Abstract

Program assessment has been a topic of significance in higher education over the last decade. Initially, program assessment was implemented in response to concerns over the quality of college graduates' education and increasing competiveness in the job market for American college graduates. Recently, higher education institutions have been encouraged to engage in assessment which can generate data that is comparable between institutions; resulting in assessment models which are predominantly quantitative. While quantitative data aids in cross-institution comparison, which remains important, alone it lacks the specificity that is needed to understand nuanced experiences of students, faculty, and administration. In this article, the assessment model that has been developed and implemented at one small-sized private institution is described. Focus is given to the qualitative elements of the multiple-method model. An evaluation of the model, post-implementation, is included in order to provide detail to facilitate potential application at other institutions.

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Case Study: One Institution's Application of a Multiple Methods Assessment Framework

*I*nstitutional assessment has become a topic of cumulative importance, and even great debate, amongst higher education professionals, and within higher education institutions, over the last two decades (Halpern, 2013). Both regional and secondary accreditation organizations have imposed rigorous assessment requirements and higher education institutions have become accustomed to environments that are characterized by assessment and oversight. Regional accrediting organizations provide guidelines and expectations for accreditation; however, the design and implementation of assessment procedures are at the discretion of the higher education institution (e.g., Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 2013). Thus, higher education institutions must develop a formal assessment methodology that meets accountability standards of accrediting organizations. Yet, a lack of consensus and specificity regarding the ways in which assessment ought to be conducted within an institution remains. Though quantitative assessment methods have historically been preferred within higher education, a shift in the field of higher education has emerged as educational researchers have come to realize that important information and questions cannot necessarily be gathered or answered by a single methodology (Commander & Ward, 2009; Van Note Chism & Banta, 2007). Furthermore, Howard and Borland (2001) noted that institutional assessment is actually a form of qualitative research since institutional research is context-focused and unique to the specific university. Considering this information, qualitative research methodologies and frameworks are important elements that must be included within institutional research. This does not exclude or nullify the importance of quantitative measures and methods; rather this information highlights the importance of integrating both qualitative and quantitative inquiry into institutional assessment (Howard & Borland, 2001). Therefore, integrating qualitative methods and frameworks into institutional assessment practices increases access to important data.

A Brief History of Higher Education Assessment

Traditionally, accountability in higher education meant that institutions used financial resources effectively and appropriately (Ewell & Jones, 2006; Liu, 2011). However, at the turn of the century, a shift in the concept of higher education accountability began to emerge. The new form of accountability mandated institutions provide evidence that they were producing a qualified workforce through assessing learning and performance outcomes (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Ewell & Jones, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The purpose of these learning and performance outcomes was to measure students' mastery of knowledge and skills, and they have become important and contentious topics within the field of higher education (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Furman, 2013; Halpern, 2013). This change in accountability appears to be in response to several factors (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). As the quality of higher education in other countries began to surpass the United States, it became apparent that the United States' higher education system was falling behind. In addition, employers began to criticize higher education institutions for failing to produce a qualified workforce with basic writing, problem-solving, critical thinking, and leadership skills (Liu, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Thus, the demand for qualified graduates and effective educational programs has resulted in an emphasis in higher education on learning and performance outcomes. As a result, discussion in the literature about creating universal, or at least, comparable across institutions, outcome assessment processes has emerged (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Hanson & Mohn, 2011; Liu, 2011). In addition, ideas about how to measure student learning and report these outcomes have been debated (Furman, 2013; Germaine, Barton, & Bustillos, 2013).

Outcomes Assessment

Institutional comparison. The recommendation that institutions measure their performance outcomes in such a way as to be easily comparable to other institutions does not account for the various roles and unique missions of different institutions within the higher education landscape (Ewell, 2013; Ewell & Jones, 2006; Liu, 2011). Liu (2011) questioned if it is meaningful or helpful to compare performance outcomes of premier research universities with liberal arts baccalaureate colleges. Instead, Liu suggested that a more helpful comparison would be among similar-type institutions. Furthermore, performance and learning outcomes can be useful tools in assessing an institution's effectiveness in fulfilling their distinct role and purpose (Ewell & Jones, 2006; Germaine et al., 2013). Thus, performance and learning outcomes are beneficial for evaluating an institution's ability to fulfill its mission in comparison with similar-type institutions.

Methods for measuring outcomes. Measuring certain outcomes and unique roles of higher education institutions can be difficult; some outcomes (e.g., leadership, self-awareness, critical thinking, mission fulfillment, etc.) are not easily or efficiently measured quantitatively (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Furman, 2013; Germaine et al., 2013). Though these outcomes are important goals of higher education, quantitative measures for these outcomes typically involve lengthy self-reported surveys (Furman, 2013). Furthermore, the desire for an institutional-comparable assessment process encourages the development of a simplistic, broad quantitative approach that can be applicable to multiple types of institutions (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007). However, the demand for detailed information about program effectiveness, student learning, and fulfillment of unique roles on difficult to measure outcomes is more attainable through the use of qualitative methods (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Harper & Kuh, 2007; Van Note Chism & Banta, 2007). Thus, there is a paradox within the literature on how to assess outcomes: quantitatively and institutionally comparable or qualitatively with an emphasis on the institutions' role and purpose.

