Increasing Faculty Involvement in Assessment in Higher Education

Every once in a while, among the thousands of journal articles, technical reviews, or research reports that are published, you come across a few that are seminal – that are a “must read”. That is the way I came to feel about an occasional paper written by Pat Hutchings for the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) in April 2010 titled, “Opening Doors to Faculty Involvement in Assessment.”

Although institutional assessment of student learning outcomes has been a topic of concern in higher education for over 25 years, no issue related to it has generated more debate and discussion than the role and involvement of faculty in such work. That should come as no surprise since the key to assessment’s influence and impact ultimately comes from the interactions between teachers and students which take place mostly in the classroom – brick and mortar, virtual, or in the field.

Yet, as Hutchings (2010) notes, while faculty are involved in assessment in varying degrees, there is room for greater involvement. Part of the challenge to increasing faculty involvement lies in several perceived obstacles. According to Hutchings, there are at least four obstacles: (1) assessment is seen as part of an administrative culture rather than as a reciprocal activity between faculty and students; (2) generally speaking, faculty do not receive training in assessment during their graduate studies—hence, they are not experts in assessment; (3) the work of assessment is not matched with institutional reward systems, such as tenure, promotion, or merit pay; and (4) many faculty has not seen sufficient evidence that assessment improves practice, student learning, or services because the uses of assessment outcomes are not well-documented.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, Hutchings (2010) offers six recommendations that may serve as keys to opening doors to greater faculty involvement in assessment: (1) build assessment around regular, ongoing work of teaching and learning—“assessment must live where faculty live,” in their disciplines and where they teach; (2) make a place for assessment in faculty development—at Howard University assessment is the surname of our faculty development center, Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Assessment (CETLA); (3) build assessment into the preparation of graduate students; (4) reframe the work of assessment as scholarship—as scholars, faculty study all types of important phenomena—including their students’ learning; (5) create campus spaces and occasions for constructive assessment conversation and action—Howard’s Office of Institutional Assessment and Evaluation, in collaboration with CETLA, sponsors a summer assessment seminar each year for faculty; and (6) involve students in assessment—in the assessment of their own learning, and in building knowledge and skills about assessment.

Obviously, there is no single way to increase faculty involvement in assessment; however, the aforementioned recommendations provide a good starting point. Collectively, they help to overcome some of the formidable obstacles that have stood in the way of progress. With so many opportunities for faculty development available on campuses today, the climate for faculty involvement in assessment has become more welcoming and hospitable. As a result, we look forward to continued increases in faculty involvement in assessment in higher education.

Reference

Read the entire paper at: http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/PatHutchings_000.pdf
Assessing General Education Learning Outcomes

The following assessment strategies were aggregated from the Education Advisory Board’s (EAB) Custom Project Library, which contains custom research reports pertaining to improving student access, retention and outcomes, and strategies for maintaining research and teaching excellence. EAB also provides customized reports based on institutional requests. Several custom reports highlighting assessment strategies utilized by faculty and administrators at various colleges and universities across the United States were reviewed.

A review of several EAB custom reports focusing on the assessment of learning outcomes reveals a number of assessment strategies that faculty and administrators are utilizing to assess student learning such as rubrics, post-exam questionnaires, reflection essays, e-portfolios, and real-world scenarios.

Rubrics

Rubrics are used as standardized tools to assess student competency in a learning outcome. Each rubric separates the outcome into several proficiencies. Instructors then rank a student’s level of proficiency in each area according to a scale. Although rubrics increase uniformity of assessment, instructors do not always use rubrics consistently (Morrill and Geraci, 2011). Maher and Geraci (2012) identified two problems with embedding General Education Rubrics into coursework. Regarding the first problem, rubrics are too general and are not relevant to individual courses, it was suggested that faculty create rubrics that are assignment-specific rather than course-specific to embed them within the courses. The second problem is that faculty members often distrust the use of rubrics. it was suggested that administrators indicate on the rubric how collected data will be used to evaluate general education outcomes.

Student Questionnaires

Several colleges and universities surveyed by the EAB translate learning outcomes into a series of questions or problems on a test by creating questions specific to course learning outcomes. Faculty and administrators then track the percentages of students who answer these questions correctly to gauge progress toward a learning outcome (Morrill and Geraci, 2011). Several institutions also include questions on course evaluations that are based on learning outcomes, however, many administrators have challenged the usefulness of student survey data, citing that students fail to respond thoughtfully to survey questions. For this reason it has been recommended that administrators do not base their outcomes assessment on student surveys and use them only to supplement data collected through other means (Maher and Geraci, 2012).

E-Portfolios

E-portfolios have been identified as an innovative technology for general education outcomes assessment. E-portfolios allow administrators to collect student artifacts such as exams, essays, and projects, that provide a record of students’ progression over the course of their education. Several institutions surveyed by the EAB reported utilizing e-portfolios to evaluate student progress from introductory courses to more advanced courses. For example, writing samples from an introductory writing course and a senior capstone course were compared to demonstrate students’ improvement in written communication (Maher and Geraci, 2012; Morrill and Geraci, 2011). E-portfolios are particularly well suited to evaluation of skills such as writing and critical thinking, as progress on these skills can be easily compared by evaluating writing samples from different periods. Institutions utilize a variety e-portfolio software including Blackboard learning and management system, Digication, LiveText, and Banner.

