A Rapid Assessment Model for Student Affairs: A Paradigm

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A PARADIGM

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INTRODUCTION

Methods of institutional evaluations are recorded as early as the 1970's. Assessment in higher education began its momentum in the 1980's in part due to the public outcry for accountability and subsequent legislative mandates in several states. A report from the National Institute of Education (NIE) in 1984 titled Involvement in Learning; as well as the Carnegie Foundation report addressing College: The Undergraduate Experience in America (Boyer, 1987) helped to launch the assessment movement whereby institutions of higher learning began to intentionally measure student outcomes. In 1986, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) set forth the standards and guidelines for student services and developmental programs used by many accreditation bodies in higher education. Hence, institutions of higher learning now have the moral obligation to provide the best educational model possible, and a charge to document outcomes. These factors have required that the concern about assessment extend beyond faculty; in fact, it encompasses the commitment to measure student outcomes outside of the classroom and into areas influenced by student affairs (SA).

In 1996, Upcraft and Schuh specifically addressed documenting outcomes in student affairs and offered a guide for practitioners. This practitioner guide is one
attempt to lay the foundation for intentional assessment in student affairs. As Upcraft and Schuh pointed out: assessment in student affairs is no longer a luxury, it is rather a necessity.

PARADIGM

A paradigm is a set of beliefs that when used will guide action. Guba (1990) implied that within all paradigms lies the foundation for future interpretation. Therefore, establishing a realistic and functional paradigm in light of university mission, vision, and goals appears paramount. Guba and Lincoln (1994) astutely note that since paradigms represent basic beliefs, proving them in the universal sense is difficult. However, measuring institutional beliefs as a reflection of the university mission is possible. As a result, this paper offers one assessment paradigm used at a small private comprehensive university in the mid-west.

PHILOSOPHY

The goal of the following model is to make all university systems successful in fulfilling their respective mission statements. Likewise, since this paradigm believes that universities are in the business of providing a learning environment both within and beyond the classroom (Kuh et al. 1988), the student affairs impact on learning deserves attention. McKnight, Gagnow and Heimann (1988) summed up the collective student affairs responsibility as a need to increase accountability with procedures that incorporate on-going assessment of programs and services. Since it is widely acknowledged that most survey participants lose response interest in direct proportion to the length of administration time; the assessment philosophy employed is to offer a process and structure that takes one minute for completion.
METHOD

The one-minute assessment begins with the university mission statement. The Student Development Outcome Assessment Model, created by Winston and Miller (1994), begins the assessment process by identifying institutional/student affairs mission and goals. The mission statement undergoes a segmentation process designed to break philosophical statements into measurable goals. The second step of this Winston and Miller model (1994) is to establish specific expected student outcomes. For example, a university may state an outcome to increase a student’s intellectual experience. Consequently, an expert panel may determine the intellectual experience to incorporate critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making. As a result, the mission statement and functional areas can now discriminate learning objectives. Ultimately, the purpose of developing such a process insures that SA programs meet student need (Upcraft and Schuh, 1996).

Table 1 highlights six outcome areas based on a sample university mission statement and offers an overview of format; an expert panel established the non-written but measurable learning outcomes inherent within the university mission. For instance, the university mission statement under examination stated that it placed high value on intellectual, cultural, physical, spiritual, social, and self-development. The learning areas listed below represent core concepts captured within the one-minute assessment.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

PROCESS

Following a student affairs presentation, program, or workshop, the one minute assessment as reviewed in Table 1 is distributed to students in attendance to assess functional learning outcomes. Assessing demographic information is as simple as circling or checking an appropriate box; and scoring utilizes the familiar student grading system.
Since, the university may have one, or more than ten areas of concern; it is important to remember that the goal of this evaluation process is to meet the needs of one's respective institution and not reflect national or external normative data. Consequently, though a student affairs workshop or program may carry the title of career development, the learning outcome a student perhaps recognizes is decision-making. Decision-making is a fundamental element within the university mission statement under consideration. Therefore, a student affairs professional can follow this same administration process for all student affairs programs and return completed assessments to one central location for analysis.

