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Assessment Matters
at Montclair State University

Inside this issue:

Supporting Decisions Through Data and Evidence: Using Assessment Results

Enhancing learning and services are the primary purposes of assessment in higher education. In addition, providing evidence that the results of our analysis are being used for decision-making related to student learning outcomes and University services is critical to institutional effectiveness and in turn to accreditation. Therefore, this emphasis on assessment is to both substantiate that things are done right, and also to provide the evidence to support decisions (Ochia, 2011).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (2008) have also called for the higher education community to take on this pedagogical imperative to improve student learning outcomes. This requires providing evidence of:
1) Continuous improvement of academic programs.
2) Institutional responsiveness to internal and external constituent groups and stakeholders.
3) Meeting the require-

ments of accrediting bodies and agencies which is demonstrated by continuous process used by the University.

Overall, assessment can answer important questions about the learning of individual students, the effectiveness of a single course or program, or even the entire institution in general (AAC&U, Series p. 1).

The model that Montclair State uses to accomplish the goals of the strategic plan and assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness is our "Assessment Circle." Since 1999, assessment has been defined as "the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development." (Palomba and Banta in Ochia, 2011) **http:// www.montclair.edu/ provost/assessment/**

Faculty and staff have invested considerable time in the development of plans, assessment measures and data collection processes. We now

Dr. Coté-Bonanno, Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Assessment

move to a most critical step of providing evidence to support program and service improvement.

We need to make clear, for ourselves and our various constituencies, what our aims are, how we seek to achieve them, and how well we do so. In order to meet the current challenges in higher education, the higher education community must "continually seek, and find, better ways to reach our common goal of helping all the students we serve realize their full potential…. We must not settle for anything less." (AAC&U and CHEA, 2008, p. 1)

Assessment Faculty Highlights: Dr. Linda Reilly and Dr. Douglas Larkin

Dr. Linda Reilly and Dr. Douglas Larkin were selected by the Provost's Office to highlight their efforts in student learning outcomes assessment this year.

Dr. Reilly is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Design at Montclair State University since 1992.

Dr. Larkin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Secondary and Special Education. He has been at Montclair State since 2010.

Impact on the Program

When asked how assessment has impacted Dr. Reilly and her program, she responded, "The major impact of the assessment efforts in Fashion Studies has been to look at the program in total. We can easily identify areas

Dr. Douglas Larkin,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Secondary
and Special Education

for modification to the current course offerings; areas of content overlap and omission are readily apparent."

Dr. Larkin responded "The Teacher Education and Teacher Development program is now in its third year, so at this early stage, the process of developing assessments has gone hand-in-hand with program development. Our discussions as a program around assessment have been intertwined with our ongoing decisions about what aspects of our program are most important, and has influenced our choices about which data will be most useful to us as our first few cohorts progress through the program."

Support and Obstacles in the Process

When asked, "What helped you in the process? What obstacles did you face?" both respondents said that assessment staff in the Provost's Office and the workshops have been very helpful in the process. Dr. Larkin also shared, "One obstacle we faced was that some courses were being taught for the first time, and so many of the assessments were being used for the first time, and it's actually taken until the second offering of a course to ensure that the data we're collecting is the data we want."

According to Dr. Reilly, the main challenge in the process is "collecting information from faculty. Encouraging facul-

Dr. Linda Reilly,
Associate Professor,
Department of Art and Design

ty/adjuncts to prepare the data has been challenging."

Plans for the Next Academic Year

Dr. Larkin and Dr. Reilly shared their plans for the next academic year regarding continuation of assessment. Dr. Larkin outlined that "The assessment data will help us make a number of programmatic and curricular decisions. We are now well situated with our assessments to gather data about each of our program goals each year, which we will continue to do. As mentioned before, Dr. Reilly stated "Curriculum development and revision are continuous. The information is helpful in looking at curriculum from a large view rather than one course at a time. The information is helpful in avoiding course overlap and consistency between courses taught by several faculty members."

Facilities Services—Assessment Highlights

University Facilities (UF) plans, designs, constructs, maintains and operates the buildings, grounds, and physical infrastructure of Montclair State University and provides related services that support the University's mission of research, education and public service in a high-quality, customer-focused, cost-effective and safe manner. UF consists of Campus Planning, Design & Construction, Environmental Health & Safety, Facilities Management Information Systems, Facilities Maintenance & Engineering, Facilities Services and Fire Safety. Assessment plays an important role in the Facilities division. Timothy Carey, *Associate Vice President for Facilities Services,* and Yolanda Brandon, *Executive Assistant to the Vice President for University Facilities* kindly agreed to answer several questions about the role of assessment in their Division.

