Supporting What Faculty Do Best: Teachers, Scholars, Researchers, and Critics Take on Assessment

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Objectives

• You will learn:
  – How engaging faculty in assessment, as teachers, scholars, and researchers, has contributed to the sustainability of the assessment efforts at Fordham.
  – How our university has been integrating assessment into its annual reporting/planning process.
  – Some of the costs and benefits to flexible management of program assessment.
INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Teachers, Scholars, Researchers

- Deeply involved in teaching
- Concerned about learning
- Responsible for course and program curricula
- Intellectually active and engaged
- Possess research and reasoning skills
- Creative
- Experts in their fields
Obstacles & Loss of (Intellectual) Power

- Language of assessment is unfamiliar
- Purpose of assessment is disconnected from teaching and learning
- Intellect & expertise ignored

Photo credit: Lillian Whitney-Morley, Nov. 2012
Administrative Flexibility is Essential

- Diverse agenda: Program faculty select focus to suit needs of program
- Use of their language: Minimize use of assessment jargon
- Requirements for content, not form
  - Monitor progress annually, permit longer-term work
ENGAGING FACULTY
Scholars & Researchers

- Faculty reading group to reconnect assessment to research, teaching and learning
  - First reading: *Academically Adrift*
- Support scholarship of assessment
  - Including dissenting perspective
- Integrate assessment into professional development
Department Chairs & Program Directors

• Annual reporting by programs includes assessment reports
  – Assessment reports are loosely standardized
• Annual planning documents prompt for assessment results as related to planning
• Deans provide feedback on assessment projects
• Internally-funded projects require assessment plans and reports
Outcomes

• Most programs choose assessment-for-improvement

• Programs that chose assessment-for-improvement sustain commitment to assessment

• Leadership promoting “curricular conversation” and faculty development
Graduate Assessment in a School of Arts and Sciences
Graduate Assessment in a School of Arts and Sciences

Different from undergraduate and professional programs

• Program goals can guide deeper and broader assessment, to include professional development
• Independence of emerging scholar not part of coursework
• Assessment inherent in mentoring
Use of Flexibility: 3 Examples

• Program faculty select assessment focus to suit needs of program
  – Meaningful and valuable to those in position to make change

• Three programs, 3 choices
  – Focus on broader needs of graduate students
  – Focus on academic outcomes, intellectual development
  – Capturing outcomes across courses
Example: Philosophy Department

• Alumni Survey – Feedback from graduates
• Reveals
  – What department is doing well
  – Where it could use improvement

Informed by experience in job market and employment
Program Evaluation

Complete the sentence to best describe your experience:

I felt Fordham's PhD. program could have prepared me better by [select any that apply]...

- [ ] Offering more history of philosophy courses
- [ ] Offering more contemporary philosophy courses
- [ ] Helping me publish my work
- [ ] Offering more training in teaching
- [ ] Offering more opportunities to learn about non-academic careers
- [ ] Helping me build a professional network
- [ ] Preparing me for job interviews
- [ ] Other

Other
Results from Philosophy Department Survey of PhDs

• Current Employment
  – 71% of those working in academia hold tenure or tenure-track jobs
  – 57% work for Catholic institutions
Survey Revealed Student Needs

Areas for Improvement

Percent reporting program needs improvement

Helping me Publish
Learn Non-Academic Careers
Professional Networking

Year of Graduation
- Before 2002
- 2002-2007
- 2008-2012
Survey Revealed Success of Changes: Preparing for Interviews

Year of Graduation

Percent reporting program needs improvement

Before 2002
2002-2007
2008-2012
• Focus on dissertation quality
• Rubric generated using Barbara Lovitts’ *Making the Implicit Explicit* and *Developing Quality Dissertations* examples
• Assesses knowledge accumulated throughout graduate career
Program goal and student-learning objectives

Excellent dissertations should clearly **define a compelling problem**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outstanding (4)</th>
<th>Very Good (3)</th>
<th>Acceptable (2)</th>
<th>Unacceptable (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>well written</td>
<td>competently written but not eloquent</td>
<td>is not well written or well organized</td>
<td>poorly written and organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>succinct, interesting, and compelling</td>
<td>interesting; has breadth, depth, and insight</td>
<td>makes a standard case for a narrow or pedestrian problem</td>
<td>not clear or succinct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provides a clear statement of the problem</td>
<td>poses a good question or problem</td>
<td>does not do a good job of explaining why it is important</td>
<td>provides no motivation or justification for the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shows independent thinking about the problem</td>
<td>explains why the problem is important and significant</td>
<td>provides minimum of poor context for the problem</td>
<td>does not state the problem (or it is wrong or trivial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explains why the problem is important and significant</td>
<td>makes some attempt to situate the problem—albeit in a less interesting or compelling way</td>
<td>has a routine introduction of the problem</td>
<td>does not make the case for the importance of the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>places the problem in scholarly and intellectual context so as to illuminate its importance</td>
<td></td>
<td>lacks a careful and thorough attempt to situate the problem in its intellectual context</td>
<td>does not provide or does not put the problem in a clear context</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
• Master’s Program assessment *coordinated among courses*

• Complex rubric generated with TEAGLE grant for undergraduate courses and modified for graduate courses

• See session immediately following:

  **Men and Women For and With Others: Collaborative Learning and Innovative Assessment in Humanitarian Studies**
Hurdles to Assessment in Arts and Sciences

- Meaningful assessment common, documentation new
  - Incorporate in routine reporting documents and planning
- Professors are not proficient in the language of assessment
- Pathways may be circuitous, involve direct and indirect measures as needed
Costs of Flexibility

- More work for administrators
  - Reduces standardization
  - Requires thought and judgment
Benefits of Flexibility in Management of Assessment

• Engages faculty in research/scholarship rather than bureaucratic exercise
  – Taps faculty expertise
• Supports diverse foci and methods
• Yields information faculty value and use
• Minimizes obstacles
Acknowledgements & Further Information

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The full text of this presentation is available at: