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Creating a Faculty-Centric Approach as a Catalyst to Improve Teaching and Learning

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Abstract: We created a faculty-centric model to serve as a catalyst for faculty engagement that resulted in improved teaching and learning. We aligned the goals and objectives to improve teaching with faculty-centric guiding principles, creating policies and practices that are in the best interest of the faculty. Simple but effective philosophical guiding principles were defined and implemented to openly support and defend faculty. We facilitated dialog among faculty, leveraged technology, and opened new opportunities for faculty scholarship, resulting in documented improvement in student learning. We witnessed innovation in pedagogy become pervasive across the university. This strategy sparked meaningful improvements in teaching and learning. The model is so effective that accreditors noted that a culture of assessment was created "at mach speed."

"We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them."
— Albert Einstein

Background

As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, higher education is tasked with making agile pivots in scope and scale in order to prepare our graduates to meet unprecedented challenges. However, the very mechanisms, processes, and policies that protected academic institutions for centuries from the whims of monarchs, despots, and dictators also hinder their ability to change quickly. Accrediting bodies struggle to adapt and adopt policies to validate the educational effectiveness of an institution to make sure they conform with modern notions of student success. The intent of assessing educational effectiveness is to ensure that institutions develop a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Unfortunately, many assessment efforts did not produce the intended effects (Eubanks et. al., 2018; Jankowski et. al., 2018). Faculty across the country complain that the bureaucratic nature of mandatory and compliance-based assessment is not resulting in improved student learning.

In response to the mandate from the accrediting body to institute assessment of student learning, the Office of Assessment at Samuel Merritt University (SMU) developed a framework to guide assessment. The framework went well beyond the narrow definition of assessment and created a structure that nurtured a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning. This framework was embraced by the faculty. The accreditors' site visit summary reported that the University created a culture of assessment "at mach speed." A faculty-centric approach was key to success.

Faculty-Centric Assessment Framework

The purpose of assessment is to improve student learning. The role of the Office of Assessment is to provide a philosophical framework and set of guidelines and structures that drive improvement in curriculum, pedagogy, services, and assessment of student learning (Banta et. al., 2016; Rami, 2012). Key to achieving this goal is to facilitate practices that support faculty in becoming the best version of themselves.

The end shouldn't simply justify the means. The means should instead promote the end. All assessment activities should promote improvement in teaching and learning. An effective assessment framework is faculty-centric: all policies, tools, and rewards directly benefit faculty. Each step of assessment (gather, analyze, improve, re-assess) purposefully serves as a catalyst for continuous improvement. All processes serve to inspire faculty and facilitate critical thinking and dialog. The result is documentable improvements and a rich narrative demonstrating excellence in teaching and learning. Assessment should not be an isolated activity that is added on to the teaching load. Assessment is an integral part of the practice of teaching, and results are documented with an authentic, meaningful narrative, based on evidence-based practice.

A faculty-centric approach supports and promotes the student-centered mission of the university by supporting faculty in continually improving their teaching practice. It prioritizes the needs and goals of faculty so they can develop and improve in their role at the front line of student learning. If the core mission of higher education is to serve students, the faculty must have time, space, support, resources, and training to continuously improve and develop.

Improvement in learning begins with support for improving teaching (Banta et. al., 2016). Faculty and student services staff maintain a student-centered focus. Academic administrators and the faculty organizations must maintain focus on supporting faculty and facilitating practices and policies that promote and incentivize their development, as well as work to eliminate barriers to innovation.

In a plenary address at the 2018 Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education conference, Erik Gilbert (Gilbert, 2018) stated that too much effort is spent on assessment activities rather than on the desired result—improvement in teaching and learning. Faculty-centric assessment plans focus on the results of teaching and learning, rather than on dictating and monitoring assessment activities. Assessment is woven into the fabric of teaching and becomes inspirational. All assessment processes, tools, and reports are focused on improvement, not merely complying with assessment reporting.

