The Basics: Program-Level Assessment of Student Learning

Assessing Student Learning

- What does the faculty want students to
  - know? (knowledge)
  - do? (skills)
  - care about? (attitude)
- How will faculty know when the goals are reached?
- What evidence already exists? What is needed?
- How can faculty use the evidence to improve what is done?

Common Misconceptions

- *Individual professors or students are evaluated.*
  - No, individuals remain anonymous; goal is *program* assessment.
- *Grades are adequate assessments.*
  - Grades alone do not reveal what or how much is being learned in the program.
- *Assessment is done once (for program review or for accreditation).*
  - Assessment functions best as a cycle of planning, assessing, communicating, and improving.

Typical Assessment Cycle

1. Agree on program's mission.
2. Articulate goals that derive from mission.
3. Describe "learning outcomes" that mark progress toward each goal.
4. Identify instructional activities related to each learning outcome.
5. Describe possible ways to measure student learning.
6. Develop an assessment plan or sequence (prioritize goals, choose method, set time line, etc.).
7. Implement assessment.
8. Communicate results.
9. Use results to set new goals; improve program offerings, teaching, learning; and improve assessment process.
10. Begin cycle of assessment-driven improvement again.

Suggestions

At the Beginning

- Find out what faculty already does & what faculty expects of students.
- Help colleagues understand that the goal is to improve student learning.

In the Middle

- Identify learning outcomes that can be measured.
- Choose at least one method that evaluates student learning (i.e., not a survey or self-report).
- Start small (pilot projects; select 1-2 outcomes).
- Design a plan that will highlight areas for improvement.
- Make sure faculty & students understand both the desired learning outcomes and the standards or criteria for success.

At the End of a Cycle

- Effectively communicate results to stakeholders.
- Treat results as "tentative answers."
- Reflect.
- Discuss & form plan to use the results:
  - Enhance what already produces desired results.
  - Change what is taught or how students are taught.
  - Improve assessment process/cycle.
- Plan next cycle.

On-Line Resources

- Program-Based Review & Assessment (step-by-step guide)
  http://www.umass.edu/oapa/top_assessr.html

- List of links - Higher Education Assessment Resources
  http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm