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SHARPEN YOUR PENCIL

Developing an Equity Scorecard

The Equity Scorecard, a tool developed by the Center of Urban Education in the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California (USC), helps institutions of higher learning assess their performance in “providing equity of outcomes to its students of color.” By collecting and analyzing student outcomes data, the scorecard devises an individualized framework to monitor institutions’ progress toward equity in four areas: access, retention, institutional receptivity, and excellence.

To carry out the Equity Scorecard’s Model of Institutional Change, according to Center Director Estela Mara Bensimon, the institution selects a team of individuals whose role is to report clearly and unambiguously the status of basic educational outcomes of underrepresented students. The team examines available data on each dimension of performance, disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. Team members then highlight a specific array of outcomes for particular groups of students. They create the scorecard by identifying and selecting goals and measures in each of the four general areas.

When this review is complete, the team presents its findings to the campus community. At this point, the institution can develop proposals and initiatives to respond to scorecard items. The long term goal of the project is to establish a regular process—a scorecard—which monitors whether outcomes for underrepresented students are improving or lagging behind.

It is important that institutions develop benchmarks to indicate the desired results. The Center for Urban Education has developed a new measure, the Student Outcomes Equity Index, to facilitate the benchmarking process. Readers are invited to view an example of a completed report.

Dr. Bensimon writes, “The best hope for change in an institution is for individuals to see, on their own, the magnitude of inequalities (awareness); to analyze and integrate the meaning of these inequities (interpretation); and then act upon them (action).”
HLC Annual Meeting Sees Assessment in 2016

The 111th Annual Meeting of the Higher Learning Commission is set for March 31-April 4, 2006, at the Hyatt Regency of Chicago. Entitled “The Future-Focused Organization: 2016-Ready or Not?”, the gathering features multiple pre-conference workshops, more than 100 sessions in the general program, and a variety of excellent resources. The HLC invites higher education professionals to consider:

“2016 is a decade away. That alone qualifies it as a good point of reference. But students of demographic trends suggest that very close to 2016, this nation will be experiencing some extraordinary shifts in our population mix. Larger numbers of students seeking entrance—and being admitted—to our colleges and universities will come from ethnic and class backgrounds not particularly well-served today by our colleges and universities.

“Technology is already transforming the learning environments students expect and, some argue, only through the astute use of technology can we hope to provide effective education to our new student populations. The basic business structures of our colleges and universities are also shifting through privatization, collaboration, and outsourcing. Accountability and transparency, buzz words in the current reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, will undoubtedly be firmly integrated into accreditation processes as well as woven into the fabric of each institution. In short, by 2016, if higher education is to continue to serve the common good, it will be likely by a significantly changed enterprise from today.

“This Annual Meeting will provide the occasion to learn about the opportunities and challenges every distinctive college and university will confront, and to hear about strategies already being pursued by Future-Oriented Organizations.”

Multiple ways to get in touch with the HLC include sending an email to annualmeeting@hlcommission.org, calling (312) 263-0456, or (800) 621-7440, ext. 115, or visiting the Annual Meeting Web site, which includes hotel information. Those interested in attending are encouraged to register early. Register by March 1, 2006, to take advantage of early registration discounts. Pre-registration closes on March 17, 2006. After March 17, attendees must register on-site.
Faculty can feel overwhelmed with requests for assessment information from their colleges, the university, and accreditation agencies. Most recognize the value of assessment when looking at student learning objectives in classrooms and programs. But it can feel burdensome to report assessment findings to the college or higher levels. This may be because the link between classroom assessment and college goals and objectives is not always clear.

The College of Health and Human Sciences (CHHS), led by Dean Shirley Richmond, is working to clarify this link. Featured in Profiles in Assessment below, Dean Richmond stresses the importance of linking CHHS assessment efforts with the broader core values of the college: Diversity, Advocacy, Professionalism and Collaboration. She also highlights the need to demonstrate measurable outcomes to the many accreditation agencies governing CHHS programs. Highlighting the classroom-college assessment link reveals a more cohesive picture of student experiences, and can help faculty to better understand the need for assessment.

Last month in his State of the University Address, President John Peters invited faculty to consider the link between college assessments and the overarching vision for NIU. The vision he presented is one of NIU as the Sustainable University, the Engaged University, the Global University, the Responsive University, and the Accountable University. Particularly in the last mandate, making the link between classroom and higher levels of assessment more apparent is a challenge that faces us as we continue to grow in assessment practice.

**PROFILES IN ASSESSMENT**

**Shirley Richmond, Dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences**

Dean Shirley Richmond has been involved in assessment for many years. As the chair of medical technology department at the University of Texas Medical Branch, she developed programmatic outcome measures, demonstrated assessment criteria to the accreditation agency, and showed how the resultant findings were used to make program changes. Subsequently, as Associate Dean of that College, she was responsible for the oversight of all programs’ assessment efforts. Dean Richmond has also served two terms on the program review board for the National Accreditation Agency for Clinical Laboratory Scientists.

These days, as Dean of NIU’s College of Health and Human Sciences, she is part of the linkage between all College programs and the NIU Office of Assessment.

Tune in to hear more by clicking on either picture on the right.