Strategic Planning as a Call to Action

A strategic plan can become an integral part of a narrative. John Hagel describes the difference between story and narrative:

> "In short, stories for me have two characteristics: they're self-contained (they have a beginning, a middle and an ending)...In contrast, narratives for me are open-ended, there is no resolution yet, but there is some significant opportunity or threat on the horizon that is yet to be achieved and it's not clear whether it will be achieved. The resolution of the narrative hinges on you: it is a call to action to those you are addressing, telling them that their choices and actions will play a material role in helping to resolve the narrative." (Hagel, 2017)

A strategic plan can be a call to action, a compelling narrative, that provides faculty greater opportunity for significant shifts in culture and innovation. The narrative as a call to action for assessment is embodied by the motto *Non satis scire*, "To know is not enough." Assessment data should inspire tangible and documentable change and improvement. The assessment narrative can be designed to spark an innate desire for faculty to improve their craft. The narrative of the strategic plan for assessment can help faculty fulfill their potential. The data collected and the assessment framework should help faculty become who they want to be. This idea was articulated by Giorgia Lupi in her TED talk (Lupi, 2017)

> "...to make data faithfully representative of our human nature and to make sure they will not mislead us anymore, we need to start designing ways to include empathy, imperfection, and human qualities in how we collect, process, analyze, and display them. I do see a place where, ultimately, instead of using data only to become more efficient, we will all use data to become more humane."

Strategic plans can either help organizations achieve their goals or be considered a time-consuming bureaucratic process. At SMU, the strategic planning process for assessment was influenced by the work of technology visionary Douglas Engelbart. Engelbart focused on augmenting human capabilities by leveraging collective intelligence through technology, creating integrated repositories that connect silos and promote communication and transparency, enabling people to assess the current state in order to imagine and pioneer the future state (Landau, Clegg, & Engelbart, 2010). The methodology was the foundation that led to a visual and non-linear approach to assessment, based on a holistic rather than siloed approach. It engaged faculty by providing them with a different viewpoint for engaging with their courses, their pedagogy, and their role in the educational structure at the program and university levels. The framework for assessment is about self-improvement and collective improvement, not a race for compliance.

Philosophical Framework

The Office of Assessment created a strategic plan to implement the faculty-centric framework. First, they defined a goal and objectives designed to create a faculty-centric model of assessment of educational effectiveness:

Faculty-centric Goal

Create a continuous cycle of improvement to promote excellence in teaching and learning.

Objectives

1. Inspire and support scholarship and innovation.
2. Nurture the recognition and rewarding of teaching excellence.
3. Foster learning communities.
4. Provide faculty development opportunities.

Second, a set of guiding principles outlining the philosophical tenets were articulated:

Philosophical Guiding Principles

1. Support and defend faculty.
2. Assume every teacher wants to be a great teacher; therefore, improving teaching and learning is in their interest.
3. Ensure all policies and initiatives are in the interest of the faculty and directly benefit them.
4. Make assessment meaningful and flexible.
5. Create institution-wide goals, and honor individual approaches.
6. Remove barriers, annoyances, and bureaucracy.
7. Leverage technology to add value and eliminate tedium.

The third step was to define the actions that would achieve the desired objectives. An analysis of the organizational infrastructure led to the definition of four types of implementation actions:

Implementation Actions

1. Policy/Process
2. Services
3. Technology
4. Incentives

The final step was to define a set of actions to achieve the desired goals. Each action was aligned with both the objectives and the philosophical guiding principles. That became the map for our actions. (See Appendix A: Assessment Department Strategic Plan).

A faculty-centric model focuses on supporting and defending faculty by following guiding principles. In this model, all policies, tools, and services directly benefit faculty. No assessment policies are put in place that require faculty to engage in work unless it is in their best interest. Each step of assessment (gather, display, analyze, share, improve) purposefully serves as a catalyst for continuous improvement and directly benefits faculty. The result includes documented improvements and a rich narrative demonstrating continual improvement in teaching and learning. This foundation was operationalized in a unique strategic planning process.

Assessment of student learning is transformed from compliance-based number-driven reports into a meaningful narrative documenting how faculty engaged in reflectively improving the learning experience.

Faculty-Centric Strategic Plan

At SMU, the strategic planning for assessment of student learning is aligned with the goal, objectives and the philosophical guiding principles. The articulation of a faculty-centric approach led to widespread adoption of authentic assessment practices.

