “likelihood of college involvement” are specific to the Freshman Survey, whereas “habits of mind,” “academic self-concept,” “social self-concept,” and “civic engagement” are common to all three surveys. Technical information about the CIRP constructs is provided on the HERI website.

The HERI website also provides information about how individual items from the surveys can be used in assessment and accreditation. A brief report is available describing how institutions have used data from the CIRP surveys in self-studies for regional accreditation. In addition, lengthy reports, specific to each regional accrediting association/commission, map individual items from the CIRP surveys to standards for accreditation. The HERI website also provides information about registering for the surveys and the costs for participating (see http://www.heri.ucla.edu/).

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