Outcomes assessment process. Despite the increasing emphasis on learning and performance outcomes, there is very little information or recommendations for developing a formal assessment process (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007). However, a close connection between the formal assessment process, especially the evaluation of learning outcomes, and the institution's overall mission and purpose is recommended (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Germaine et al., 2013; Halpern, 2013). Considering this literature, we believe that it is essential to include qualitative methods within institutional assessment. Specifically,

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qualitative methods are useful for evaluating in-depth, specific outcomes for less quantifiable educational goals and allow institutions to evaluate their effectiveness in fulfilling their unique role and mission.

In recent years, there has been an increase in literature published about the possible uses of qualitative methods in institutional assessment (e.g., Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Fifolt, 2013; Harper & Kuh, 2007; Museus, 2007; den Outer, Handley, & Price, 2013; Van Note Chism & Banta, 2007), however, very little has been published on the applied use of qualitative methods in a formal assessment process. Furthermore, there are few publications on higher education institutions' formal assessment processes. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to expand the literature on (a) institutional assessment processes by presenting one university's assessment procedures, and (b) the applied use of a qualitative framework for institutional research.

Methodology

Institutional Profile

The recommendation that institutions measure their performance outcomes in such a way as to be easily comparable to other institutions does not account for the various roles and unique missions of different institutions within the higher education landscape.

The university is a private, regionally-accredited, Christian co-educational liberal arts institution founded in 1934. The university maintains campuses in multiple states and numerous extension sites; in addition, the offering of online courses, degrees, and programs has rapidly expanded for traditional, adult, and graduate students. The university employs five senior administrators, 69 full-time faculty members, and a pool of 311 adjunct faculty members to award associate, baccalaureate, master, and doctoral degrees.

The total fall 2013 enrollment was approximately 1,740 students. On-campus residence is encouraged for traditional undergraduates and 674 of the 958 undergraduate students live in on-campus residence halls and student apartments. Students participate in a wide range of co-curricular activities, including student government, residence life, campus ministries, student organizations, intramural athletics, and intercollegiate athletics for men and women.

Applied Framework/Instrument Design

In response to revisions and new requirements in the regional accreditation process, the university's Accreditation Committee, composed of a mix of administrators, faculty, and staff, created an institution-wide assessment process. The purpose of the assessment process was to be sufficiently broad so as to effectively function at both the institutional and departmental level: (a) to measure institutional mission-fulfillment and, (b) to facilitate departmental accountability and improvement. In addition, the process was to be sufficiently flexible so as to encompass both quantitative and qualitative departmental assessment.

Assessment matrix. Central to the assessment process was the Assessment Matrix (Appendix A). In order to assess both the overall mission fulfillment and the work of individual departments, an Assessment Matrix was established that was applicable to all areas of the institution, from academic departments and student development to administrative support offices and facilities maintenance. Along with outcomes, indicators, findings, and an analysis of findings, the matrix delineated a standard for success and required that a success score is assigned to every outcome. Through the use of this Assessment Matrix, the university was able to gain a summative evaluation of departmental success and institutional mission fulfillment.

Assessing mission fulfillment. In accordance with the new regional accreditor requirements, the mission of the university was detailed in four core themes (community, spirituality, academics, and engagement). The university defined institutional mission fulfillment in relation to the success of core theme outcome achievement measured using the Assessment Matrix for each core theme.

These core themes were specifically created to be sufficiently broad in order to be applicable to all university functions. Therefore, in the completion of a departmental Assessment Matrix, the department director selected the most appropriate core theme that is addressed by each departmental outcome. For example, while an academic major outcome might be assigned the academic core theme, the security office might perceive their outcome that encompasses their work toward student safety as addressing the community theme.

The matrices from all areas of the university were then compiled by core theme and core theme outcome to facilitate institution-wide assessment of mission-fulfillment through core theme achievement. Specifically, the university defined institutional mission fulfillment as an overall average success score on the core themes of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale. Thus, every department on campus contributed to institutional mission fulfillment through the achievement of their departmental outcomes and associated core themes.

Assessing departmental accountability and improvement. In addition to measuring mission-fulfillment, the Assessment Matrix provided a structured process for facilitating accountability and improvement. Every department on campus engaged in ongoing systemic assessment through the use of the Assessment Matrix. The staff department assessment matrices assessed performance-based outcomes, measuring the primary departmental responsibilities, tasks, and functions. In contrast, the academic department assessment matrices were primarily learning-based outcomes, measuring the primary student learning goals within a major. All outcomes were framed in terms of a customer, who may be a student, parent, donor, alumnus, or faculty and/or staff in another department. The utilization of both qualitative and quantitative means of outcome (and indicator) assessment were encouraged in order to most appropriately, effectively, and comprehensively measure and interpret the data in terms of departmental performance and/or student learning. This assessment occurred throughout the year, with staff following the Assessment Strategy Cycle (Appendix B) and academic departments following the Academic Assessment Cycle (Appendix C).

Assessment cycle. Although variation between the staff and academic cycles existed, a similar timeline was followed by all departments. Prior to the commencement of the traditional academic year, the outcomes, indicators, data source, time period, and standards for success were established and core themes assigned. The collection of data occurred throughout the year. Upon the completion of the academic year, the data were analyzed for findings and based on the results, a success score assigned. Finally, based on this analysis, subsequent program changes were planned (e.g., added or deleted outcomes and/or indicators, adjusted standard for success, implemented program changes for next assessment cycle, etc.). Upon completion of the Assessment Matrix, the finalized document was sent to the respective vice president and the Office of the Provost. The cycle then began again for the subsequent year with a matrix that reflected the changes made.