RESULTS

The results that a student affairs professional can generate from the one minute assessment are numerous. For example, sorted results can reflect class rank in relationship to learning areas. Mean grade point average scores can indicate level of student satisfaction in relationship to university mission; and tracking response rates can provide department feedback as to future programming needs. Statistical analysis for the one minute assessment can be descriptive or predictive; and address multiple questions of concern. In sum, not only are results capable of sophisticated analysis; outcomes have both face and expert validity leading to ease of interpretation.

DISCUSSION

There are many valid benefits to using the one-minute assessment in student affairs. To begin with, the visceral response to the format and structure tends to be non-threatening. For example, structurally it is not overwhelming to students as it comprises a half of a page. The circling of responses is quick and easy; and scoring uses the well known academic grading system. Once the format is cognitively processed and completed, the designated areas function as an educational tool. That is, the survey structure
creates a student mind set for interpreting learning outcomes and understanding university intent (mission).

Because the one-minute assessment addresses institutional and program goals, reinterpreting or applying normative information obtained on standardized instruments is not a factor. Likewise, since demographic and descriptive variables contained sorted or clustered information; options for data analysis abound. Furthermore, since the areas of interest (i.e., learning outcomes within the mission) are core values and concepts, each department can employ the assessment instrument without change.

Given that the one-minute assessment process is applicable across departments and at varying times, the survey format can be part of an on-going process. Hence, the rapid assessment becomes an evaluation in progress and not in decline as with a pre- or post-test format. Think of this assessment format not as a snap-shot, but as a strobe video; allowing for feedback, assessment, adjustment, and planning on a continuous basis. Therefore, a professional does not have to wait until the end of the year with a program evaluation to assess how well student affairs is fulfilling the university mission.

Since each student affairs department can employ the one minute assessment (without change) as part of their learning outcomes assessment and program evaluation; assessing student outcome can clarify or justify the importance of services beyond the traditional classroom. For example, the findings of the one-minute assessment tool could indicate that the Residence Life department is not offering programs that foster critical thinking. This could result in Residence Life changing their programming model to address stated student intellectual outcomes. It could also result in collaboration with other university departments or divisions within student affairs. Therefore, each student affairs department can highlight need areas by working together and changing their emphasis as they plan and schedule services, workshops, programs, and speakers.
Though there appears to be many benefits when using the rapid assessment approach in student affairs, there are some cautions. First, because this process calls for relative quick feedback; a central location or person is needed for analysis and dispersing of information. Inasmuch, that person may have to possess some research or statistical expertise; this could be a difficulty within some student affairs departments. Second, though programming addresses one’s respective university need, there may be times warranting normative national data; for example, when benchmarking one institution against another. Likewise, though this process can give a continuous update or baseline information (e.g., cumulative data), it may not provide specific information of immediate concern as the rapid assessment’s primary concern is the relationship between learning outcomes and the university mission. Third, there may be a tendency not to use the one minute assessment with large groups (i.e., athletic events, concerts, physical activities, etc.); therefore, limiting data interpretation to small group educational programming.

All in all, the one-minute assessment’s primary concern is the relationship between learning outcomes and university mission. When this occurs, one-minute assessment results can improve the quality and effectiveness of student affairs programs. Likewise, student outcome data can assist long term planning and strategic planning for student affairs.
Table 1

One Minute Assessment

Please circle all that apply. From this program, I learned or further developed the following skills or values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Cultural Appreciation</th>
<th>Personal Wellness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Aesthetic Value</td>
<td>Physical Fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>Common Humanity</td>
<td>Sportsmanship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-Setting</td>
<td>Awareness of History</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-long Learning</td>
<td>Respect to Others</td>
<td>Competitive Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical/Moral Dev.</td>
<td>Service to Others</td>
<td>Self Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Self-worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Diplomacy</td>
<td>Resource Mgmt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Civility</td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Each Ind.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What grade (A, B, C, D, F, or NA; not applicable) would you give the program for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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1. Meeting program objectives
2. Professionalism of presenter
3. Location of program
4. Time and Date
5. Overall grade

Please describe yourself (Circle): Male or Female; Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior or Graduate.

Please use the back for additional comments. THANK YOU!

Note. This form is approximately a half sheet of paper and takes approximately one minute to complete.
REFERENCES


Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. CAS standards and guidelines for student services/development programs (1986). Iowa City, Iowa: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.


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