

CIE UPDATE

The Center for Institutional Effectiveness

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THE CENTER FOR INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS Spring 2013

The Center for Institutional Effectiveness (CIE) has been working hard to support and enhance institutional effectiveness and student learning. Most recently, the Strategic Planning Workgroup, a committee comprised of 35 faculty and staff completed the College's first values statement as well as the strategic plan, *Framework for the Future: Maximizing Potential for Student Success: 2013 – 2018*. Using the input gathered from open forums and surveys, the committee was able to synthesize the information into documents that reflect our collective goals for the College.

CIE also has been improving its website. Faculty and students now can view program curriculum maps, program learning outcomes, and department annual plans and assessment plans. This redesign has led to accessible information for students and reflects the College's commitment to greater transparency.

Finally, the role of the CIE Assessment Fellows is evolving. In addition to working with department assessment liaisons throughout the four semester assessment cycle, they are presenting assessment workshops, writing articles for college publications, and working on the monitoring report requested by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

ASSESSMENT TIPS

Faculty may feel hesitant when beginning the assessment process. The following suggestions should ease some of their uncertainty.

Tip 1:

Don't be concerned that outcomes assessment is assessing your instruction. This is not the goal of student learning outcomes assessment. The purpose for measuring learning outcomes is twofold- **to improve student learning** and **to improve instruction**. Educators perform outcomes assessment, but might not identify the process in these terms. An example would be a test given on a particular learning module to measure a specific competency. The measuring tool is a 50-item multiple choice test. The desired outcome is that 80 percent of the students enrolled in the course pass the test. The test is given and an item analysis is performed. Did your class meet the established benchmark for success? This is an example of a measurement of a learning outcome that is performed on a regular basis.

ASSESSMENT TIP 2:

Consider revising tools when you feel there is an issue or concern with the tool's reliability. Tools, like learning, need to be dynamic. If you feel that the tool is no longer reliable at measuring learning consistently, then you and your department might consider a revision. Students change, the class dynamic changes and so does the class as a whole.

Bergen and Middle States – What's Next?

In March, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education removed the College's warning and reaffirmed accreditation because Bergen was in compliance with Standards 7 (Institutional Assessment) and 14 (Assessment of Student Learning). However, to be sure that the College does not relapse in its work on assessment, the Commission requested a monitoring report due by October 1, 2013. This report must document "(1) further implementation of a comprehensive, organized, and sustained process for the assessment of institutional effectiveness, including evidence that results are used in budgeting, planning, and allocating resources; and (2) further implementation of a documented process to assess the achievement of program-level student learning goals, including General Education." Additionally, another visit may follow the submission of the monitoring report. The outcome of the report also will determine whether we are given permission to go forward with our self-study in 2015.

The report from the small team that visited Bergen in October 2012 made several recommendations. For Standard 14, these included completing curriculum maps, creating a clear process for reporting academic program learning outcomes, and reporting on general education outcomes across disciplines. In relation to Standard 7, the team recommended continuing to integrate the College's Dashboard, a system that measures and tracks institutional performance and facilitates planning, along with the Strategic Plan.

This monitoring report will be significant for Bergen's future with Middle States. CIE developed a plan and timeline for preparing the report. Dr. Yun Kim, Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, spoke with the Middle States liaison, Ellie Fogarty, to obtain insight and more details regarding the report. During April, Dr. Kim and the CIE Fellows identified progress made since October 2012 regarding assessment. May, June, and early July will be devoted to collecting documents and writing a draft report. The draft will be shared with the College community during July to obtain feedback. Final edits will take place in August and the report will be submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval at its September meeting.

CIE welcomes your support in this endeavor.

