How Do You Know what Your Students are Learning?

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Presentation Overview

- Overview of Outcomes-Based Assessment (OBA)
- What OBA is really trying to accomplish
- The Importance of OBA
- Questions
Ask Yourself These Questions

- What decision did you make about your program last year?
- What evidence did you use to inform that decision?
- What was it that you were trying to influence about your program when making that decision with the stated evidence?
That is Outcomes-Based Assessment  
(Bresciani, M.J., 2006)

- Most people do capitalize on their innate intellectual curiosity to find out what works
- Most people just don’t articulate their intended end results (e.g., outcomes) ahead of time
- Most people don’t document the decisions made based on their results
- Most people don’t follow up later to see if their decisions made the intended improvement
The Assessment Cycle (Bresciani, 2003)

The key questions...

- What are we trying to do and why? or
- What is my program supposed to accomplish?
- How well are we doing it?
- How do we know?
- How do we use the information to improve or celebrate successes?
- Do the improvements we make work?
The Iterative Systematic OBA Cycle

Adapted from Peggy Maki, Ph.D. by Marilee J. Bresciani, Ph.D.

Mission/Purposes

Goals

Outcomes

Gather Data

Interpret Evidence

Implement Methods to Deliver Outcomes (e.g., planning) and Methods to Gather Data

Make decisions or recommendations to improve programs; enhance student learning and development; inform institutional decision-making, planning, budgeting, policy, public accountability

Bresciani, M.J.
Implementing Assessment
(Bresciani, 2006)

- To be effective, efficient, and enduring, OBA should be:
  - Understood = by faculty/professionals and students
  - Inclusive = involve as many faculty/professionals as possible
  - Meaningful = faculty/professional (i.e., expert) driven
  - Manageable = take into account varying resources
  - Flexible = take into account assessment learning curves and integrates with all accountability systems
  - Truth-seeking/objective/ethical
  - Iterative and systematic
- Informs decisions for continuous improvement or provides evidence of proof
- Promotes a culture of accountability, of learning, and of improvement
What aspects of these good practices already exist at your institution?

What characteristics do you need to develop in order to become more pervasive and systematic in your reflection of student learning?
Reasons Faculty Do Not Engage in OBA
(Bresciani, 2006)

- They do not understand it
  - Don’t know what it is
  - Don’t know how to do it
  - Believe what they are teaching is “un-measurable”
- They do not have time
- They do not have resources
- They simply are afraid
The Purpose

- Outcomes-Based assessment does not exist for assessment’s sake
  - It is taking the inquiry process that most faculty already do, and making it systematic
- It is NOT personnel evaluation; it is professional development
- It can help you manage resources and manage expectations
The Purpose, Cont.

- It’s purpose is to reflect on the end result of doing - - are we accomplishing that which we say we are?
- All types of assessment have value (e.g., inputs, needs, utilization, satisfaction, learning, and development)
- It is important to understand how we are contributing to delivering and supporting student learning
What purposes would resonate with your faculty and administrators?

How could you leverage values to connect with purpose in order to engage faculty and staff in purposeful reflection on student learning?
Drivers of Outcomes-Based Assessment (Ewell, 2001)

- To improve the underperforming student
  - Competency Movement in Business and Industry
  - International Trade Agreements
    - Affecting Higher Education - Competition for New Providers in Postsecondary or Tertiary Education
    - Transnational Education or Globalism
    - Massification of Education
Drivers, Cont.

- Bologna Declaration of 1999
- Federal Government Conversation, 1985
  - The Higher Education Re-authorization Act
  - Testimonies in USA, 2002 and 2006
    - Response to NCLB Legislation
    - Regional Accreditation – flexibility
      - CRAC – 2003, 2004
    - Commission on the Future of Higher Education
  - Public Information about Performance
  - Transparency of outcomes and results
Drivers, Cont.

Other Research

• NSSE Deep Learning Project
• Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College
• Alverno College Research Consortiums
• National Research Council
• AAC&U Greater Expectations
• NASPA/ACPA Learning Reconsidered
Given these drivers…

- How can you effectively build systems for reflection that will be efficient, effective, and enduring?
- What would you have to change in order to build these systems?
“There are some people who live in a dream world, and there are some who face reality; and then are those who turn one into the other.”

- Douglas Everett
Some Challenges to Sustaining OBA

(Bresciani, M.J., 2006)

- Getting the public and the academy to understand that the education process is a process with mutual responsibility from the student, the teacher, and the institution
- Linking the financing of higher education to the delivery and evaluation of student learning
- Shifting the focus from transfer of credit hours to transfer of student learning (Mentkowski, 2006)
Challenges Continued
(Bresciani, 2006)

- Linking the rewards for faculty with the values of the institution
  - Shifting to rewarding collaboration
- Allowing institutions to leverage the expertise of their faculty as they evaluate student learning
- Moving away from comparable data to meaningful conversations for improvement of student learning
- Integrating learning in the co-curricular and the curricular
How can you facilitate turning the dream into a reality?
Suggestions for Reform

- Stop valuing what we can measure
  - Evaluating deep student learning takes time and effort
    - Refer to Oblinger’s and Mehaffy’s presentations
  - Commit the time to evaluating and reflecting on student learning and development; to improving teaching and academic support; to educating students about their roles in the learning process; to improving the environment that supports learning
    - Refer to Siemens’, Dede’s, Plater and Chism’s presentations
  - Commit to systematic, iterative systems of internal evaluation with external peer review
    - Embrace Papert’s Constructionist Learning Epistemology
Suggestions for Reform, Cont.

Move away from the obsession with “rankings” to promoting internal accountability for resource management that improves student learning and development

- Every institution is different
- No institution can “afford” to be fabulous in everything they can do
- Less meaningful but easy to compare indicators do not promote the kind of reflection needed to understand each institution’s needs and opportunities for service and improvement
Suggestions for Reform, Cont.

- **Invest in education**
  - Refine the federal and state funding formulas for education (refer to Dede’s presentation)

- **Finance:**
  - Faculty development in order to help them better understand how students learn and develop and in order to apply their research to their teaching
  - Educating students on how to learn and how to take responsibility for their learning
  - Curriculum reform and reward faculty for collaborative improvements in curriculum development
Suggestions for Reform, Cont.

- Refine funding formulas to:
  - Follow transfer of learning rather than transfer of credit hours or student heads
  - Reframe the “product” of education in order to understand the process of education and the integration of the co-curricular and the curricular
  - Acknowledge the discrepancies in how students are prepared
Suggestions for Reform, Cont.

- Finance:
  - Access to higher education
  - The repair of the “pipeline”
  - Reform in K-12
  - The preparation of students for higher learning
  - The preparation of faculty for teaching the skills and abilities demonstrated in deep learning
“We are the ones we have been waiting for…”

- Ralph Wolff,
WASC Executive Director
Resources

- Your own website – e.g.,
  http://assessment.udel.edu
- Each other
- University Planning and Analysis (UPA) Assessment website
  - http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/
  - http://assessment.tamu.edu
Questions?
References


References, Cont.

- **Ewell, P. T.** (2003). *Specific Roles of Assessment within this Larger Vision.* Presentation given at the Assessment Institute at IUPUI. Indiana University-Purdue University- Indianapolis.

- **Maki, P.** (2001). *Program review assessment.* Presentation to the Committee on Undergraduate Academic Review at NC State University.