Multi-Pronged Approaches to Assessment

Institutions surveyed by the EAB also reported using multiple assessment methods to properly measure student competency in a course. One of the participating institutions utilizes the following three primary methods to assess progress toward institutional learning outcomes:

- Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) : First-year and senior students take the Collegiate Learning Assessment. Administrators then analyze questions that pertain to learning outcomes to gauge student progress.

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The Education Advisory Board (EAB) surveyed several colleges and universities regarding strategies and techniques utilized to assess study abroad learning outcomes. Several strategies utilized by the participating colleges and universities are summarized below.

### Qualitative Methods

Several colleges and universities have adopted the use of electronic portfolios, which allows students to track international learning by uploading artifacts to an individual online portfolio. Artifacts can include self-reflections, photographs, and/or curricular work. Students assign new artifacts descriptors that link the artifact to an activity, event, or class. Faculty and administrators also gather anecdotal results from study abroad experiences to support quantitative data.

### Quantitative Methods

A number of colleges and universities reported using several assessment tools to assess students’ growth and development via pre-departure and post experience surveys.

The Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) is an online assessment comprised of approximately 450 belief statements. Through pre- and post-administration, the BEVI measures changes in beliefs and attitudes that result from studying abroad.

The Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) is a free, web-accessible scale that examines how interactions with people of a different culture generally lead to attitudinal, affective, and other changes in development and adjustment that can be explored cross-culturally.

The Global Perspectives Index (GPI) reflects a global and holistic view of student learning and development and the importance of the campus environment in fostering holistic student development. The GPI measures how a student thinks, views herself/himself as a person with a cultural heritage, and relates to others from other cultures, backgrounds and values.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) measures an individual’s or group’s intercultural competence.

**Reference:**


Developing a Rubric to Assess Student Learning Outcomes Using a Class Assignment

Background

In recent years, there have been strides towards enforcing assessment as a necessary element in higher education, as demonstrated in the work of Halonen and colleagues (2003, 2004) in their undergraduate psychology programs. There is also interest in multi-method assessment of student learning outcomes (SLO’s) along with the development valid and reliable rubrics that measure SLO’s.

Though the idea is favored the actual execution of developing a rubric that is both reliable and valid while actively assessing student learning based on oral and visual presentations, group work and discussions, final projects, written reports, and other completed student work is rather difficult. Halonen et al. (2003) developed a theoretical rubric designed specifically for psychology department’s undergraduate population assessing students’ scientific inquiry skills. The rubric proved to be broad allowing for not only scientific inquiry skills but also ample self-assessment, collaborative efforts and communication; however it was never empirically test for reliability or validity. Scientific inquiry skills are identified as forming hypotheses, designing experiments, interpreting outcomes, and communicating results. The domains Halonen et al. (2003) defined are in congruence with what McGovern and Hawks’s (1986) established as the demarcating psychology SLOs. Each of the domains are given a range of proficiency that measures the ability of students throughout their academic matriculation from as early as high school to as far as college graduation. Though the rubric is broad and all-encompassing, the time and energy it requires to efficiently complete these assessments is a limitation that makes for some faculty attrition. However that limitation maybe combated by further simplifying the rubric Halonen et al (2003) established while using it as a guide.

This study does just that, it uses Halonen et al.’s (2003) work as a benchmark to empirically expound on a rubric that can assesses the completion of specific SLOs using the psychology students’ research manuscripts. The rubric was formulated to measure the point to which students completed certain SLOs and was developed in congruence with the identified standards of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2001).

Material

CSUN’s psychology department has eight SLOs that assume the Task List goals of the American Psychological Association Task Force (2007). The eight SLOs set by CSUN incorporates skills essential to theorizing and developing an experiment, statistical testing and manuscript development in accordance with the APA guidelines. The developed rubric consists of 10 items, graded on a 6-point Likert scale, that evaluate four identified SLOs: the use and interpretation of statistical techniques, critical thinking skills and skeptical inquiry in evaluating their own and others’ research, competencies in electronic and information technologies, and effective written communication skills.

Methods

Of the enrolled student population, 20% (55 Students; women = 52, men = 3) were randomly selected to be participants from each section of the research methods courses. At which point the course instructors were notified as to which students have been chosen. The instructors then provided copies of those students’ final manuscripts without any identifying information thus aligning it with the standards for intra-rater reliability. The sample size evaluated for convergent validity was rather small due to the inability of some faculty to provide information. The instructors and raters found difficulty in differentiating whether certain manuscripts were high scoring or not. Overall, the rubric was developed based on the best possible information received.

The rubric was developed by a focus group of faculty from which two raters trained on the rating system of the rubric were appointed to review the make-up of the rubric and provide feedback. The raters went on to code 40% of the manuscripts which was roughly 22 papers. The results of the ratings were compared to the individual instructor’s evaluation methods.

Results

Spearman’s Correlations (r_s) was used to examine interrater reliability amongst the two raters. The following domains held the strongest correlations with average interrater reliability, r_s(22) = .68, p < .01; Quality of Results, r_s(22) = .89, p < .01, an Overall Written Communication items, r_s(22) = .92, p < .01. While the Hypotheses Operationally Defined item present no statistical significance r_s(22) = .35, p < .11. The remaining correlations between individual items were large and presented correlations that ranged from .58 to .79.

Though this developed rubric was only tested once in one specific sample, it has shown to be an effective method assessment for CSUN’s SLO’s of the undergraduate Psychology Department. The rubric can be utilized to make direct assessments in written communications, the use of appropriate statistics, use of previous literature that substantiates ideas and hypotheses while aligning with the APA Manual, and ability to discuss research methodology concepts.

Reference: