From the Desk of the Director:

**Building Your Assessment Toolkit: Strategies for Gathering Actionable Evidence of Student Learning**

Choosing the most appropriate assessment strategies that will yield actionable evidence of student learning is the focus in a series of briefs that helps institutions, in general, and minority serving institutions, in particular, build effective assessment toolkits by (1) understanding and appreciating the imperative for engaging in the assessment of student learning, (2) selecting appropriate assessment strategies, and (3) taking action based on the evidence that results from the assessment process (Beld, 2013, 2015). For example, the use of direct or indirect assessment strategies such as tests, examinations, quizzes, and rubrics provide direct evidence of what students know and are able to do. The evidence from these direct strategies can be used by curriculum committees to make recommended changes in course or program offerings. Indirect strategies such as surveys, questionnaire, focus groups, and interviews can provide information about perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions about student learning, and if necessary, to make decisions about how to allocate resources to support learning, or to make inferences about program or institutional effectiveness.

**References**


**Write On or Right On:**

**Using Assessment Data to #StayWoke**

Dana Williams, Ph. D
Chair, Department of English
Howard University

During the 2015 Summer Assessment Institute, Dr. Dana Williams, among eleven speakers, presented on the improvements made in the Department of English by using assessments. The Department of English offers first year courses seeking to help enhance students’ reading and writing skills. In order to improve course outcomes, student evaluations are used to assess, such things as:

- Were the course objectives met?
- Was the course intellectually challenging?

To improve the Writing Center, students are now using updated referral sheets and questionnaires. Additionally, peer observations, information sharing, and faculty retreats are also strategies being used to make department improvements that focus on improving student writing skills.


**“Building and Evaluating Your Assessment Toolkit: From Program to Student Learning”**

Summer Assessment Institute (SAI)

The 2015 Institute focused on building and evaluating assessment toolkits to better assess institutional programs and student learning. The Office of Institutional Assessment & Evaluation and CETLA will use the SAI evaluation information to refine and improve the Institute.

Assessment and Evaluation at Howard University

2015 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)
The 2015 CIRP was administered during Orientation Week of the fall semester. It is designed to gather information about secondary school experiences, reasons for attending college, expectations of the college experience, student values and goals, and concerns about financing college.

Use of Assessment: The collected CIRP data are used for institutional strategic planning, preparing for accreditation and to cultivate a culture of evidence based decision making. This assessment is administered to the entering freshmen class.

2015 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
Through its student survey, The College Student Report, NSSE annually collects information from hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.

Use of Assessment: The collected NSSE data are used to ensure faculty and staff understand and endorse the concept of student engagement. It allows institutions to focus on individual departments, which can increase faculty interest in using engagement data. This assessment is administered to both freshmen and sophomore classes.

2015 Howard University Undergraduate Graduating Student Exit Survey
The Howard University Undergraduate Graduating Student Exit Survey is administered annually to prospective candidates for graduation in all undergraduate programs. The primary purpose of the survey is to obtain information about students’ satisfaction with a range of academic and co-academic experiences during their matriculation and to inquire about their future plans.

Use of Assessment: The collected survey data are used to provide feedback to graduating seniors about learning gains, evaluations of their experiences in the major, and ratings of administrative areas. It also gives a range of anticipated and actual alumni starting salaries, as well as where students are interested in attending graduate school.

2015 Howard University Graduate and Professional Graduating Student Exit Survey
The Howard University Graduate and Professional Graduating Student Exit Survey is administered annually to prospective candidates for graduation in all graduate and professional programs. The primary purpose of the survey is to obtain information about students’ satisfaction with a range of academic and co-academic experiences during their matriculation and to inquire about their future plans.

Use of Assessment: The collected survey data are used to provide feedback to graduating seniors about learning gains, evaluations of their experiences in the major, and ratings of administrative areas. It also gives a range of anticipated and actual alumni starting salaries and post graduate employment plans including but not limited in finance, human services, architecture, and educational fields.

2015 Focus on College of Arts and Sciences (COAS) Faculty Assessment One-On-One
In attempt to promote a culture of assessment, the OIAE personally engaged department chairs and particular faculty with assessment as part of their portfolio on a one-on-one basis in twelve different departments of the College of Arts and Sciences. Department chairs were provided with feedback as well as assistance with developing plans on how assessment can be utilized in order to promote better student learning outcomes contoured to meet their own goals and objectives.

Use of Assessment: Assessment case studies are being developed to provide evidence of use of assessment results program, course, and student learning outcomes.

The Importance of Using Assessment
Assessments are used to improve course, program, and institutional outcomes. Using assessment in Higher Education allows for overall institutional improvement and accountability.

Why should we assess?
1) To improve instruction
2) To improve student learning

It is important to measure how and what students learn. Assessments can help faculty and staff develop new instructional practices to help students improve their educational experiences.

Tips for Using Assessment
1. Design the assessment so that students tackle the task appropriately; i.e. they engage in the process of learning rather than simply producing the final product.
2. Provide sufficient and detailed feedback.
3. Focus your feedback on student performance learning or actions that the student can control.
4. Provide timely feedback for students to use to improve future performance.