SPELLINGS COMMISSION:

“...to weigh and rank comparative institutional performance”

Entitled *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, the final report of the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education includes the following recommendation:

“To meet the challenges of the 21st century, higher education must change from a system primarily based on reputation to one based on performance. We urge the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education. Every one of our goals, from improving access and affordability to enhancing quality and innovation, will be more easily achieved if higher education institutions embrace and implement serious accountability measures.

“We recommend the creation of a consumer-friendly information database on higher education with useful, reliable information on institutions, coupled with a search engine to enable students, parents, policymakers and others to weigh and rank comparative institutional performance.

“The Department of Education should collect data and provide information in a common format so that interested parties can create a searchable, consumer-friendly database that provides access to institutional performance and aggregate student outcomes in a secure and flexible format. The strategy for the collection and use of data should be designed to recognize the complexity of higher education, have the capacity to accommodate diverse consumer preferences through standard and customizable searches, and make it easy to obtain comparative information including cost, price, admissions data, college completion rates and, eventually, learning outcomes.

“Third-party organizations should be encouraged and enabled to publish

Continued...
NASULGC and AASCU Discuss Voluntary System of Accountability

The Spellings Commission Report has brought a heightened awareness of issues of access, affordability and accountability to the higher education community. The report suggests, among other things, that student learning of general education be measurable in an “apples to apples” way from one institution to the next.

Institutional members of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) have been working together to establish a voluntary mechanism for increasing accountability and transparency of institutional outcomes. Funded by the Lumina Foundation, 79 representatives from approximately 650 public universities have been working on seven task forces to develop the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).

The process of developing the VSA has led to a three-pronged accountability approach with task force members are focusing on 1) student and parent information, 2) student campus engagement data and 3) core educational outcomes. This approach is intended to benefit three constituencies: 1) prospective students, current students, and their parents; 2) faculty and campus support staff; and 3) public policy-makers and public and private funders of higher education.

Under the VSA, participating institutions or “VSA universities” would agree to maintain data representing measures of each of these areas of accountability on their own publicly accessible web sites. Longitudinal data, comparing institutional performance to their own past performance over time, is viewed as optimum and VSA universities are expected to have these data available by fall, 2011. In the case of the student and parent information, these data are expected to be made available sooner. A review of the types of data anticipated in each of the three sections will be published in this and upcoming issues of Toolkit.

References:

The VSA Core Educational Outcomes Task Force is examining the potential of the following assessment instruments:
- The Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) is from ACT (formerly known as American College Testing). Its modules test reading, writing, mathematics, science, and critical thinking.
- The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) was developed in 2002 by the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) in conjunction with the RAND Corporation. It is designed to test critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and written communication.
- The Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) is a product of the nonprofit Educational Testing Service (ETS). It measures learning outcomes related to reading, mathematics, writing, critical thinking, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.
YFCY Outcomes: Critical Thinking and Research Ability

The Your First College Year (YFCY) survey is designed to assess student values and attitudes, goals and aspirations, educational and career plans, and academic and social experiences during the first year of college. Students included in this assessment were a sample of 114 students who began as new freshmen at NIU during the Fall 2004 semester. Those students were then tracked for their first year and given the survey at the completion of their first year of study.

Two measures of first-year growth were examined in this assessment project: student ratings of their growth in critical thinking skills and in their ability to conduct research. Data from this assessment study were analyzed using multiple regression procedures.

Considering students’ self-ratings of growth in their critical thinking skills, two specific experiences were significantly related to changes. Students who reported higher levels of growth in critical thinking skills also indicated that they tended to more frequently discuss course content with other students outside class. In addition, students who spent more hours per week on studying/homework also tended to report higher levels of growth in critical thinking skills.

Seven specific first-year experiences were significantly associated with students’ improvement in their ability to do research. Students who reported that their ability to conduct research had improved also indicated that their courses inspired them to think in new ways. They spent more hours per week on studying/homework, were more likely to have worked on a professor’s research project, and spent more hours per week attending classes and labs. They were also more likely to have enrolled in linked courses as part of a focused interest group. However, students who spent more hours per week working for pay were less likely to have reported improvement in their ability to conduct research.