Initially, as part of departmental planning, the vice president of the appropriate division reviewed and provided feedback on the department outcomes, indicators, and standard for success. Upon completion of the assessment cycle the vice president of the appropriate division reviewed and evaluated the subsequent findings. This involvement fostered shared expectations and increased communication between the vice president and department directors. The faculty, specifically the program directors and the deans, evaluated the academic programs each year and implemented changes for improvement, including curriculum changes. This assessment was based on student achievement as documented through the student's completion of the learning outcomes for each course, major, and degree as indicated by the instructors and program directors.

Thus, the findings of the assessment matrices were then used to determine what, if any, changes were needed in the departmental outcomes, indicators, and/or success scores in order to most accurately assess the work of the staff department or the learning of the students within a major. This process ensured that assessment is reviewed at all levels of the institution, with the Assessment Matrix findings included in divisional reports to the Board of Directors, yet empowered the staff and faculty to lead the changes necessary for departmental improvement.

Procedures

By utilizing the process described above, the university established a system of assessment that highlighted both worthy achievement and areas necessitating improvement. In addition, this model encouraged investment in and growth toward increased mission fulfillment. The flexibility of this process to include both qualitative and quantitative assessment was a distinctive strength of this applied assessment approach. In particular, the ability of both staff and academic departments to utilize qualitative assessment methods

Thus, there is a paradox within the literature on how to assess outcomes: quantitatively and institutionally comparable or qualitatively with an emphasis on the institutions' role and purpose.

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to measure their outcomes and indicators provided a more nuanced understanding of the individual experience and better protected and communicated the voices of those involved in the outcome. In addition, the establishment of standards for success rubrics by department directors was qualitative in nature, based on their analysis of observations, interviews, and past experience. For example, for student advising outcomes within the X major, the department chair created the standard for success rubric based on individual student interviews, class focus group feedback, and past experience in supporting struggling students. Thus, this process intentionally provided space for the diversity of stories and experiences of the students and customers served by the various departments.

Standards for success. The Standard for Success Rubrics undergird the Assessment Matrix as this stage includes both the definition and measurement of departmental success. The development of the Standard for Success Rubrics was intentionally qualitative, as the detailed information about program effectiveness and student learning on difficult to measure outcomes was most effectively obtained through the use of qualitative methods (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007; Harper & Kuh, 2007; Van Note Chism & Banta, 2007).

The Success Score Rubric was described as follows:

4 = significantly exceeded the Standard for Success

In the Success Score Rubric, a 4 signifies that the department or program has fully reached its goals in this area. This score indicates that no improvement or change is necessitated and maintaining current practice will ensure the ongoing success of the department and its contribution to the continued health and wellbeing of the University.

3 = met the Standard for Success

In the Success Score Rubric, a 3 signifies that room for minor improvement remains and/or is possible for the specific departmental goal, but that at the present time, this item has been sufficiently fulfilled for the ongoing success of the department and its contribution to the continued health and wellbeing of the University. No urgent improvement is necessary, although vigilance remains important.

2 = partially met the Standard for Success

In the Success Score Rubric, a 2 signifies that attention to the specific area is necessitated in order to maintain the ongoing success of the department and its contribution to the continued health and wellbeing of the University. This specific area needs to be considered a priority for improvement that should be addressed within the next few months.

1 = did not meet the Standard for Success

In the Success Score Rubric, a 1 signifies that attention to this area is necessitated immediately in order to maintain the ongoing success of the department and its contribution to the continued health and wellbeing of the University. This specific area must be considered a high priority and addressed immediately.

X = outcome not addressed; need to revise the outcome or select a different indicator.

In the Success Score Rubric, an X signifies that the outcome was unable to be measured due to a problem with the indicator or data source. A change needs to be made in order to assess this outcome.

Through the use of the standards for success on the Assessment Matrix, the university was able to gain a summative evaluation of department and institutional success. This model was an effective system to assess both departmental performance and mission fulfillment because the subjective nature of the Standard for Success Rubric ensured the space for the primary purpose to be achieved: the measurement of change over time.

Analysis. The standards for success were established by the department directors, who were most knowledgeable in that area and, therefore, most able to apply best practices and accepted professional standards to the assessment of their outcomes. However, they were also most aware of the minority opinion and the outlier experience. In addition, the standards for

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success were reviewed by the appropriate dean, supervisor, director, or vice president who was also in a strong position to ascertain whether reasonable standards for success were established. This step in the process facilitated conversation in regard to departmental expectations and served as an opportunity to reconsider the departmental priorities, in addition to the customer needs and preferences.

Thus, standards for success were established and then measured by the directors in order to measure improvement in their department over time, and to that end, this system was effective. Subsequently, if, over time, a standard for success proved to be set too high or too low, it could be adjusted in the same way that outcomes or indicators could be changed.

Most significantly, this system of assessment was successful in measuring mission fulfillment because the core themes were a direct application and representation of the mission statement. The core theme measurement ensured that the entirety of the institution was represented in the assessment process. In addition, the core themes were designed to be formative, as they encouraged the institution to devote human and financial resources to those advances most closely tied to the fulfillment of the mission.

