TEN DEPARTMENTS HONORED FOR OUTSTANDING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

First Assessment Expo a Strong Success

Over 40 participants attended NIU’s first Assessment Expo on March 7, 2008. Participants learned about successful assessment methods and outcomes from several academic programs across campus. A panel of four speakers discussed issues of using assessment data to drive program changes, engaging faculty in the assessment process, and using external feedback in assessing student learning outcomes. Six poster presentations included capstone courses, computer applications for technology assessment, and more.

Feedback from the Expo was overwhelmingly positive. Of the participants who filled out a program evaluation form:

- 95% believed the scope of the topics covered was appropriate,
- 85% believed the concepts and techniques in the program were directly applicable to their own teaching and other student-related activities, and
- 90% believed their participation in the Expo will benefit NIU students.

The Expo provided a showcase for ten academic programs that were selected by the University Assessment Panel (UAP) as having outstanding assessment practices. They were:

- B.S. in Business Administration
- B.S. in Computer Science
- M.A. in Economics
- M.S. Ed. in Educational Administration
- B.A. in French/Spanish
- M.S. in Geography
- B.S. in Kinesiology
- B.A. in Philosophy
- B.S. in Public Health
- B.S. in Textiles, Apparel and Merchandising

From this group, the UAP selected three whose departments will receive a $500 award to use in their future assessment efforts. The top three programs chosen were: M.S. in Geography, B.A. in Philosophy and B.S. in Public Health.

Congratulations to the winners! The Office of Assessment Services applauds all who participated.
Summer Assessment Conferences

Noel-Levitz Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys Client Workshop
July 14-15, 2008
Hyatt Regency
Chicago, Illinois
FREE

Limited to 50 participants, this workshop is an excellent opportunity to interact with colleagues who are conducting satisfaction assessments. Topics include building buy-in; administering the survey; groups responsible for using the data; conducting focus groups; and cycles using multiple assessment tools.

The 2008 Assessment Institute
October 26-28, 2008
The Westin Indianapolis
Indianapolis, Indiana
Pre-Institute Workshops: October 26, 2008
Institute Dates: October 27-28, 2008

The Assessment Institute in Indianapolis is the nation's oldest and largest event focused exclusively on outcomes assessment in higher education. Beginning, intermediate, and advanced sessions will be presented. Opportunities are available for individuals, campus teams, experienced assessment leaders, and any are interested in outcomes assessment at any level to establish networks that serve as sources of support and expertise beyond the dates of the Institute.

NASPA International Assessment & Retention Conference 2008
Assessment Reconsidered: Improving Learning, Student Success, and Transparency
June 11-15, 2008
Westin Kierland Resort & Spa
Scottsdale, Arizona

NIU will be represented by Brandi Hephner LaBanc, Amy Franklin, and Donna Schoenfeld from the Division of Student Affairs, and Lucy Robinson from Family, Consumer, and Nutrition Sciences. Their presentation, entitled “A New Game Plan: Hitting assessment and learning out of the park!” will include the Division of Student Affairs’ Assessment Strategy Grid/Guides, the Annual Planning Process, and a specific departmental example incorporating an academic collaboration.
**Rubrics You Can Use**

Now concluding its sixth year of publication, *Toolkit* has a wealth of rubrics available for faculty and staff in its archive. If you are seeking to measure a specific aspect of student learning, you may be able to avoid reinventing the wheel by using one or more of the following:

- **Volume 4, Issue 1** highlights the Critical and Integrative Thinking Rubric from Washington State University
- **Volume 4, Issue 3** of *Toolkit* features the Capstone Research and Report rubric from the Department of Chemistry
- **Volume 3, Issue 2** displays a writing skills rubric from the English Department
- **Volume 5, Issue 3** contains the first of a four-part series about the Problem-Solving Analysis Protocol (P-SAP), a set of rubrics which measures students’ ability to solve problems.

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**General Math Rubric**

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Better Quality

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**Expo Video Highlights**

At NIU’s first Assessment Expo, panel members discussed assessment challenges in their respective disciplines. In this video clip:

- David Changnon (Department of Geography) discusses keys to effective assessment practice.
- Andrea Evans (Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations) demonstrates assessment as a data-driven process.
- Jinsook Kim (School of Nursing and Health Studies) relates the importance of consistency in assessment measures and the use of assessment results.
- Penny McIntire (Department of Computer Science) emphasizes the need for external feedback.

In addition, David Warlick of Raleigh, North Carolina, has developed a free beta version of a rubric builder called “The Rubric Machine: A Collaborative Rubric Toolkit.” Thousands of rubrics are published in this database and searchable by keyword. For example, a search using the keyword “math” yields 1,291 results, one of which appears here.

David emphasizes that while the Rubric Machine works well, it is in beta version and not fully technically supported. However, materials posted are free of charge.

Click either image to view highlights from the panel discussion.
A Team-Based Assessment Model for Effecting Change

Randy Swing, Senior Fellow for the Policy Center on the First Year of College, points out that while many assessment practices are methodologically sound, they fail to incite action. His 2007 workshop “Assessment as Change Management: Creating Advocates for Improvement,” offered a team-based assessment model for engaging in effective assessment practices and moving stakeholders to action.

According to Swing (2004), effective assessment either generates action leading to changes in existing practice, or confirms the effectiveness of current practice. The Center’s team-based assessment model focuses on assessment processes that:

• Call for campus-wide involvement
• Look at overall student experiences and structures
• Lead to professional development
• Create advocates for change and improvement
• Engage participants in problem identification and improvement planning

The team-based assessment model consists of eight steps and focuses only on what the university can control. The first step emphasizes identifying a model of excellence. This step involves setting goals and operationally defining what these goals mean.

