

***Task force on
Evaluating Assessment Practices
at SUNY Oswego
Final Report
to
the Faculty Assembly
October 11, 2021***

The Charge for the ATF

As communicated to us:

1. Identify our assessment practices for each of the Schools, and General Education
2. Consider whether there is a need for assessing all (100%) courses versus a statistically valid sample for purposes of reporting.
3. Recommend assessment processes that are meaningful, integrated, and don't "consume more energy than they produce" (Warner 2019)
4. Identify recommendations for assessment practices that will establish a "well-worn path" between assessment, improving learning, and allocating resources, as recommended by the MSCHE.

Added by the ATF:

5. How can we explicitly honor our commitment to equity and related issues as we reflect on our assessment? What are the equity issues at play in our assessment practices?

Members of the Task Force

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- Sarah Bonzo *Faculty, School of Business*
- Kristin Croyle *Dean, CLAS (President's nominee)*
- Michelle Duffy *Faculty, School of Education*
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From the data: Why faculty value assessment

Assessment helps to:

- ◎ **(Most cited)** facilitate faculty discussions and conversations about SLO's, programs, planning and reporting
- ◎ identify areas of strength, and areas of weaknesses in the curriculum
- ◎ understand whether curricular expectations are being met, what students are getting out of the program, and how best to deliver on our promise of quality in higher education
- ◎ establish consistency across different sections or years of the program
- ◎ provide data to examine and revise curricula, courses and pedagogical practices.
- ◎ understand where our students are when they graduate

What faculty find onerous about the process

- ◎ (Most cited) The logistics – constructing the plan each year, coordinating data management, setting up data collection and analyses, and report writing
- ◎ Gen ed assessment
- ◎ Dealing with very small sample sizes
- ◎ Faculty related issues – establishing buy-in, using adjuncts, faculty cooperation, rigidly established practices, turnaround each cycle
- ◎ Including new course-related endeavors into the assessment plan
- ◎ Confusion over timing – gen ed is over calendar year (CY) whereas program is over academic year (AY)
- ◎ Redundancies between gen ed and program assessment
- ◎ Over-assessing a specific (possibly lower level) course
- ◎ LACK OF RESOURCES allocated

Externally accredited units added the following benefits

Assessment helps to:

- ⦿ understand the inter-relationships among programs, including how each is different
- ⦿ develop projects that benefit all programs within a school
- ⦿ develop a systematic approach to reflection which allows for consistency among program assessments, and the dedication of human resources to maintain the systems
- ⦿ bolster written communication, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking in curricula

... and the following caveats:

- ◎ The sheer volume of assessment can be burdensome
- ◎ The formality of the process may detract from learning from the process
- ◎ Changing priorities and standards of external agencies

“Cries for help”

- ◎ Given the lack of sufficient numbers of tenured faculty, we are stretched too thin to benefit from assessments.
- ◎ The process places undue pressures on the coordinator and the few faculty who are qualified to conduct the assessments.
- ◎ It hasn't been that valuable because we don't get good data.
- ◎ While there are results from assessment activities, how to properly evaluate the meaning of the results is an open question.
- ◎ Diminishing benefits because of the pressure on a few faculty members to conduct numerous evaluations.
- ◎ It is difficult to have consistency, and consistent improvements because of a significant turnover in the faculty.

What we learned from the presentations

- ◎ The context, and the historical evolution of program, and general education assessment processes on campus.
- ◎ For general education, the shift to the CY from the AY was approved in order to “encourage conversation about assessment within and across departments and programs and to identify any actions to be taken in light of what had been learned from the assessment.”
- ◎ The use of the AEFIS Outcomes Assessment + Data Collection solution is close to being tested.
- ◎ A Continuous Improvement Report for 2020-21 and a Continuous Improvement Plan for 2021-2022 has been created by IRA. The report and subsequent plan will capture 1-3 goals from each department/unit that are tied to our institutional goals, priorities and mission of SUNY Oswego.
- ◎ Assessment Coordination has been restructured over the last year. Program Assessment is now being managed via the offices of the Deans, by the Associate Deans.

So, where do we stand?

◎ Our data indicate that we have reached a fair level of maturity on our campus in regard to assessment.

Consider the following indicators:

◎ Clearly defined SLO's, and processes to collect data

◎ Data collection processes are embedded in the life of the programs

◎ Departmental assessment coordinators are doing their job competently

◎ What faculty report as being onerous indicate next steps that should be taken to improve the process. Faculty seek better facilitation, active conversations within and across departments, processes that allow programs to streamline and revise their assessment plans as needed, improved feedback, and information on how the data feeds into decision making processes (Research (e.g Walvoord (2010)) asserts that this is a key factor in making assessment more valuable).

Recommendations

We recommend the following:

1. Find, and communicate ways of tying assessment to policy related issues. What, and how do, departmental, programmatic, and institutional decisions rely on assessment data? Suggestions: Use assessment data and results to inform curricular changes, hiring requests, etc. Dean's offices should support this process.
2. For the same reasons as for General Education, we recommend moving the Program Assessment cycle to the calendar year.
3. Develop a coordinated calendar of assessment requirements for both Program and General Education, with clearly defined due dates, published on the IRA website. Also, develop living forms in consistent and easily accessible locations that are updated regularly based on feedback.

Recommendations continued...

Subsidiary

4. Create an onboarding program for new coordinators to help them get started.
5. Hold assessment Coordinator-led annual meeting of program faculty within each unit to discuss program assessment, to address issues such as:
 - Relating assessment to institutional goals.
 - Areas that need improvement.
 - What we can celebrate about our students and their achievements.
6. Hold an annual meeting/retreat for all departmental Assessment Coordinators along with the Deans, and IRA to provide an overall picture of assessment within the entire unit. Participants would discuss due dates, highlight programs that tried something new, celebrate programs that saw improvements, share best practices, and discuss assessment in general. Externally accredited programs should be included in the meeting.

And still more ... (Well, you did ask ...!)

7. A technology-assisted solution that allows units to upload department reports, see trends over time including ways to visualize data, and share best practices.
8. Attention to equity as related to assessment. As part of our work, the ATF discussed the following questions:
 - a. What are some key issues related to assessment and equity?
 - b. How can assessment take into account the diversity of students on our campus?
 - c. What resources are needed to help faculty/departments address issues related to equity?

Discussion about these issues led to the creation of the document “*Considering Equity in Student Learning Assessment Practices*” appended to this report. The document provides guidance to programs to help evolve models that align with their disciplinary areas. Seeking and supporting appropriate opportunities for professional development would further bolster this process.

... and finally

9. A college Assessment website to better reflect the entire process including overarching goals, the activities at each stage, the administrative personnel that provide oversight, and the timeline.
10. Allocated resources to strengthen the process, and to help programs and faculty meet expectations. Data from our “Cries for help” section indicate that institutionally, there is a need to attach value to a process that is deemed essential and useful.

Institutionally speaking, if we desire that programs and units invest time and energy (and passion) into the assessment process, then they must be provided the necessary resources - in terms of course release/extra service as needed in order to plan and reflect on the existing process, support for professional development, and for research, including pilot programs, and lastly, rewards for exemplary performances.

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Thank you!
Comments? Questions?

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