Implementation. In response to changes in the regional accreditation process and requirements, the university created an institution-wide assessment process that was initially adopted in the fall of 2010 and has been refined through application over the past few years. Assessment workshops, in which assessment theory and practice was reviewed, particularly related to the categories of the departmental Assessment Matrix, were conducted annually, in addition to individual training sessions with department directors. Regular reminders as to progression through the assessment timeline were communicated, based on the staff Assessment Strategy Cycle (Appendix B) and the academic department Academic Assessment Cycle (Appendix C). This assessment framework has received commendations from the regional accreditor and recently undergirded a successfully comprehensive evaluation report.

Findings

As a result of the last few years of utilizing this assessment process, changes have occurred at the departmental, divisional, and institutional levels. At the institutional level, the findings from the core themes measurements have resulted in a shift in resources in order to address areas of weakness, emphasis and training has occurred in areas that gaps were identified, and areas of strength have been communicated in order to celebrate positive achievements. The findings from both the core themes measurements and the departmental assessment matrices have influenced changes at the divisional level. In some divisions, vice presidents integrated the assessment process into the performance evaluation process. In others, the assessment process became a tool to facilitate a discussion about departmental time usage, workload, and priorities. The public nature of the core themes assessments increased the inter-departmental awareness of responsibilities and functions, but also resulted in some difficult conversations as unmet goals were published with the assessment documents. Finally, at the departmental level the process has proven effective in refining the expectations of and priorities for staff department performance and academic student learning. In addition, the strong work performed by most departments was obvious and documented through the Assessment Matrix; this evidence was used to celebrate the daily work of many faculty and staff.

Culture of Assessment

Although assessment is standard within academia, the idea of an assessment process was unfamiliar to most staff directors. Extensive individual training sessions were necessary in order to support the creation of sufficiently broad outcomes, measureable indicators, and achievable standards for success. Even among the academic departments, regular communication and graduated deadlines were necessary in order to ensure that the deans were working with program directors and department chairs throughout the year in a systemic and constructive process. A culture of assessment has not yet been created, but most directors now appreciate the findings from their matrices and no longer view the Assessment Matrix as an additional and unrelated task.

The public nature of the core themes assessments increased the inter-departmental awareness of responsibilities and functions, but also resulted in some difficult conversations as unmet goals were published with the assessment documents.

However, the model proved successful, as over the past few years the directors have realized that the standards for success are not intended to be consistent across departments, but rather department specific in measuring change over time.

Perhaps because of the unfamiliarity many directors had with assessment or perhaps simply a symptom that the assessment model is effective, nearly 25% of the original outcomes have been modified or deleted, replaced by higher priority department functions and/or customer service needs and/or preferences. In addition, many of the indicators have been adjusted in order to allow for more accurate, more effective, and/or more contextualized measures of success. Finally, the standards for success on the assessment matrices were also frequently modified, as surprisingly, most directors initially established unrealistically high standards for their measurement (in contrast to establishing a less challenging standard for success that could be easily achieved and thus guaranteeing a high score on that outcome). One academic dean, reflecting upon the assessment process and model, noted that "the continual use, and review, of the assessment matrix has resulted in our college really thinking through our program outcomes and determining what is important. In many instances, program outcomes have been changed, or eliminated, as a result of authentically using the process."

Qualitative Framework

The focus group setting has allowed faculty and staff to further elucidate important data (especially from student narratives gathered in the assessment process) that could have otherwise been considered vague or unusable.

The interpretive approach of the assessment process, in particular the Success Standard Rubric which was inherently qualitative in nature, but also allowed for both qualitative and quantitative departmental outcome assessment, was necessary in order to achieve the dual intentions of the university (assessment of department accountability and improvement, as well as mission-fulfillment) and to provide a framework to capture the nuanced and varied experiences of stakeholders. However, the very space that allowed this process to successfully fulfill the diverse objectives also created frustration for some staff and faculty. Some staff questioned the reliability and/or validity of the scores, expressing discomfort with establishing their own thresholds for assessment. However, the model proved successful, as over the past few years the directors have realized that the standards for success are not intended to be consistent across departments, but rather department specific in measuring change over time. For example, in one college within the university all faculty and staff meet together in a focus group setting to discuss and respond to the scores derived from the assessment process and the corresponding data, including narratives from which the scores were obtained. This process of providing a venue for faculty and staff to discuss scores with one another (and the change in those scores over time), has proven invaluable in the assessment process. Specifically, the focus group setting has allowed faculty and staff to further elucidate important data (especially from student narratives gathered in the assessment process) that could have otherwise been considered vague or unusable. This model does not quantitatively allow for comparison between departments or institutions, but rather qualitatively assesses improvement at the departmental and institutional levels over time.

Thus, this applied qualitative framework has proven successful at both the departmental and institutional level. The university concluded with a success score of 3.04 on a 4.0 scale for the core theme achievement, with scores ranging from a low of 2.71 and a high of 3.4. These findings represented an accurate portrayal of the strengths and weaknesses of the university and demonstrated a reasonable level and extent of mission fulfillment according to the regional accreditors. Further, the university has found that the use of this scale over time has had both a motivational and corrective effect on institutional priorities and budgetary allocations.

Discussion

The described assessment model was designed to provide a mission-centric focus to assessment and to assess all aspects of work across the institution. In addition, it was important to create an assessment model that moved away from periodic reporting and to a model characterized by ongoing and integrated assessment throughout the academic year (Ewell & Jones, 2006). A review of our experience in developing and implementing a new approach to institutional assessment was useful in our work to continually refine the process. In addition, potentially significant applications also exist for other institutions, especially those that are mission focused and open to fundamentally re-thinking their approach to assessment.