Step two involves obtaining campus-wide participation and involvement. This includes faculty, staff, administrators, as well as students.

Step three addresses the need to conduct a current practices inventory that is value-free and identifies current policies, initiatives, and data/assessment sources.

The fourth step in the team-based assessment model asks participants to determine the degree to which the university has achieved each goal or aspect of excellence by drawing on each of their data sources and citing relevant evidence.

Step five asks participants to identify potential challenges, opportunities, and/or successes based upon the evidence, followed by the development of specific actions for each area of concern. It is at this step that participants identify practices to continue, monitor, and improve. Swing emphasized the importance of linking each action to the stated goals, areas of concern, and evidence presented.

In step six, participants are asked to rank and prioritize each action based upon whether they require immediate action, considerable planning, or future consideration.

Step seven involves the implementation of these action plans followed by continued monitoring of the proposed solutions in step eight.

The Center’s pilot study utilizing this model found that campus-wide involvement led participants to develop a more “institutional” view of the issues. The problem identification process also developed proponents of change which helped to ease the transition from planning to implementation.

References


ASSessment FAQ

What Centralized Assessments are Available at the University Level?

FAQ: What centralized assessments are available to me at the university level for assessment of my programs?

There are two centralized assessments that are available each year at the university level through the Office of Assessment Services (OAS). The first is the NIU Alumni Survey. Each spring/summer, all NIU alumni from the previous calendar year are sent an Alumni Survey asking them about their experiences at NIU, their experiences since their graduation, their opinions concerning the quality of their education at NIU, and information pertaining to their sociodemographic characteristics. Data are collected by mail, online and through telephone follow-up. These data are analyzed by university, college and department and are made available to the NIU community through the OAS. Highlights from these data are available on the OAS website.

Along with the NIU Alumni Surveys, departments are invited to submit their own program or department surveys to be included in the mailing and online portions of the NIU Alumni Survey. Raw data from these surveys are sent directly to departments for their own in-house analysis.

A second centralized assessment available to departments is the University Writing Project (UWP). Each year, faculty members from across the university are invited to submit student papers that are completed as course requirements by juniors and seniors to the OAS. These are, in turn, delivered to the faculty from the Department of English where a team of trained readers review and score the writing samples using a standardized rubric. These data are analyzed by university, college, and course. Faculty who participate in the UWP are given a copy of the final report that outlines how their students scored overall and on the sub-scores of the rubric: focus, genre, audience, organization, critical thinking, writer’s presence and presentation. Although specific colleges are targeted for participation in the UWP each year, any faculty member from any college may participate in any cycle of the UWP.

Other centralized assessments are undertaken on an ad hoc basis. In the past, these have included technology assessments, assessments of critical thinking, and assessments of engaged learning. Check with the OAS to learn more.

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.
Graduate Alumni Pleased With Their Degrees From NIU

The Office of Assessment Services conducted NIU’s Class of 2006 Graduate Degree Alumni Survey one year after the group’s graduation. Respondents felt positive about their education at NIU:

- 94 percent reported that faculty at NIU were thorough in their treatment of course material
- 92 percent felt as though faculty were academically supportive and helpful to them
- 95 percent reported that they completed their degree in a reasonable amount of time
- 95 percent indicated that their degree program was a worthwhile investment of their time

Alumni were also pleased with how NIU prepared them for life after graduation:

- 93 percent of respondents indicated that they were currently employed, of which…
- 95 percent reported being satisfied with their current job
- 95 percent felt as though their graduate degree prepared them for their job

Overall, survey respondents had good things to say about the university:

- 96 percent indicated that the quality of their interactions with other students at NIU was good
- 96 percent reported a positive attitude toward NIU and…
- 93 percent said that they would recommend NIU to their friends and family.
Team-Based Model in Alternate Format

Earlier in this issue, Toolkit presented the team-based assessment model for effecting change in a descriptive article. Some readers may wish to study the model in a bullet-point format:

1) Identify a model of excellence
   • Set goals for what it you would like to achieve
   • Operationally define goals

2) Obtain campus-wide participation and involvement
   • This includes faculty, staff, administrators, & students

3) Conduct a current practices inventory
   • Should identify current policies, initiatives, and data/assessment sources that are currently in place
   • Should be value-free -- NOT evaluative

4) Determine the degree to which the university has achieved each goal or aspect of excellence
   • Draw on identified data sources
   • Cite relevant evidence

5) Identify potential challenges, opportunities, and/or successes based upon the evidence and develop specific actions for each area of concern
   • Identify practices to continue, monitor, and improve
   • Link each action to stated goals, areas of concern, and evidence presented

6) Rank and prioritize each action
   • Should be based on whether they require immediate action, considerable planning, or future consideration

7) Implement specific action plans
   • Solutions should directly address identified problems or continue prior successes

8) Continue monitoring proposed solutions

Join the Campus Assessment Network

The Campus Assessment Network is a growing group of assessment professionals and other interested parties across NIU working together to better communicate and network on assessment issues; 2) share information and assessment tools; and 3) develop a shared assessment culture. Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month from 10:00-11:00 in Campus Life Building, Room 115. Contact Carolinda Douglass, Director of Assessment Services, at 753-7120 or cdoug@niu.edu for further details.

Toolkit is

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