

The State of Academic Program Assessment at Viterbo University: Present and Future

March 10, 2009

I. Best Practices of Program Assessment

Program assessment is an on-going process designed to monitor and improve student learning. Faculty:

- Develop explicit statements of what student should learn
- Align pedagogy with methods and outcomes
- Collect empirical data that indicate student attainment
- Reach a conclusion (faculty are satisfied or disappointed with student learning)
- Use these data to make curricular or pedagogical changes
- Test the effectiveness of the changes
- Confirm student learning

“In general the assessment plan should focus on direct, authentic, summative assessment with triangulation,” Mary J. Allen

The only good assessment plans are the plans that are implemented. Assessment should be manageable and sustainable. We do not have to assess every outcome in every student every year.

Higher Learning Commission Expectations:

1. Assess, confirm, and improve student learning through systematic collection and analysis of information about learning.
2. Tell the story of assessment through documentation of evidence-based assessment.

II. Program Assessment Reflected in 2008 TracDat Reports

49 established academic programs (both undergraduate and graduate):

- 100% (49) have established a plan for program-level assessment.
- 92% (45) have data on student learning and are in the process of analyzing the data
- 73% (36) have articulated action taken to improve student learning.
- 18% (9) have indicated follow-up measures.

On the whole, we have reached the following steps:

- Develop explicit statements of what student should learn
- Align pedagogy with methods and outcomes
- Collect empirical data that indicate student attainment
- Reach a conclusion (faculty are satisfied or disappointed with student learning)

On the whole, we are poised to move into the steps which fulfill the process of assessment:

- Use these data to make curricular or pedagogical changes
- Test the effectiveness of the changes
- Confirm student learning

Strengths:

For faculty who progressed through Title III faculty development, there is substantial buy-in and ownership of assessment;

The majority of our 49 established programs have a solid assessment plan;

Many of our programs have collected meaningful, actionable data;

One of the greatest benefits of assessment—productive conversation about teaching and learning—is evidenced in assessment work;

Many programs have thoughtfully and collaboratively analyzed data and implemented meaningful changes;

Our institutional ratio of direct to indirect measures is 78% to 22%. For individual programs, the focus should be on direct assessment. Indirect assessment should be supplemental.

Greatest Growth Areas:

1) Using assessment to improve learning: programs that are implementing a solid plan and have taken action to improve learning will test the effectiveness of the changes and reach a conclusion about student learning.

2) Developing a manageable and sustainable assessment plan: programs that have a cumbersome plan that is not possible to sustain (or launch) will work to streamline the process. Meaningful assessment can occur with as few as two direct measures for each learning outcome.

Ten Ways to Achieve Assessment-Induced Baldness:

1. Use a course grade as a criterion.
2. Use a grade on an exam or paper as a criterion.
3. Have just one or two faculty members do assessment for the program.
4. Mistake classroom assessment for program assessment.
5. Use overloaded or poorly defined program-level learning outcomes.
6. Work with poorly aligned learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment methods.
7. Think one size fits all.
8. Try to do too much.
9. Wait for perfection.
10. Collect lots of data as an end point; data is the beginning of assessment.

III. Strengthening Program-level Assessment

Shared Goal for Program-Level Assessment for 2008-2009: to “close the loop” on assessment.

Follow up on changes in curriculum or pedagogy:

- What are the results of the action taken?
- What do these results reveal?
- Were the changes effective in improving learning?
- What actions will you take as you move forward?

Question 1: Given our overarching goal—to assess, improve, and confirm student learning—what are reasonable but rigorous goals for the Sept. 2009 and Sept. 2010 reports?

| | Sept. 2008 | Sept. 2009 | Sept. 2010 |
|---|------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| 1) Establish a plan: outcomes aligned with teaching strategies and methods | 100% (49) | | |
| 2) Collect actionable data and draw conclusions through analysis | 92% (45) | | |
| 3) Take action to improve student learning | 73% (36) | | |
| 4) Test the effectiveness of actions, either confirming learning or taking further action | 18% (9) | <i>Probable: 49% (24)</i> | |

Question 2: How do we bring new programs on board?

Proposed Expectations:

All new programs should establish an assessment plan along with program design.

End of Year 1: 100% implement plan, improving the plan and the process through implementation.

End of Year 2: 90% draw conclusions about data on student learning, articulating action to improve learning as appropriate.

End of Year 3: 90% use meaningful assessment to confirm and/or improve student learning.

Naomi Stennes-Spidahl

Interim Director of Assessment, March 2009