While quantitative assessment models can be useful for developing metrics which can be compared between institutions, these models are insufficient for assessing mission fulfillment and departmental efforts within an institution. Furthermore, given the importance of linking student learning to institutional mission and culture, assessment approaches must

be developed in ways that are consistent with the institutional mission (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007). We found that mission-centric assessment was both fundamental and essentially practical in our assessment model. For example, our institution is self-defined as a private mission-driven institution. Our educational pedagogy, programs, and student learning outcomes are directly linked to the institutional mission. With this in mind, it was necessary to develop an approach to assessment that helped us to understand the ways in which we were accomplishing our mission and the degree to which we were experiencing success in doing so. In addition, a mission-centric approach to assessment was also found to be very practical. Specifically, by centering on our mission, focus was given to the process. Faculty, staff, administrators, and students were able to better understand both the purpose and goals of institutional assessment: to assess how well we do what we say we do. Furthermore, using our mixed qualitative and quantitative framework, we were able to learn about the specific ways in which constituents experienced mission fulfillment. We found that mission-centric assessment was easily understood by those in academic departments, however, it was found to be more elusive in non-academic departments. This highlighted our need to continue to build a culture of mission-driven work throughout the institution. Understanding mission fulfillment, not just in academic programs but across campus, is an essential step in identity formation within mission-driven institutions. Mission-centric approaches to assessment become iterative in this process; guiding the institution in assessment of mission fulfillment, and then, in turn, developing an improved sense of institutional identity across campus.

Although our previous approach to assessment focused solely on the evaluation of academic programs, it was important to develop a new model that involved campus-wide participation (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007). The expansion of assessment across campus, while important, was also met with some resistance and confusion. As noted, the linkage between academic programs and institutional mission was self-evident. However, non-academic departments, for example accounting or maintenance, were unsure of how to assess their work within the frame of our institutional mission. This experience highlighted the bifurcation that oftentimes occurs within higher education institutions. However, unfortunately, this bifurcation has potential negative consequences for stakeholders at all levels. Additionally, the qualitative framework and opportunity for qualitative indicator assessment was essential in elucidating stakeholders' varied experiences. For example, students may experience receiving one message from within their academic program or from a faculty advisor and another message from student accounts or housing – as if the values or principles guiding the work of the respective departments are divergent. Engaging in a campus-wide approach to mission-centric assessment highlighted this bifurcation and the importance of institutions working toward creating a consistent and collaborative educational experience.

While quantitative assessment models can be useful for developing metrics which can be compared between institutions, these models are insufficient for assessing mission fulfillment and departmental efforts within an institution.

In addition to developing an approach to assessment that was both mission-centric, and campus-wide, we also purposed to develop a method that was ongoing, integrated and iterative (Ewell & Jones, 2006). According to Bresciani (2006), although assessment is typically conducted, often the intended results and/or outcomes are not articulated in advance, the changes or decisions based on the data and findings are not documented, and the subsequent changes are not re-assessed in order to measure whether or not the intended improvements were achieved. Similarly, Hanson and Mohn (2011) noted that little attention has been given in the literature, to making meaning of collected data and Ewell (2011) highlighted the importance of setting expected levels of performance. Our approach to assessment, particularly the Assessment Matrix, has aided our institution in engaging in ongoing, and definable, assessment, as well as a process of data evaluation that is essentially practical and linked to the change process. Regardless of the specific method employed, the inclusion of qualitative analysis is essential to ensuring meaningful interpretation and documentation of the collected data.

Limitations

Although the interpretive nature of this assessment model has proven both successful and necessary in order to assess the diverse functions of the university, the qualitative approach limits the ability for inter-departmental comparison. In addition, the mission-centric framework also limits the ability for comparison with other institutions. Ultimately, this method only measures the department and university improvement over time, benchmarking only with ourselves, rather than external indicators.

Finally, as discussed previously, a culture of assessment does not yet exist, particularly among the staff, at the university. Thus, an ongoing challenge is how to integrate the assessment process in a manner that is practical and attainable without adding significant additional work. Comprehensive and robust assessment is time consuming, especially within a subjective and interpretive model; establishing the importance of this process and the results continues to be a challenge for the university.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this method only measures the department and university improvement over time, benchmarking only with ourselves, rather than external indicators.

Qualitative assessment frameworks are both advantageous and necessary in today's higher education environments. In response to mandates from both regional and secondary accreditation bodies, higher education institutions must embrace cultures of assessment. Engaging in assessment practices that allow for meaningful comparisons between institutions, for example, between similar degree programs, can be useful in developing and maintaining standards or benchmarks for professional fields of practice. However, in doing so, higher education institutions must not lose sight of data that are essentially practical and contextualized within the respective institution. Specifically, qualitative assessment frameworks must be utilized in order to obtain institutional data that are both contextualized to the institutional environment and mission and representative of diverse constituents. Qualitative assessment frameworks move beyond the numbers and further elucidate the experience of the stakeholders; the voice of diverse students, staff, faculty, and administrators are heard. In this process, meaningful data are not only obtained, but a culture of assessment, where participation is valued, is created. In this article, the multiple-method assessment model utilized by one small-sized private mission-driven institution is outlined. The assessment model, while not solely qualitative in nature, is designed to (a) involve stakeholders, at all levels, in the annual assessment process, and develop a culture of institutional assessment; (b) develop assessment practices that are essentially practical and meaningful for respective departments, resulting in a cycle of ongoing assessment and change implementation; and (c) engage in assessment practices that model the values and mission of the institution.