The faculty-centric assessment strategic plan was created by first defining a simple goal and objectives that focus on cultural change. Objective and guiding principles were assigned a color or symbol as shown in the Assessment Department Strategic Plan in Appendix A.

Tools and Initiatives

Technology has served as a catalyst for change. History shows us that with the advent of an effective tool, culture changes rapidly. SMU designed and developed several tools and initiatives that sent a clear message to faculty that aligning and assessing learning outcomes was focused on improving their teaching and learning.

All the tools and initiatives were developed collaboratively by the Department of Academic and Instructional Innovation and the Office of Assessment between 2010-2019. The development process was agile and based on the

philosophical guiding principles of faculty-centric support for teaching and learning.

Timeline

2009
- Defined and align learning outcomes at the course, program, and institution levels per the regional accreditation recommendation to build a culture of assessment.
- Licensed commercial assessment management tool TK20.

2010
- Instituted faculty-centric assessment framework.
- Designed and developed Excel-based Curricular Mapping Initiative (CMI) tool. All academic departments created and analyzed curricular maps that aligned learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels and linked to authentic evidence of student learning. Received commendations from the regional accreditor.

2011
- Office of Assessment of Student Learning created.
- CMI developed as a web-based app.
- Ended licensing of TK-20.

2012
- CMI revised to align professional standards with learning outcomes and add music and animation to demonstrate alignment.

2013
- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning integrated into assessment through an action learning template for faculty to assess student learning at the assignment level.
- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Symposium created for faculty to share action research posters.
- Faculty Organization incorporated the action research projects as a component of rank and promotion.

2014
- Action research template improved.
- Online archive of action research posters created.
- Second Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Symposium.

2015
- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning action research project integrated into annual Faculty Research Symposium led by the Faculty Development Committee.

2016
    - CMI interface improved.
- Assignment Designer Toolkit designed and piloted.
- Faculty-centric philosophical guiding principles improved.
- Action research poster template improved.

2017
- SyllaBot created after Curriculum Committee identified a problem with disparities between current policies and syllabi submitted for new courses. Several academic programs required SyllaBot be used by all faculty; other programs make it optional.

2018
- SyllaBot survey and study conducted.
- SyllaBot improved.
- Action research template improved.

Curriculum Mapping Initiative

The Curriculum Mapping Initiative (CMI), developed at SMU, provided a key element in the change strategy. The initiative is a software application based on a faculty-centric approach

to assessment. It enables faculty to view dense data in a meaningful context and to critically view where their courses are situated in the landscape of the curriculum. It sparks the interest of the faculty to examine, discuss, and assess the effectiveness of their curriculum.

CMI was designed and developed in stages, with faculty input at each stage. An outside engineer was contracted to develop and maintain the code from 2010-2018. He was paid on an hourly contract totaling approximately $170,000 over the eight years.

CMI displays the alignment of learning outcomes, evidence of student learning, and professional standards. It facilitates faculty in assessing achievement of learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels. Graphical displays help uncover gaps and overlaps in curriculum and evidence of student learning using shape, color, and sound. Faculty view and analyze curricular maps and evidence at faculty meetings, including faculty development meetings, Faculty Organization meetings, and during annual program-level faculty retreats.

CMI creates a portfolio for each academic program and for the institution. It displays the entire curriculum as a whole, with easy access to detailed information about each learning outcome. The broad and detailed maps engage faculty to think deeply about their own teaching practice within the context of the program and the institution. It is easy to use and provides engaging ways to assess, document, and share how students are demonstrating the learning outcomes.

Faculty upload and view exemplar assignments, rubrics, and authentic evidence of student learning. They reflect on the quality of the student work and gain insight into how they might improve their teaching practice. The learning outcomes are also integrated into each course in the learning management system (LMS).

Curricular maps are enhanced with data visualization via graphics, animation, and music. These maps provide a shared vision and motivation to analyze program strengths and weaknesses. CMI facilitates the gathering, display, analysis, and sharing of assessment data occurs all in one place (Landau, 2018).