Q.: Does assessment play a part in University Facilities? If so, what part does it play?

A.: As a customer-service-oriented organization, the Division of University Facilities utilizes assessment as a means to not only determine the needs of our customers, but also as a method by which we may evaluate current programming for effectiveness. Forms of assessment utilized by departments within the Division include: customer satisfaction

surveys; contractor and consultant evaluations; data analysis; focus groups; work order sampling and follow up; online service comments feedback; and the implementation of department and/or division-level Service Level Agreements with regular progress meetings between the provider and the customer.

Q.: Who are the people from your department who have managed assessment?

A.: While the Vice President for University Facilities maintains ultimate responsibility for customer service initiatives and program effectiveness within the Division, those who regularly manage assessment include the Associate Vice Presidents of Facilities Maintenance & Engineering, Facilities Services and Design and Construction; department managers of Environmental Health and Safety, Fire Safety, Facilities Information Technology, Parking, Transportation and Building Services, and the Executive Assistant to the VP.

Q.: What role do these employees play in your department in terms of assessment?

A.: These employees are responsible for conceptualization of assessment initiatives and the front-line management of assessment activities. They keep abreast of industry benchmarking and best practices; they convene meetings, where assessment is planned and discussed; they work cooperatively with customers, subordinates and colleagues to map and gather

Dr. Timothy Carey,
Associate Vice President for
Facilities Services

resources; and they play a significant role in determining the course of action for assessment activities.

Q: Can you provide a brief example of how assessment was utilized in UF?

A: Each time a shuttle bus stops to pick up and/or drop off students, the driver records the number of passengers getting on and off the bus. As an example, last year, 1.2 million passenger trips were provided to students and staff. This data is utilized to adjust campus bus routes and times to better-serve the campus community. However, the results of this ongoing assessment practice go beyond service to our customers; we have realized operational savings that are presently assisting with funding new bus purchases, and we have reduced the carbon footprint that accompanies operating buses due to a reduction in the number of vehicles that are needed to service the shuttle stops throughout the day.

New Jersey Assessment Consortium Meeting at Montclair State University

On June 13th, Dr. Coté-Bonanno welcomed over forty people attending the New Jersey Assessment Consortium (NJAC) end of year meeting hosted by Montclair State University. A panel of four, Dr. Dolores Henchy of Felician College, Dr. Ronald Goldfarb of Middlesex County College, Dr. Luis Montesinos of Montclair State University, and Dr. Scherr of Mercer County Community College, spoke about the Middle States monitoring system, of which they had been a part. Background information on what is expected of the team, as well as suggestions for those hosting site visits, were the topics of discussions. After a question and answer session Lorraine Hodges of Pillar College gave a power point presentation of MOOC, which is Massive Open Online Courses. These courses are totally online without a limit on participants, which allows a large number of participants to enroll in the courses. Most

classes are free and accessible to anyone worldwide. Following lunch, plans were made for the October meeting at Burlington County College.

In 2010, realizing the importance of assessment as it relates to SLO (student learning outcomes) and as an important piece of attaining Middle States Association accreditation, the formation of a consortium of New Jersey colleges and universities was formed. This initiative, spearheaded by Dr. Rosenbaum from Fairleigh Dickinson University and Dr. Pfleger, then of Centenary College, came into being. The purpose of the group was to share and assist each other with student learning outcomes assessment (SLOA's) issues.

The first meeting, attended by only a small group of New Jersey colleges and universities (seven) has evolved into a group with participants from a cross-section of New Jersey higher ed institutions. To date, there are four community colleges, five state universities, one research university, and eleven private/independent universities/colleges who are involved.

The group meets three times a year (fall, winter and end of academic year) at a rotation of volunteered campuses. They act as an information/support forum for attendees and participants.

Members set the agenda and volunteer to present on topics where the membership sees a need.

The NJAC Sakai website, hosted by Rutgers University, provides information, schedules, announcements and resources for all to access and download as deemed necessary.

Dr. Pfleger and Dr. Rosenbaum were both asked what they thought the benefits were of participating in the consortium. Dr. Rosenbaum felt that it is very helpful for people dealing with MSCHE accreditation at their institutions. She stated, "At the consortium, we discuss concerns, share ef-

fective strategies, keep updated on current Middle States policies and issues, provide useful hints in preparing PRR's and Self-Study documents, observe different management systems used by members and gain perspectives on the various challenges faced by our members." Dr. Pfleger felt that we are able to share experiences, share the sense of isolation that the position brings and share successes and misses at each other's campuses. Dr. Rosenbaum agreed that it reduces the sense of isolation many of us feel at our own institutions. We gain support from each other, which helps

to bolster our confidence and knowledge base as we address this challenging assignment with our colleagues. Dr. Rosenbaum also feels that having the establishment of the Sakai website enables us to communicate and disseminate the latest information we receive on addressing outcomes based assessment. It is a way of providing an electronic venue for our members to keep in touch with each other.