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Appendix A

Assessment Matrix

Division/Department:

Program:

OUTCOME	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	TIME PERIOD	STANDARD FOR SUCCESS	FINDINGS	ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	SUCCESS SCORE	RESULTING PROGRAM CHANGES	CORE THEME ADDRESSED

Assessment Key:

OUTCOME: The department or program outcomes

INDICATOR: What will be measured that directly or indirectly indicates mastery of the outcome?

DATA SOURCE: What student action or product is being evaluated?

TIME PERIOD: When will the data source information be collected?

STANDARD FOR SUCCESS: What level of accomplishment will be considered satisfactory for meeting the outcome goal?

FINDINGS: What level of accomplishment was observed?

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS: What is the conclusion regarding meeting the outcome?

SUCCESS SCORE:

X = outcome not addressed; need to revise the outcome or select different indicator.
1 = did not meet Standard for Success
2 = partially met the Standard for Success
3 = met the Standard for Success
4 = significantly exceeded the Standard for Success

RESULTING PROGRAM CHANGES: What changes in the program will be made to improve the success score?

CORE THEME ADDRESSED: What Institutional Core Theme is related to this outcome?

Core Theme One: Building a caring community and enduring culture

Core Theme Two: Developing Christian commitment and Spirit–formed lives

Core Theme Three: Advancing academic engagement through teaching, learning and scholarly production

Core Theme Four: Empowering people with the vision and tools to meet human need in their personal and professional lives