This serves as a catalyst for faculty dialog on:

- Alignment of learning outcomes to professional standards
- Quality of evidence of student learning
- Curricular gaps and overlaps
- Clarity and intention of the learning outcomes

To spark conversations about curriculum, CMI displays the alignment of program learning outcomes (PLOs) to institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) in the Sonification of ILO-PLO Alignment display. Each ILO is represented in a row and is assigned a color and a musical note as shown Figure 1. The tool plays the PLO-ILO matrix as a musical score, a process referred to as “sonification.” Each academic program has its own song. Hearing and seeing the high-level assessment information empowers faculty to begin thinking critically about their curriculum. The music and visuals help faculty engage with the data using different parts of the brain, often leading to new insights.

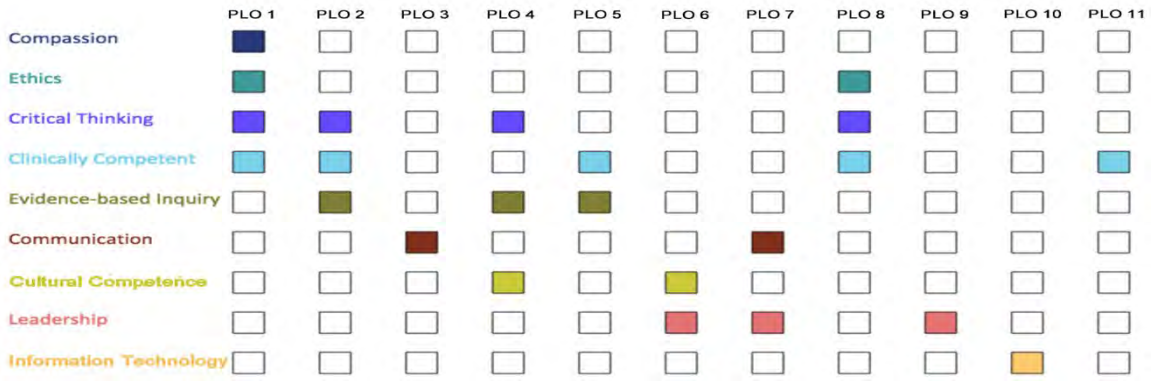


Figure 1. *PLO-ILO alignment matrix with sonification of curricular maps.* [Link to video of CMI playing musical notes with animation]

Faculty testimony reflects that the music and colorful animation made a lasting meaningful impression, provoking a serious reflection on the role of learning outcomes as evidenced by student learning. During a February 2020 faculty meeting, two faculty members commented on the positive impact of using CMI nine years earlier to assess their curriculum.

The Mosaic View shown in Figure 2 provides a dense and rich way to very quickly conduct assessment at the program level. Each ILO is represented by a color and is displayed in a legend at the top of the screen. Each PLO is displayed with a set of boxes representing the ILOs; boxes representing an ILO that the PLO is aligned with is filled in with the color of that ILO. Black dots represent all the CLOs aligned with that PLO. The user can click on any CLO dot to view the full text of the CLO, the full text of the PLO, and any evidence of student learning demonstrating full or partial fulfillment of the CLO. Users can also download any supporting documents, such as the assignment instructions, rubrics, or learning resources. Figure 3 provides a detailed explanation about how to interpret the information in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Mosaic View showing institutional, program, and course learning outcomes. Each ILO is represented by a color and each PLO shows which ILOs are aligned. The black dots are clickable CLOs with evidence of student learning and rubrics.