From a Culture of Assessment to a Culture of Evidence: Bergen on the Move

Assessment is omnipresent in college classrooms. We engage in it constantly. It's an ongoing process, something we continually revise and refine. We use it to help us improve teaching and students' learning. One way to look at assessment is to recognize that a culture of assessment incorporates

some of our current practices and moves toward an institutional process that looks at assessment broadly and systematically. We are accustomed to having complete autonomy in our teaching methods. We teach and students learn. But the reality often is that we teach but students don't learn. Or we find that students aren't learning the correct material. It's infuriating, right? We try to improve our teaching each semester, but we still find that students are not learning. Retention rates, graduation rates, and exam scores all point to this as a problem.

One characteristic of a culture of assessment is that it encourages us to pause and reflect, to go beyond what we are routinely doing and find additional – even novel ways to help students. The culture supports the need to systematize and report on our efforts to change. We have to stop being infuriated and speculate on why students are not learning. “Closing the loop” is the term heard most often to describe what we should do after we complete our assessments. It requires that we make explicit what we are implicitly aware of, that sometimes students don't learn what we're teaching. A culture of assessment raises questions about what we're doing, how we're doing it, and what we should change. The question we should ask is: if teaching the same thing the same way is not helping students learn, how can we assess our own teaching methods and improve them? How can we use the information we gain from assessment to improve student learning? When we report and analyze assessment results and use that information to improve our teaching we are moving into a culture of evidence.

ASSESSMENT TIP 4:

Close the loop. After collecting the data, and analyzing it accordingly, educators need to develop an action plan to improve future learning performance. The plan does not need to be intricate; just doable. Brainstorm with your department and colleagues in other disciplines for their ideas. Once a departmental plan is formulated, put it to the test. Measure to see if the plan is working effectively. Then, reassess to determine whether or not the action plan worked.

ASSESSMENT TIP 3:

Set realistic and achievable desired outcomes (benchmarks) for success. In a circumstance when an accrediting agency sets the desired outcome, collaboratively formulate a benchmark that expresses your philosophy of success. Start at the foundation for success, and then raise the benchmark as needed.

THE LEARNING ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Assessment Software Update

During the spring semester, the Learning Assessment Software Subcommittee completed its task of searching for assessment software. After reviewing proposals and inviting software vendors to present their products, the committee decided Tk20 will best meet the current and future needs of the College. The committee will help lead the software “rollout” beginning with a core group of users including CIE Assessment Fellows, assessment liaisons and interested committee members.

Addressing Standard 7

While much of CIE's attention has been focused on Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning), we also are working on addressing Standard 7, the Middle States Characteristic of Excellence which looks at institutional assessment. Generally speaking, it is “the place” where we demonstrate that our institution has a process to assess and evaluate our effectiveness in meeting our mission and goals. Institutional assessment is an integrated and proactive process that uses evidence to evaluate an institution's achievement of its mission and goals through a system of feedback (assess – evaluate) and continuous improvement (action). Our up and down administrative structure facilitates the flow of information. This information (data) is used to identify and refine goals, to develop strategies for meeting these goals, and to measure progress. Data also is interpreted against established benchmarks and, when appropriate, interventions are initiated to increase student success, improve planning and grow the overall effectiveness of the institution. In assessing institutional effectiveness, an institution uses multiple direct and indirect assessment measures. These measures, both qualitative and quantitative, frame the review of strategic and operational plans at all levels of the institution. The assessment work done by the faculty and administration provides the institution with the data that is critical in addressing Standard 7.

ASSESSMENT TIP 5:

Keep up with the process of assessing student learning on a regular basis. Outcomes assessment is designed to be a continual or ongoing process in order to assure that the process is systematic. Even though our time is tightly constrained with so many responsibilities and tasks, the process of outcomes assessment is integral to the education and success of our students. When outcomes assessment is used to measure learning and instruction, the educator gains insight on the students' abilities to synthesize and apply the information acquired in the respective course or program. Having a blueprint of expectations clearly communicates the intended learning outcomes to the students so that they are aware of expectations of their performance in the classroom, clinic, laboratory and external field experience.

References

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