Implementing the Assessment
of
Administrative and Academic Support Units

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by

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Implementing Assessment in Administrative & Academic Support Units

Although learning is directly affected by instruction in the classroom, it is indirectly affected by the processes and resources of administration and support staff. Because these offices have great impact on the environment and tools of the classroom, their objectives must be assessed. The objectives for these offices and the processes by which resource allocations are made should ultimately promote the learning environment in the classroom.

Institutional planning and assessment coordinators need to begin by educating their units concerning the functions and processes of assessment. Considerable time must be spent explaining what assessment is, how it can help the units, and what is involved in its processes.

What is assessment?

Assessment is a process that centers on student learning and the ways in which the units within an institution facilitate that learning. Assessment provides a picture of the extent to which the actions of learning institutions are consistent with their missions. Also important is that assessment is an exercise in professional judgment; “how” any specific goal is assessed depends on the professional judgment of the administrative unit/investigator.

How can it help my unit?

Assessment is the vehicle through which academic institutions can demonstrate and document that we as educators do what we say we do, linking our outcomes back to the overall mission of the institution. It is an opportunity to identify ways to improve our effectiveness as a learning institution and to clarify any need for more resources and development. Ultimately, assessment is directly linked to budgeting as we strive to create an environment that enhances a student’s potential to learn.

What are the steps to assessment? (How do I complete the process?)

Assessment is a process by which each unit of an institution must:

- **Establish goals** which support / facilitate student learning;
- **Set performance measures** (decide how outcomes are demonstrated, when, and to whom);
- **Test for outcomes** (administer the performance measures);
- **Act on findings** to improve student learning where measures demonstrate deficiency; and
- **Document** for attainment-benchmarks, proof of need, and accreditation.

All administrative and academic support units should have a unit-level mission statement that clearly defines the services and direction that the unit provides. This unit-level mission statement must be linked to the overall institutional mission or vision statement, paying special attention to how the unit affects the learning environment of the institution.

If the institution is multi-campus, unit-level mission statements should be completed in collaboration with peer units across the institution (e.g., all Deans of Instruction, or all Directors of Counseling/Testing, or all Campus Store Supervisors, etc.). It is understood, however, that individual campuses may serve the learning environment in different ways. With this in mind, the peer-equal unit-level mission statements need to be broad enough to incorporate all the varied
activities of the independent campus units while still identifying the over-arching services those independent campus units together provide for the institution.

Steps for Defining a Unit Mission Statement

1. Identify the aspect(s) of the institutional mission and/or expanded vision statement(s) into which your unit’s activities fit.

2. Describe your stakeholders (e.g., the public, faculty, students, staff, etc.).

3. Indicate the key services provided by your unit to support the above aspect(s) of the institution’s mission/vision and the learning environment. (Include only the services of your unit, not those of your reporting units. For example, the Provosts will not list on their unit mission those responsibilities belonging to the Dean of Instruction or the Dean of Student Services; each of these units will have their own unit mission.) Include only those services that you have control or influence over.

4. Use the above lists of stakeholders and services to develop a one to three sentence unit-level mission statement.

Once units have written their individual mission statements, they are ready to begin the cyclical process of assessment. The process begins with the formulation of assessable unit objectives. These objectives should be services/processes under the control of the unit and be worded in terms of what the unit will accomplish or what its clients will think, know, or do following the provision of services. The objectives must be linked to the services described by the unit-level mission statement and lead to the improvement of these services; the assessment of the objective provides useful information for this improvement.

The formulation of assessable objectives is followed by the selection of appropriate assessment tools to measure success in the objective. The assessment tools may be direct or indirect measures of success; whatever assessment tool is used must yield useful results that inform possible change for improvement. In addition to the selection of assessment tools, measurement criteria must be established to indicate the level of attainment toward the objective being assessed. Established criteria serve as a reference against which to gauge actual assessment results. Without these criteria, any results yielded by the assessment tool become vague and unusable. It is important to rely on the professional judgement of each unit, as experts in their services, to develop the various assessment tools and measurement criteria.

After the objectives, tools, and criteria have been determined, the units are ready to capture outcome data from their services and processes. Using the assessment tools they have selected, the unit gathers data that, when compared to their criteria, becomes information directing the unit’s plan of action. Based on the resulting information, the unit must determine any tasks, processes, and services it will start doing, stop doing, and/or continue doing. As these action plans are implemented into the daily functions of the unit, the assessment cycle begins once again with the selection of new assessment objectives and the tools and criteria with which to measure these new objectives.
Planning the Assessment Process

1. List all of the services your unit provides to its stakeholders.

2. List three (3) current tasks/aspects of service/methods of operation that you feel could be improved within your office. These should be services that are provided within the scope of your control or influence. Note how this improvement will benefit learning by students and/or your colleagues, either directly or indirectly. Consider the importance and the impact of the task on achieving your unit mission, the vision of the college, and learning.