Assessment Matrix: Department (Staff) Example

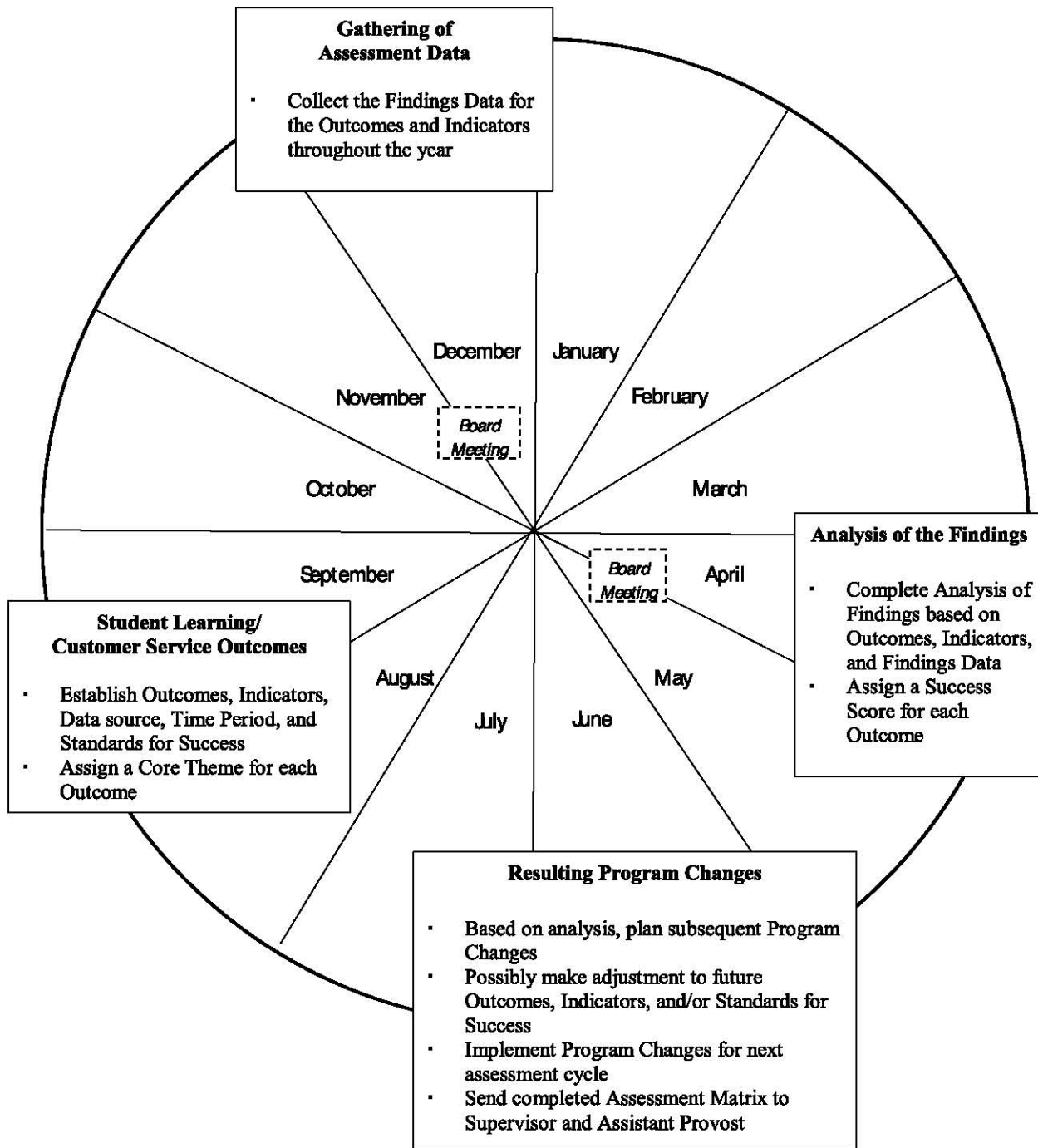| OUTCOME	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	TIME PERIOD	STANDARD FOR SUCCESS	FINDINGS	ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	SUCCESS SCORE	RESULTING PROGRAM CHANGES	CORE THEME ADDRESSED
Students are prepared for success when entering the LEAP or Ministry Head Start programs.	Orientation	Attendance at orientation	Beginning of Program	4 – 80% of new students attend 3 – 75% 2 – 70% 1 – 65%	April 2012 Orientation: 86% attendance (37/43 eligible students)	Importance of attendance at Orientation was communicated to students by Enrollment, OEE staff, and advisors.	4	None	1
Students know who their advisor is and understand their academic plan to graduate.	Advising appointments and academic plan	Advising schedule and transfer reports	Beginning of each semester	4 – 80% of students meet with advisor prior to the semester to review their academic plan 3 – 75% 2 – 70% 1 – 65%	April 2012 semester start: 135 of 175 students (77%) were advised at least one month prior to the beginning of semester.	Students were contacted by office staff and advisors and encouraged to complete the advising process in advance.	3	Ongoing conversation about the best dates to open registration and for facilitating advising appointments.	1
Students currently enrolled are satisfied with their educational experience.	Responses on annual survey	Adult Student Priorities Survey question: "Rate your overall satisfaction with your experience here thus far."	Spring semester	4 – 80% of students indicate satisfied or higher 3 – 75% 2 – 70% 1 – 65%	Spring 2012 survey result: 5.69 mean for all LEAP students.	Average response was between somewhat satisfied and satisfied.	2	Standard needs to be rewritten to accurately reflect result provided from survey.	1
Students complete the LEAP program with a feeling that they have made a worthwhile investment.	Responses on exit survey	Exit survey question: "Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment"	Completion of program	4 – 80% of graduates mark satisfied or higher 3 – 75% 2 – 70% 1 – 65%	April 2012 Exit Surveys: 65%	Psychology: 6 of 11 Ministry Leadership: 6 of 10 Business Management: 12 of 16	1	Standard for success needs to be rewritten for a more realistic approach.	4
New adjunct instructors are effectively trained before teaching in OEE programs.	Orientation for faculty	Meeting schedule with faculty	Meeting with faculty 3 months prior to their first course	4 – 80% of faculty meet with OEE staff 3 months prior to first course 3 – 75% 2 – 70% 1 – 65%	4 of 5 new professors starting between January 1 and April 30 completed the OEE orientation process.	The one instructor who did not complete an orientation is a residential faculty member. Follow up was conducted during and after the course.	4	OEE personnel are considering how best to continue orientation with faculty through their first course to ensure the best experience.	3
Current OEE faculty have the opportunity for professional development.	Development workshops and online development courses	Attendance at workshops and use of online courses	Minimum of 1 workshop scheduled for each semester	4 – 20 or more faculty in attendance 3 – 15 2 – 12 1 – 10	Two spring workshops were conducted with attendance of 30 and 15.	Attendance declined for the second workshop but positive feedback was received.	3	A comprehensive schedule for workshops and topics for the 2012-13 academic year will be developed in summer 2012.	3
Curriculum and delivery models consistently evaluated for possible improvement.	Responses on course evaluations	Course evaluations	Conclusion of each class	4 – 80% of course evaluations score 4.0 or higher 3 – 75% 2 – 70% 1 – 65%	Course evaluations processed from January 1 through April 30: 45 of 48 classes (94%) rated 4.0 or higher	For the most part, positive feedback received from students regarding curriculum and delivery models.	4	Standard for success may need to be adjusted to a higher expectation.	3

Assessment Matrix: Program (Academic) Example

OUTCOME	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	TIME PERIOD	STANDARD FOR SUCCESS	FINDINGS	ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	SUCCESS SCORE	RESULTING PROGRAM CHANGES	NU CORE THEME
Traditional Undergraduate – Bachelors of Arts in Psychology									
Demonstrate competency in academic content areas that meet prerequisites for graduate work in behavioral and social sciences;	Student performance on ETS Major Field Test in Psychology.	Psyc 4403 Advanced Topics in Psychology – ETS Major Field Test in Psychology	Data is reported by the Advanced Topics professor to the undergrad psychology chair at the end of Spring semester.	The mean score of NU undergrad psychology students is above the 50th percentile thereby demonstrating competency in academic content areas of behavioral and social sciences. • 1 ≤ 40% • 2= 41%-49% • 3 = 50%-55% • 4 ≥ 56%	Due to an unforeseen circumstance the ETS Major Fields Test was not administered to students.	Suggestion: CSBS develops its own Capstone Exam to administer to student.	X	CSBS undergraduate faculty will develop an NU psychology exam to administer in the 2014-2015 academic year. Rationale: By developing our own test, CSBS faculty will be better able to determine which content areas students are the strongest and weakest in. However, for the 2013-2014 academic year, faculty will continue to use the ETS Major Field Test.	3
Demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate their understanding of psychological issues in both oral and written formats including mastery of APA style	Student performance on 4 key elements of oral communication on a Class Presentation Assignment	Psyc 4203 Cognitive Psychology – Class Presentation Assignment	Data is reported by the Cognitive Psychology professor to the undergrad psychology chair at the end of Fall semester.	50% of students demonstrate an ability to effectively communicate orally by achieving 80% (B-) or higher on the 4 key elements of oral communication. • 1 ≤ 39% • 2= 40%-49% • 3 = 50%-55% • 4 ≥ 56%	97% of students scored 80% or higher on the four key elements of oral communication.	Only one students did not score 80% percent or higher on key element "Quality of Presentation"	4	Resulting Change: All standards will be revised by faculty for 2013-2014. The goal of the revision is to standardize the outcome standards within each program.	3
Demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate their understanding of psychological issues in both oral and **written formats including mastery of APA style;**	Student performance on 6 key sections of the Final Research Paper.	Psyc 3023 Research Methods II – Final Research Paper	Data is reported by the Research Methods II professor to the undergrad psychology chair at the end of the Spring semester.	50% of students demonstrate an ability to communicate in writing with a mastery of APA style by achieving 80% (B-) or higher on the 6 key sections of the Final Research Paper. • 1 ≤ 39% • 2= 40%-49% • 3 = 50%-55% • 4 ≥ 56%	95% of students demonstrated an ability to communicate in written format including mastery of APA style.	Nothing noted	4	Resulting Change: All standards will be revised by faculty for 2013-2014. The goal of the revision is to standardize the outcome standards within each program.	3

