Strategies to Overcome the Barriers in Assessment of Student Learning and Development

Marilee Bresciani, Ph.D.
Professor, Postsecondary Education and Co-Director of the Center for Educational Leadership, Innovation, and Policy
San Diego State University
Marilee.Bresciani@mail.sdsu.edu
Presentation Overview

- Summary of challenges that assessment presents
- Examples of common assessment challenges
- Suggested methods to address those challenges
- Resources
- Discussion and questions
Examples from the field

- What are the greatest barriers you have faced in implementing assessment?
- What are some examples of concerns about assessment you have heard from colleagues?
Common Challenges

Are there any similarities between our groups?
This Presentation...

- will not focus on the challenges “external” to the systematic structure and delivery of higher education.

- will address the challenges within our “locus of control”.

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Common Challenges Assessment Presents

- Understanding what it is
- Not knowing how to do it
- Finding Time to engage
- Not prioritizing values/goals
- Finding time to document
- Getting support from top leadership
- Not using results to inform decision-making
- People who prefer anecdotal decision-making
- Academic Freedom
- Academic Autonomy

Source: Ewell, P. (2005); Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004); Bresciani, 2006
Common Challenges Assessment Presents, Cont.

- Lack of organizational incentives
- Lack of communication about what has been learned
- Difficulty with requesting data
- Difficulty with finding data
- Difficulty in identifying how to use data
- Difficulty interpreting data
- Fear of change, of unknown
- Concern over faculty contracts – a.k.a. – unions
- Confusion

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Source: Ewell, P. (2005); Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004); Bresciani, 2006
Common Challenges Assessment Presents, Cont.

- Avoiding being labeled as “one of them”
- Avoiding burnout
- Lack of truly authentic instruments and evidence-gathering techniques
- Challenge of benchmarking against external standards
- Concern over student motivation and involvement
- Challenge of managing the assessment process

In addition, see Table 1
Tips to Identifying Resistors
From Bresciani, 2006

- Treat every “excuse” to not engaging in assessment as if you heard it for the first time.
- Remember that what is being said is not always the reason for the resistance.
- Probe with empathetic questions and genuine offers of assistance to identify what the real barrier is.
- Work with the “resistor” to identify the solution.
Suggestions
from Bresciani, 2006

- Get your leadership on board
  - Explain why assessment is not a fad
  - Explain that doing it well does require resources
  - Fine balance between “top-down” expectations and “bottom-up” engagement
  - Fine balance between structure and flexibility
Suggestions, Cont.

- Know your university’s culture
- Define assessment
- Articulate a shared conceptual framework and common language for assessment
- Articulate and implement expectations
- Identify short and long range goals for the process
- Disseminate information on the process – keep the process transparent
Suggestions, Cont.

- Genuinely interact with faculty/staff and utilize feedback to improve the process
- Design and implement a professional development plan
  - Tie to theory, delivery, evaluation methods, identifying data, interpreting data, use of data, report writing, etc.
  - Include how to reflect and how to collaborate
- Provide incentives for initial engagement
- Consider engagement in process – not generation of results – as a performance criteria and position description expectation
Suggestions, Cont.

- Re-allocate time from doing to reflection of doing
- Involve students, where appropriate ad accepted by your institutional culture
- Protect junior faculty, if appropriate
- Identify assessment successes
- Celebrate good practices in quality assessment
Suggestions, Cont.

- Start small and grow
- Start with early adopters and then ask them to be the spokespersons
- Start with pilot projects and grow them if successful
- Remind people why they are engaging in assessment – not a process for process’ sake
- Embrace the ambiguity
- Remain flexible, but systematic
Suggestions, Cont.

- Remember that Faculty / Administrators must have ownership of the process
- Respect varying disciplines’ academic freedom
- Recruit influential faculty / administrators to lead the process
  - Stagger or turn over appointments to avoid burnout
- Offer one-to-one or group consultations / sessions as needed and requested
- Take time to get to know and cater to specific needs
Suggestions, Cont.

- Share examples with each other
- Advertise your assessment learnings and decisions made
- Nudge and Retreat (Maki, 2001)
- Incorporate students in all facets of assessment planning and implementation, if your program is ready
- Answer the question, “What happens if I don’t engage in assessment?”
Suggestions, Cont.

- Discuss challenges, derive solutions, and document
  - Establishing acceptable levels of performance and why
  - Prioritizing
  - Concerns about trust and use of data
Resources

- Each Other
- University Planning and Analysis (UPA) Assessment website
  - http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/
Questions and Discussion

Marilee.Bresicani@mail.sdsu.edu
One Minute Evaluation

- What is the most valuable lesson that you learned from this session?
- What is one question that you still have?
- What is one thing you will implement on your campus as a result of this presentation?
References


Bresciani, M.J.