3. a. Consider how you might assess these three objectives during the coming year. What kinds of direct and indirect assessment tools might be used to gauge the unit’s performance in these three areas?
   b. Describe your criteria for success: How will you know if and when your unit achieves success toward the particular objective you are assessing?

4. Be sure the results from your assessment reflect the level of success toward your objective and can be used to support modifications to your activities. These modifications might include starting new action, continuing current action, or stopping current yet ineffective action.

Results from these administrative and support unit assessments should be recorded and warehoused to document the following activities: benchmarking successes, substantiating resource requests, and providing accountability to the community and governing agencies. This documentation is particularly useful when one unit’s assessment reveals a need for change in the services provided by another unit; an aggregated feedback report can be used to inform other units of these needs. In addition, assessment documentation can be used as the foundation for data-driven resource allocation (annual budgeting) throughout the institution. Good assessment efforts will improve the individual unit, the units relationship with stakeholders, and the institutions overall effectiveness and efficiency.

Potential Barriers to Good Assessment

Barriers to good assessment should be expected and can be overcome by deliberate and detailed education. Some potential barriers include the following:

- The belief that one must assess every unit goal or task rather than just a few; assessment is for improvement, not job justification.
- The belief that all assessment must be quantitative; some of the best criteria include equipment/facility inventories, process timelines, focus group results, meeting minutes, or demonstrated performance.
- Doing assessment before you have a use for whatever results you may obtain.
• The disconnect between things we assess and plans for improvement and budgetary decisions
• Using assessment to justify a predetermined budget rather than budgeting the needs demonstrated by the assessment.

Upper-level administration of the institution must be prepared to support the processes of assessment driven planning and budgeting. Lack of administrative support will undermine otherwise effective assessment processes. Supported assessment, however, will transform an institution from the status quo environment into a thriving, organic culture of improvement and quality.
Resource Tools

Workshop tool to help units plan their assessment:

1. Services You Provide
   - Write the tasks that you (or your unit) perform within the scope of your unit?
   - How are these tasks linked to learning?

2. Improvement / Changes to Make
   - What changes or improvements would you like to make in your unit over which you have some influence or control?

3. A Plan of Action
   - What actions will you **Start**?
   - What actions will you **Stop**?
   - What actions will you **Continue**?

How will you assess?
- Qualitative & Quantitative
- How will you be able to use your results?

Flowchart used to demonstrate the Assessment Cycle:

Adapted from an Institutional Effectiveness Workshop by J. Nichols
Perform the Assessment
(Means of Assessment)

Assessment Outcomes
(Results)

Was the objective met?
(Criteria for Success)

Yes

Set a New Objective
- Plan activities for the objective
- Budget for these activities
Consider what activities can be completed without added resources.
(Plan of Action)

STOP

No

Revise the Objective
- Plan Modifications to Activities
- Budget for these Modifications
Consider what adjustments can be made without added resources.
(Plan of Action)

STOP
## Administrative and Academic Support Unit Assessment: AY 2001 – 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Mission</th>
<th>Assessed Goals</th>
<th>Assessment Tools</th>
<th>Criteria for Success</th>
<th>Assessment Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the mission of your specific unit (as defined in collaboration with like-units across the institution)?</td>
<td>Which of your annual objectives did you choose to assess?</td>
<td>What kind of information did you collect to help you indicate whether you have or have not met each goal?</td>
<td>What was the minimum result you could have obtained through the assessment that still spelled success for each goal?</td>
<td>Reviewing the information you described as your assessment tool(s), what was the actual outcome or result of your work toward each goal assessed?</td>
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* Adapted from the “five-column model” of Institutional Effectiveness by J. Nichols
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<th><strong>Plan of Action</strong></th>
<th><strong>New Goals</strong></th>
<th><strong>New Assessment Tools</strong></th>
<th><strong>New Criteria</strong></th>
<th><strong>Requested Resources</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Based on what you now know about your work toward each goal, describe your action plan for next year? What will you start doing differently, stop doing altogether, or continue doing the same (for each goal)?</td>
<td>Translate your action plan into brief goal statements to be assessed next year. If you are satisfied with the results from your assessment of this year’s goal(s), formulate new goals to assess. (What changes or improvements can still be made within your unit?)</td>
<td>What kind of information will you collect to help you indicate whether you have or have not met each goal?</td>
<td>What is the minimum result you could obtain through the assessment that would still spell success for each goal?</td>
<td>Based on the results of this year’s assessment(s), what resources or professional development activities could TCC provide to your unit to support the success of your goals (and, ultimately, the learning supported by those goals)?</td>
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