Assessment Matrix: Program (Academic) Example

OUTCOME	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	TIME PERIOD	STANDARD FOR SUCCESS	FINDINGS	ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	SUCCESS SCORE	RESULTING PROGRAM CHANGES	NU CORE THEME
Traditional Undergraduate – Bachelors of Arts in Psychology									
Think critically concerning issues relating to psychology, culture, and social injustice within the context of a globalized world;	Student ability to think critically concerning issues of psychology, culture, and social injustice as demonstrated in 3 sections of a reflective writing assignment	Psyc 4973 International Field Study – Student Journals	Data is reported by the International Field Study professor to the undergrad psychology chair at the end of the Spring Semester.	80% of students demonstrate an ability to think critically in areas of psychology, culture, and social injustice by achieving an 80% or higher on the 3 sections of a reflective writing assignment. • 1 ≤ 69% • 2 = 70-79% • 3 = 80-89% • 4 ≥ 90%	77% of students demonst-rated an ability to think critically in areas of psychology culture, and social injustice by achieving an 80% or higher on a reflective writing assignment	Several submitted the assignment late and, therefore, lost points; this affected their overall grade on the assignment.	2	Resulting Change: All standards will be revised by faculty for 2013-2014. The goal of the revision is to standardize the outcome standards within each program.	3
Examine Christian faith integration and psychology.	Student integration of psychology and Christian faith as demonstrated on a paper about a fictional meeting of Sigmund Freud and CS Lewis.	Psyc 4403 Advanced Topics in Psychology	Data is reported by the Advanced Topics in Psychology professor to the undergrad psychology chair at the end of the semester.	80% of students successfully integrate psychology and Christian faith by achieving 80% or higher on a paper about a meeting between Freud and Lewis. • 1 ≤ 69% • 2 = 70-79% • 3 = 80-89% • 4 ≥ 90%	100% of students successfully integrated psychology and Christian faith.	Nothing noted	4	Resulting Change: All standards will be revised by faculty for 2013-2014. The goal of the revision is to standardize the outcome standards within each program.	2

Appendix B

Assessment Strategy Cycle

Gathering of Assessment Data

- Collect the Findings Data for the Outcomes and Indicators throughout the year

December January

November February

Board Meeting

October March

September April

Board Meeting

August May

July June

Analysis of the Findings

- Complete Analysis of Findings based on Outcomes, Indicators, and Findings Data
- Assign a Success Score for each Outcome

Student Learning/ Customer Service Outcomes

- Establish Outcomes, Indicators, Data source, Time Period, and Standards for Success
- Assign a Core Theme for each Outcome

Resulting Program Changes

- Based on analysis, plan subsequent Program Changes
- Possibly make adjustment to future Outcomes, Indicators, and/or Standards for Success
- Implement Program Changes for next assessment cycle
- Send completed Assessment Matrix to Supervisor and Assistant Provost

Appendix C

Academic Assessment Cycle

Gathering of Assessment Data

- Collect the Findings Data for the Outcomes and Indicators throughout the year

Fall: Semester of Decisions

Academic Catalog prepared for printing

Spring: Semester of Assessment

Curriculum changes are considered by Academic Affairs Committee and Faculty Council

December

January

Annual Deans Assessment Report to Provost

November

Board Meeting

February

October

March

Deans suggest revisions to individual program curriculum

September

Board Meeting

April

Analysis of the Findings

- Complete Analysis of Findings based on Outcomes, Indicators, and Findings Data
- Assign a Success Score for each Outcome

Student Learning/ Customer Service Outcomes

- Establish Outcomes, Indicators, Data source, Time Period, and Standards for Success
- Assign a Core Theme for each Outcome

August

July

June

May

Resulting Program Changes

- Based on analysis, plan subsequent Program Changes
- Possibly make adjustment to future Outcomes, Indicators, and/or Standards for Success
- Implement Program Changes for next assessment cycle
- Send completed Assessment Matrix to Supervisor and Assistant Provost