Dr. Rosenbaum and Dr. Pfleger were both asked what they saw as the next steps for the NJAC. They both agreed with each other and envisioned the NJAC continuing as a grass-roots resource for its members. Dr. Rosenbaum sees continuing with the approach that we have been following for the last three years. "We meet three times a year, which is not an enormous amount of extra time." Members will continue to volunteer their institutions for the meeting and provide refreshments. At each meeting, the members are polled to see what they want to have on the agenda for the next meeting. Members with

the expertise on the topics selected present at the meeting and we are able to interact and ask questions that members feel are important. Dr. Rosenbaum states, "There are no dues, and it does not take a great deal of time and effort to keep the organization functioning effectively."

When asked, "What is your vision for the consortium as it continues?" Dr. Rosenbaum responded, "… We aim to keep this organization ongoing for many years ahead. It is our hope that as new members come on board, and older ones retire, that the group will continue to operate and provide the valuable support, guidance, and knowledge that is needed for those facing the challenges of the MSCHE accreditation." Dr. Pfleger stated, "My vision for the future is that the consortium evolves based on the needs of the membership and the needs of assessment and accreditation efforts over time –that it is fluid enough to be responsive to the needs of the assessment efforts in higher education."

"We plan. We develop. We deliver. We assess and evaluate the results of the assessment. We revise, deliver the revised material, and assess and evaluate again. Perfection is always just out of reach; but continually striving for perfection contributes to keeping both our instruction fresh and our interest in teaching piqued."
-E.S. Grassian, 2001

Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

"Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and program goals and that graduates meet appropriate higher education goals."
-Middle States Standard XIV

1. **The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.** Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess, but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.

3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations-these derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.

4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way-about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/PrinciplesofAssessment.html

Best Practice: Colorado State University

Colorado State University was determined to be an instructive case study because of its innovative learning outcomes assessment and institutional improvement activities have been highlighted in various publications (see Bender, 2009; Bender, Johnson, & Siller, 2010; Bender & Siller, 2006, 2009; McKelfresh & Bender, 2009) and have been noted by experts in assessment and accreditation. CSU's assessment effort in student affairs is a model for bridging the work of academic affairs and student affairs through student learning outcomes assessment.

Link to the full report

here.

Lessons from Colorado State University
1. Build on aspects of the institutional and assessment culture that work well and connect them in ways that make productive assessment activity visible and shared. CSU leveraged success in program review, specialized accreditation, and a

homegrown database to develop its more integrated PRISM system, which also provided a platform for showcasing and sharing assessment and improvement efforts.
2. Create customized entry points and paths to highlight results salient to valued audiences. CSU developed pathways on PRISM to present results in the form of questions to address the specific interests of constituent groups including alumni, students, parents, and employers.
3. Strive to make assessment activity regular, routine, continuous, and connected to valued practices in departments and units. CSU enhanced a routine program review process by expanding involvement and discussion through review committees, by monitoring improvements that result from the review and, more recently, by making program-based student learning outcomes and their assessment a criterion in its formal policy on New Program Planning Proposals.
4. Highlight specific

instances of assessment results used in continuous improvement activities. Spotlighting program improvements at CSU fostered faculty and staff interest in using data to improve and stimulate demonstrable change in courses, in programs, and in student affairs.
5. Provide support to faculty and staff who attempt innovations and enhancements in teaching and learning based on assessment results. At CSU, this support came in the form of training in assessment techniques and approaches, regular meetings, an annual student affairs assessment conference, and support through The Institute for Learning and Teaching (TILT).

6. Ensure student learning outcomes are emphasized and well represented in assessment and continuous improvement activities in academic affairs and student affairs. Recognition of the benefits of using rubrics for student learning stimulated broader use of rubrics among CSU faculty, and the required reporting on student learning outcomes in student affairs units has fostered greater understanding of the shared emphasis on student learning in academic affairs and student affairs.
http://
www.learningoutcome
assessment.org/
ColoradoStateCas-
eStudy.html

Assessment Workshops Overview

Dr. Kirk McDermid, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion

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"*The important question is not how assessment is defined, but whether assessment information is used…*"
--Palomba & Banta, 1999

Dr. Leslie Wilson, Assistant to the Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

In Spring 2013 faculty and staff of Montclair State University, Dr. Kirk McDermid, Ms. Barbara Ritola, Dr. Leslie Wilson and Dr. Irina Koroleva, attended several assessment workshops. Their observations are shared here:

