Assessment Benefits & Barriers

Shared Experiences with the Barriers to Effective Assessment

***What is the single most difficult challenge you have encountered in the assessment process?***

Richard Voos: The single most difficult challenges in the assessment process has I think been over faculty suspicion about the process and it comes reasonably and justifiably from a couple of places Number one it does seem to have been posed from without right from our accrediting bodies to the administration and then from the administration so that has been a barrier And understanding and developing trust and its purpose

Chris Cratsley: My role as a director of assessment I think that you get to meet with and work with faculty with all different levels of interest in assessment sometimes levels of resistance to assessments and levels of knowledge about awareness of what assessment is and how are use it And so one of the biggest challenges for me is being able to approach everybody where theyre starting from in terms of interest in or resistance acknowledging about assessment and to hopefully help them all to see that there is a benefit and that there are going to be ways and its going to we work and theyre going to be ways that this work is going to pay dividends that for their teaching and learning and is going to bring them together as a program and help them to move forward So I think that we often college building a culture of assessment on a campus where you Bring people together to some level of shared understanding of how this is important and how it is valuable But that is a very challenging thing when as I said you are dealing with people coming from a lot of different perspectives and a lot of different places

Laura Saunders: Our biggest challenge was just really just creating a culture of assessment really trying to get everyone on board because when we had our very first assessment retreat before our current team was even hired I think if you were people understood what it was we were trying to accomplish I just remember one person saying after we had gone through this workshop and we had talked about rubrics and all of the stuff one person saying this is all great but I dont have time for this And I think that resonated with a lot of people No one ever feels like they have enough time

***What issues or concerns have you encountered in terms of building a shared commitment to assessing student learning outcomes?***

Regina Doherty: Some of the bumps along the way that weve encountered as far as building assessment as a consistent piece is that is that its really hard Its much easier to lecture and its much easier to sort of say well I know they know it because I said it And to really push faculty to think about how did you assess it for the student because a team of students participated in an activity doesnt mean that each student achieved the competency we dont know if we dont have the assessment from each individual student

Laura Saunders: I think one of the biggest concern is that people have had in addition to time and resources that I already talked about is some concern over losing their sort of identity or their fingerprints I guess on the courses that they teach I think that some of the faculty had a concern that by trying to standardize some aspects of the course in order to have a set of rubrics that might be applicable across different kinds of courses or do you have a standard assignment that we could use for course embedded assessment I think there was some fear that we were sort of taking their courses away or telling them how to teach their courses

Richard Voos: I think that the question of shared commitment partially comes back to a question of governance also So who or how is the faculty has a whole responsible for the six undergraduate essential capabilities and who on the faculty is responsible? You know is it one of those cases since everybody is responsible nobody is responsible?

***What are some of the challenges you have faced as you have worked with your colleagues to attempt to collect assessment data?***

Tracy Brudvig: I have done some research on physical therapy students and critical thinking using some standardized testing I think there are two difficult aspects of that Ive had not just myself but we have to go through the institutional review board we go through the Spalding institutional review board which is really a medical review board And theres been a real issue with educational research and they dont understand educational research Its been harder for us to get educational projects through the IRP then medical projects and its just like beating your head sometimes against the wall You get these forms and they ask you questions and the questions dont really make any sense to what youre doing and you might answer one of those questions incorrectly because youre interpreting it wrong and it sits for two weeks and anyways thats been very frustrating And the other aspect of that in trying to collect data for research is trying to get the students interested enough in to participate Because we cant make it a requirement unless it is a program requirement and I cant say weve had the best participation and thats been frustrating and disappointing because you go in and you explain to the students why its important and that that data could essentially affect change in the future and the participation is always less than what I would hope it to be

Laura Saunders: There is a number of challenges I think that one even just getting the data from the students so for instants weve been doing an alumni survey for a number of years and the response rate to that survey tends to have her around 35% and thats not really great response rate and its challenging to try to figure out how to increase that We had an exit survey for the first time in our response rate was definitely higher but in order for surveys or even course evaluations things like that the burden is really on the student to participate it really can be a challenge just to get them to do that In terms of other kinds of assessment a more direct assessment of warning if we have a course embedded assignment for the most part students are going to do that were going to have the data then the challenge is more about finding the time to really work with that It took when we did our learning program assessment this past year we had for faculty members who work for about four hours I think to go through 50 assignments and then score them against a rubric so I think just making sure that weve got the time and resources to do that can be a little bit of a challenge and were still in the process of sort of ironing out some of the details So for instance we did discover when doing this that one of the rubrics that we were using really wasnt robust enough to do as much assessment of the particular assignment as we wanted So we were still able to score this time we were still able to kind of get an overall view of how students where achieving that particular outcome but then we had to go back to the faculty that designed that assignment and that rubric and really ask them to flush it out a little bit more

***How have you struggled with interpreting and making meaning from assessment data in the past? What common issues and complaints have arisen about the data?***

Regina Doherty: I think that some of the common complaints are that maybe the assignment was it clear and thats why its not in the evidence The other common complaint is that someone might not necessarily agree with a particular standard So the standard may say this and some one philosophical might say I dont think that all graduates should have to achieve that and so that comes to putting everyone on the same page OK well philosophically what do we believe and these are our learning outcomes you have to report to so many different people regional accreditors and specialty accreditors and sometimes those match nicely and sometimes they dont and people sort of lose track of wait a minute am I supposed to ensure they achieve this or can they just achieve this and sometimes with achieve above where the bar says many times we do and then that becomes confusing because they are targeting a different level

Chris Cratsley: One of the major impediments to using assessment data and making use of assessment data is faculty confidence in the data its very easy to look at the data and accused of too small a sample size accusing the data of not being a representative sample of the students or arguing that the data that you collected is and that the tool that youve used to select it doesnt really have validity All of those things we can argue and sometimes we are right sometimes theyre really are severe issues around those and I think that that struggle is never going to go away because we are not we can always get closer as with any kind of experimental design we can always get closer to measuring what we think we are measuring but we will always be subject to some imperfections so I really think its important we figure out how to come to terms with living with of the imperfects nature of our data and recognizing that we are not trying to actually prove something about our student learning we are actually trying to improve something about our student learning This is action research that is designed to give us a little bit more insight than we had when we sat around in a faculty meeting and said my students cant right into delve a little deeper into that question Well what is it that they are struggling with in their writing? Lets look at their writing and think about it more carefully

***What barriers have presented challenges to you in using assessment to make changes to your courses curriculum or academic policies?***

Regina Doherty: Some of the barriers are whats the right number? How many years how many times do you do the assessment measure before you say its not the right measure So if you have 30 students go through the assessment measure one semester and 30 go through the next semester what are the key changes you have to make between those semesters to really actualize a meaningful change where is the meaningful change? Is it because these students didnt get it is it because the tour was wrong is it because the activity was wrong? And so thats what I think is part of the ongoing challenge How do you evolve and change in a meaningful way? So that youre not constantly changing and you can use the data just say OK now we have substantial data we have 100 students who have done this activity and X number continue to struggle with X So finding that increment of when to change and when to use the data to drive change

Tracy Brudvig: The way my particular schedule goes I teach so much I teach probably two thirds of my entire load in one semester and it makes anything difficult that semester and I feel like it takes me half of the next semester to just recover just because Im in the classroom some weeks for 20 hours and thats a lot with students So I think time is the biggest obstacle its finding that time to sit down and think about the data think about with the data is telling you and then reflecting and coming up with proposed changes