Download *Windows Media Player* for free.
Assessing Your Assessment Process

The 2005 IUPUI Assessment Institute offered several good workshops this year; among them, Assessing Your Assessment Process, presented by Drs. David W. Kale and John Noonan of Mount Vernon Nazarene University. Reviewing one’s assessment plan, according to their presentation, involves responding to seven thought-provoking questions:

1. Does the plan primarily use direct measures of student learning?
2. Are multiple measures used to determine the degree to which departmental objectives have been achieved?
3. Does the plan put primary emphasis on evidence that student learning has persisted over time?
4. Does the plan focus on patterns of evidence rather than drawing conclusions about student learning based on one year’s data?
5. Are both summative and formative assessments included in the plan?
6. Is a process in place for the department to annually review assessment data with an eye toward modifying courses, changing program requirements, etc. as a means of improving the quality of student learning? In this process, is the effectiveness of the assessment plan itself also reviewed?
7. Are departmental resources (i.e., budget, faculty time, etc.) directed toward improving the quality of student learning?

These criteria are designed to help any faculty member, department, college or unit consider the degree to which their assessment plan is doing what it is meant to do. The criteria are flexible because they can be answered along a simple Likert-type scale (Does not meet expectations, meets expectations, exceeds expectations) or pursued with greater depth. Drs. Kale and Noonan have posted materials at the IUPUI website for further reading; or, contact them directly at david.kale@mvnu.edu or john.noonan@mvnu.edu.

Contributions Solicited!

Contribute to Toolkit’s newest feature, “Sharpen your Pencil: Assessment Tips from the Inside,” or any of our other regular features. We’re looking to share the wisdom that we each develop at home, making the work of assessment more productive. If you’d like material to be considered for inclusion in a future edition of Toolkit, submit a Word document of no more than 300 words as an email attachment to cdoug@niu.edu.
Student Affairs Hosts Industry Leader Bresciani

The Division of Student Affairs will host an assessment training day January 23 lead by industry expert Dr. Marilee Bresciani. Bresciani will lead two two-hour, interactive professional development sessions for student affairs staff members division-wide on the subjects of identifying and assessing student learning outcomes. Sessions will be held in the Holmes Student Center Sky Room at 8:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Bresciani, assistant vice president for Institutional Assessment at Texas A&M University, best known for establishing a comprehensive assessment program at North Carolina State University, is the author of numerous texts and journal articles on assessing student learning inside and outside the classroom. Her presentation will guide participants through the process of identifying and articulating student learning outcomes inherent in student affairs programs, and will provide recommendations for using multiple assessment tools to measure those outcomes.

“Outcomes-based assessment, specifically as it relates to students’ learning and development, is a major focus for the division,” shared Donna M. Simon, associate vice president for student affairs, who oversees assessment planning and priorities for the division. “Student learning is at the very core of our mission,” she added, “and in an environment of heightened accountability we need to become experts at assessing how our programs and services support and promote the academic mission of the university. Dr. Bresciani’s seminar will take us closer to that goal.”

New Teacher Certification Assessment Coordinator

Carrie Zack is the new Assessment Coordinator at the University Office of Teacher Certification (UOTC). She holds a baccalaureate from Loyola, as well as a middle/high school teaching certificate, and earned her master’s in sociology from NIU. She focused her graduate studies on research methods, social inequality, and the sociology of education, completing a thesis that explored the school characteristics that are associated with the racial gap in standardized test scores.

Her professional background includes a variety of duties at the Sylvan Learning Center, and at the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Research at the College of Lake County (CLC). At CLC, she was part of a team that supported continuous improvement efforts and administrative decision-making at the college by collecting and reporting pertinent data.

Carrie indicates, “Returning to NIU as the Teacher Certification Assessment Coordinator is a logical step for me because I can now utilize skills and knowledge I’ve acquired to support quality teacher education.”
POLICY

Employer Feedback on Alumni Performance

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) requires that universities provide evidence of feedback from employers in reports of the results from program review. Self-reported data from alumni are necessary and acceptable measures of their success after graduation are helpful, but they do not meet the criterion of soliciting information from employers. Surveys of employers are often not feasible and historically have generated a low response rate. While surveys remain an acceptable indicator of employer feedback, NIU has identified some other measures that can be used to meet the criterion of eliciting feedback from employers. The following methods are recommended to meet the criterion:

- Departmental/program advisory group input/feedback
- Articles/research published in refereed/professional journals
- Funded grants
- Juried exhibitions and performances
- Evaluations from internship/cooperative education supervisors
- Evaluations from supervising teachers or preceptors
- External review of dissertations

All assessment programs are expected to include at least one means of soliciting employer feedback.

Reporting From IUPUI: The Assessment Papers

At this year’s Assessment Institute at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, the Office of Assessment Services staff had the pleasure of meeting several experts, including Donald Bennion of Eastern Michigan University (EMU). A psychometrician and assessment professional, Dr. Bennion has written a series of papers to assist individuals within his university to improve their assessment plans. The Assessment Information Papers cover several topics including how to write an objective, how to relate objectives to program goals, and how to assess basic and higher order learning. The faculty and staff at EMU have found these papers to be valuable tools in improving their assessment plans by helping them to better establish reliability and validity of assessment methods; more effectively use multiple choice and essay questions in student assessment; and explore alternative methods of assessment. For example, Assessment Information Paper #10 describes how to use position papers, performances, case studies, and oral exams as performance-based assessment. NIU faculty who reviewed the papers responded that they are reassured because the papers affirm much of what they are doing in their classrooms. The papers can be a useful device for helping faculty to document and further refine the assessment they are already conducting. Dr. Bennion has graciously agreed to share the Assessment Information Papers with the academic community.
FROM THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future

New Higher Learning Commission accreditation criteria became effective January, 2005. Some excerpts from criterion two are:

The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

- The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
- The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
- The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
- All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

The full text may be viewed at:

http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/download/PolicyBookJan05.pdf

Toolkit is brought to you by the Office of Assessment Services:

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