In March, Dr. Kirk McDermid attended the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) General Education and Assessment Seminar in Boston. The conference was attended by institutions at an early stage in rolling out both general education and assessment. Dr. McDermid felt that the questions and difficulties encountered by these younger programs were helpful to our institution. He stated, "The main benefit I obtained from the conference was the conviction that our assessment needs to be continual, sustainable and informative to faculty, which (to my mind) means embedded in individual instructors' practice and non-burdensome to collect, report, aggregate and analyze." Dr. McDermid also felt that

"Every teacher tweaks their courses by reflecting on recent experience; we need to craft Gen Ed assessment to fit in with those already existing efforts and make them more powerful by sharing that sort of information across courses, departments, colleges."

In April, Ms. Barbara Ritola and Dr. Irina Koroleva attended the MSCHE Workshop entitled, "A Systems Approach: Integrating the Self-Study with Strategic Planning." When asked what she learned from the workshop, Ms. Ritola stated that the integration between the process of strategic planning and institutional self-study are crucial for success. She said, "In fact, today's most successful self-studies are those that show quantifiable evidence of their relationship to the institution's strategic plan and vice versa." When asked what aspects of the workshop were the most valuable, Ms. Ritola responded, "The opportunity to speak with colleagues from other institutions is always one of the most

gratifying aspects of the workshop." When asked what she learned from the workshop, Dr. Koroleva stated that the workshop was a great 'reminder' to everyone that "the Strategic Plan is not static; it is a rolling, dynamic, live organism that should be continually revised." Also, she outlined that "it is crucial for the success of any institution to build the strong connections between institutional goals, the strategic planning and the self-study accreditation process. Overall, the workshop was very helpful in preparing everyone who attended it to develop a systems approach for integrating their institution's self-study to strategic planning."

Dr. Leslie Wilson and Dr. Irina Koroleva attended the Middle States Workshop "Assessing Our Assessment" in May. Dr. Wilson stated, "I learned that with the right tools and emphasis, it is easier to create a community that embraces assessment." He feels that it is obvious that the greatest obstacle to assessment is the

way in which it is introduced to the community. Dr. Wilson outlined "The stumbling point, in many cases, is the faculty because faculty members feel that assessment is really an evaluation of their teaching. In reality, assessment is not an evaluation of a person's teaching, but a chance for an institution to self-reflect and see if it is doing all that it can to improve the delivery of services and create the best environment for faculty, staff, and students."

Dr. Koroleva said that after attending the workshop it was more apparent that so many universities share the same issues concerning assessment. She shared that the session was very valuable in terms of new strategies for planning and conducting a review and how to use the information to sustain and enhance assessment at Montclair State University. Dr. Koroleva also outlined that "the annual academic department assessment report is an efficient way to learn where assessment is happening, how it is being used, and what the gaps are. It is improvement oriented and is a great way to get everyone involved in community discussions about how to improve assessment of student learning."

Barbara Ritola, Academic Programs Coordinator, Academic Affairs

Coordinator's Corner

Principles that guide Montclair State University's approach to Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

- Outcomes assessment should be simple, manageable and useful.
- Outcomes assessment must be ongoing and performed on a regular basis.
- Every academic unit should be engaged in outcomes assessment.
- The results of outcomes assessment should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of academic programs and activities, not the performance of individual faculty or staff.
- The information should be used to develop and improve academic programs and student learning.

Dr. Irina Koroleva, Assessment Coordinator, Academic Affairs

Online Assessment Resources

- Assessing complex general education student learning outcomes / Jeremy D. Penn, editor. Publication info: San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- Assessing outcomes and improving achievement : tips and tools for using rubrics / edited by Terrel L. Rhodes. Publication info: Washington, DC : Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010.

Assessment Analogy "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative." --Stake, 2004

Upcoming Middle States Events
http://www.msche.org/events_calendar.asp

"If we always do what we've always done, we will get what we've always got."
--Urbanski, 2000

University Hall,
Montclair State University

Assessment Matters at Montclair State University

Strategies to Improve Student Learning, Part I

There is increasing evidence that students learn most effectively when:
• They understand course and program goals and the characteristics of excellent work.
• They are academically challenged and encouraged to focus on developing higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving, as well as discipline-specific knowledge.
• They spend more time actively involved in learning and less time listening to lectures.
• They engage in multidimensional "real world" tasks.
• Their learning styles are accommodated.
• They have positive interactions with faculty and work collaboratively with fellow students; all learners—students and professors—respect and value others as learners.

MSCHE, Student Learning Assessment, 2007, p.71

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Next Issue Highlights

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