--Daniel House
Office of Institutional Research

Meet Amy Swanson

Amy Swanson is the new Research Associate in the Office of Assessment Services. She holds a Master’s degree in Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychology from NIU and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in I/O Psychology at NIU as well. Amy previously served as a graduate assistant in OAS, where she primarily assisted with survey development and data analysis of the Annual Alumni Survey and provided data for program review. In addition to these responsibilities, Amy will be assisting with the University Writing Project, evaluation of the Annual Assessment Updates, and other assessment projects. Amy hopes to utilize her background in I/O Psychology to help promote a positive culture of assessment on campus. She indicates, “I am extremely grateful for and proud of the education I received at NIU. I’m looking forward to utilizing the knowledge and skills that I have acquired to raise assessment awareness on campus and help showcase the high quality educational services students obtain here at NIU.”
VSA APPROACHES TO ACCOUNTABILITY: PART 1 OF 3

University Information for Students and Parents

Each year, prospective students and their parents struggle to choose the best college or university for their needs. Thanks to collaboration between the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), this task may soon be made easier. These organizations are working together to create a voluntary mechanism for increasing accountability and transparency of institutional outcomes.

The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) is designed as a three-pronged approach. The first of these prongs is a focus on student and parent information to aid these individuals in their search for the best university fit. A better fit between students and their university is likely to result in greater satisfaction and better educational success. The types of information students and their parents are typically looking for when making a university choice include actual costs of attendance, graduation rates and employment facts. Universities participating in the VSA would voluntarily maintain data on their publicly accessible web sites that represent measures of these items and others related to student and parent concerns. A template for how these data might be displayed has been developed by the VSA collaborators. These data, expected to become available over the next 2-4 years, should aid students and their parents in the important decision of which university best meets their needs.

The second and third prongs are focused on student campus engagement data and core educational outcomes, and these data would be internet-accessible as well. Look for these initiatives to be addressed in future issues of Toolkit.

Your Contribution is Welcome

What assessment methods have worked well for you? What findings have helped you modify your program? Toolkit would love to print your assessment tips or success story! 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. The submission deadline for the next issue is November 1, 2007.
The Problem-Solving Analysis Protocol (P-SAP) is an instrument designed to assess problem solving skills that can be easily integrated into the normal activities of a class. Created by Drs. Pamela Steinke of North Carolina State University and Peggy Fitch of Central College, the tool is based on the work of researchers in service-learning on cognitive outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999) and the reflective judgment framework of intellectual development (King & Kitchener, 1994).

Students first write essay answers to a series of four questions about the causes, consequences and solutions for a problem that arises from the issue. The P-SAP then provides scoring criteria for two dimensions (locus/source and complexity) for each of the four questions. The questions relate to a given problem, its cause, a solution and analysis of that solution. Volume 5, Issue 3 of Toolkit provided the Problem Analysis Locus and Problem Analysis Complexity rubrics. Volume 5, Issue 4 invited readers to examine the rubrics for Causal Locus and Causal Complexity. This issue presents part three: rubrics which measure the Solution Locus and Solution Complexity.

The problem-solving protocol presents a real-world issue to the student that is directly relevant to the application of material the student is learning in the course, and by simply changing the issue the protocol can be used in a wide variety of classes. It can be used in

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<td>no solution locus; does not feel a solution is needed; gives an answer that does not answer the question</td>
<td>solution focused on individual mental state/individual behavior/individual differences in how people respond to situations</td>
<td>solution focused on individuals as members of a social group (e.g., family, nation, cultural group, occupation) but not connected to an established system; focus is on the group as a whole; different groups may be contrasted to make the point or the reader can easily generate groups that could be contrasted</td>
<td>systemic solution (e.g., political, educational, financial, occupational) identified but not well developed/explained/elaborated; solution focused on changing, expanding, or pointing out what is right or wrong with an established system</td>
<td>systemic solution developed/explained/elaborated; reference to broader principle (e.g. reciprocity; equity); explanation as to why or how the system should be changed or expanded; both systemic and individual mentioned but not developed/explained/elaborated</td>
<td>both individual and systemic solution developed/explained/elaborated; individual and systemic integrated but without clear causal connections</td>
<td>both individual and systemic solution developed/explained/elaborated and integrated with causal connections between the systemic and individual</td>
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ASSESSMENT FAQ

Assessment Reports Perform Double Duty

FAQ: Are the data requests from the University Office of Teacher Certification (UOTC) and the Office of Assessment (OAS) asking for the same data?

Teacher certification programs are asked to provide assessment data for these two different offices at two different points in time. This can cause some confusion.

The OAS requests assessment data on an annual basis (due May 30) from all academic programs on campus. These data are reported to the University Assessment Panel and are used as part of the program review process at NIU. Programs should refer to the Annual Update form.

The UOTC collects data annually (due September 1) only from programs that prepare students for teacher certification. These data are shared with the Unit Assessment Committee and reported to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. For further information on the teacher certification data requirements, contact Carrie Zack at czack@niu.edu or call 753-0847.

Both assessment data requests include similar components – measures of assessments, outcomes or standards, data findings, and use of results. Much of what a program reports to the UOTC can be used to fulfill the OAS annual data requirement. This overlap is documented in a UOTC article located at www.niu.edu/assessment/toolkit/uotcnewsletter.doc. Faculty and staff are encouraged to review this article in order to save time in completing assessment data requirements.

ALSO...

Upcoming Assessment Events

ASSESSMENT INSTITUTE

The 2007 Assessment Institute, Indianapolis IN, will be held from November 4-6, 2007, at the Westin Indianapolis. The registration deadline is October 12. The hotel deadline to obtain conference rates is October 3. The conference will cover a variety of outcomes assessment areas, including general education and major fields as well as civic engagement, student development, and electronic portfolios, each of which has its own track throughout the schedule. Several sessions are designed for beginners and others are for the more experienced practitioner.

CAMPUS ASSESSMENT NETWORK

All NIU assessment professionals and interested parties are invited to join the growing Campus Assessment Network (CAN). This group 1) communicates and networks on assessment issues; 2) shares information and assessment tools; and 3) develops a shared assessment culture. The September 17 meeting will cover issues related to student affairs assessment and promoting a positive culture of assessment. Meet at 9:00 am in Altgeld 203. For additional information, contact Carolinda Douglass, Director of Assessment Services, at cdoug@niu.edu or 753-7120.

MORE...

Browse the following sites for continually updated assessment happenings:

www.assessment.ilstu.edu/workshops
www.assessmentconferences.com

Toolkit is brought to you by the Office of Assessment Services: Donna Askins, Editor-in-Chief, Carolinda Douglass, Director of Assessment Services
Amy Swanson, Research Associate and Secretary Karyn Higgs.
SPELLINGS COMMISSION, continued
independent, objective information using data from such a database.
In addition, comparative studies such as, for example, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education’s biennial Measuring Up report, which gauges how successful state systems are at preparation, participation, affordability, completion and learning, should be published and disseminated by the Department as part of this information system.”

The entire report is published in the public domain at the Commission’s website (click Final Report). To learn how colleges and universities are responding to this recommendation, see NASULGC and AASCU Discuss Voluntary System of Accountability.

TOOL OF THE MONTH, continued
Part 3 of 4: The Problem-Solving Analysis Protocol (P-SAP) Rubric
class as a graded assignment or exam question or as a class exercise to start discussion.

The P-SAP has been tested at several institutions in Iowa, Michigan and Illinois and the rubric has demonstrated high inter-rater reliability (.75-.94 range) and good construct validity with intellectual development and cognitive learning measures.

Solution Complexity (3rd question)

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<td>no solution locus; does not feel a solution is needed; gives an answer that does not answer the question</td>
<td>Low: naïve; no context; often individual action without analysis; unconnected to current service infrastructure; low elaboration of a single solution</td>
<td>Medium: some context and recognition of need to gather more information; some awareness of current efforts with mention of how solution is connected to a current program or service infrastructure with reference to established sites (e.g., hospitals, schools) or direct reference to recognized professions at established sites (e.g., nurses, teachers); cites current program as model; at least two very different solutions offered</td>
<td>High: systemic approach connected to causes and needs assessment; multiple solutions or complex solutions that are developed/explained/elaborated</td>
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e.g., “don’t know”
e.g., “Have the people exercise more and do it with a partner”; “Encourage people to be open and honest about everything in the workplace.”
e.g., “legislation and government funding for daycare, educate the general population about benefits of high quality daycare and what they can do to ensure their kids get it, lower the cost”; “mentoring programs, more open minded people, affirmative action”
e.g., “I think that teachers need to be sure to look at each child’s IEP and create activities that they are sure each student can do. Teachers need to set their students up for success. Some may believe disabled children need to be separated from the class and some may not see the importance of PE for these children.”

References Coding Tips