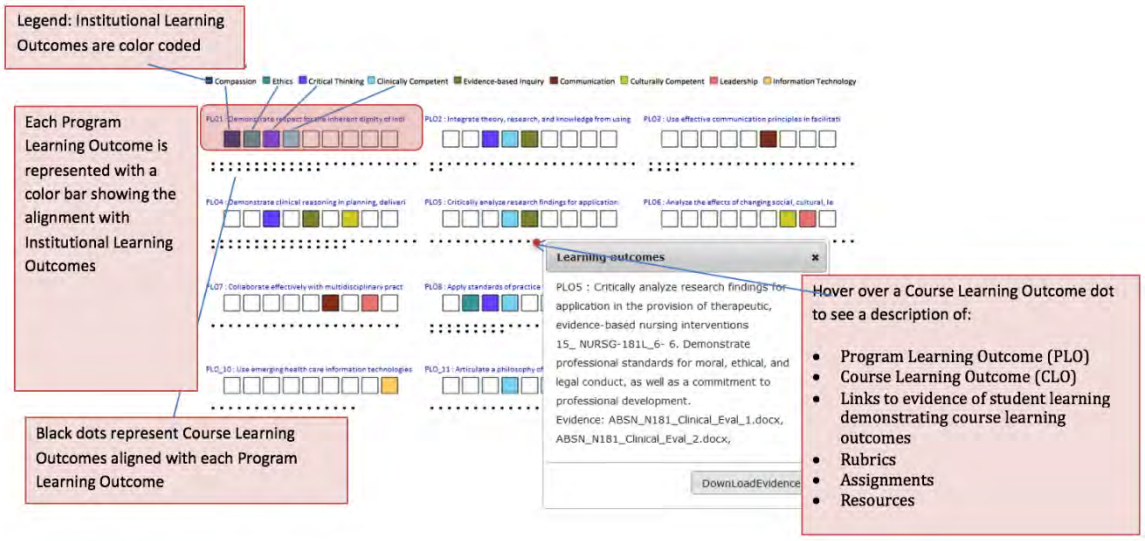


Figure 3. *Explanation of the Mosaic View, showing alignment of institutional, program, and course learning outcomes with evidence of student learning, rubrics, and assignments*

Linking learning outcomes with evidence of student learning honors individual approaches by allowing faculty to decide which evidence demonstrates student learning in their course. Each faculty member can explain or upload and showcase how student work demonstrates competency for each CLO. It provides a transparent assessment tool that enables faculty to evaluate how well student work demonstrates mastery of the CLOs. It also shows how all the CLOs combined fulfill the PLOs. Specialty accreditation displays are also generated to show how each standard is met.

The primary goal of CMI is to generate discussion and analysis rather than to generate reports that do not require critical thinking and dialog. Assessment data displays can support faculty in the process of analyzing and strategizing, and then in developing rich narratives that inspire action to achieve excellence in teaching and learning. By creating views that literally represent a shared vision, this technology has augmented the collective intelligence of academic programs.

The power of CMI is that it serves as a spark to generate conversations about curriculum, evidence of student learning, and achievement of goals. While some quantitative data is derived from the software application, the most significant benefit is that it provides faculty with a shared understanding of their academic program. The data displays help promote the idea that assignments should align with learning outcomes, and they help faculty move toward improving the articulation of their learning outcomes and improving assignments to align with those outcomes.

Results

- All academic programs except one improved learning outcomes and updated many or all of their courses.
- Increase in assessment of authentic evidence of student learning.
- Increase in program-level coordination around assignment content and timing
- Several programs were able to consolidate assignments to improve student learning.
- Alignment of learning outcomes with specialty accreditation standards.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as Assessment

Action research is a powerful tool to drive improvement in practice. In-depth assignment-level assessment is a form of scholarship designed to improve the researcher's own practice. According to Jean McNiff (2002), action research begins with the question, "How do I improve my work?" McNiff identifies steps for action research as:

1. Identify an area of practice to be investigated.
2. Imagine a solution.
3. Implement the solution.
4. Evaluate the solution.
5. Change practice in light of the evaluation.

The Office of Assessment launched an initiative to incentivize faculty to conduct action research as part of the scholarship of teaching and learning. Faculty receive a small grant for experimenting with and assessing new pedagogies or technologies in their class. They present their work at the annual Faculty Research Symposium and in an online archive. This provides multiple incentives for faculty. SMU is not a tier one research university, so while research is one component of rank and promotion, it comprises a small portion of faculty workload. The grant provides a stipend (roughly equivalent to 10 hours of pay) and counts toward their scholarship, both as having received a grant and as having presented a poster at a conference. Faculty are encouraged to collaborate by working in teams to and each participant receives the full stipend.

The action research initiative began in 2013. The majority of approximately 160 full-time faculty members, as well as several adjunct faculty members, completed one or more action research projects as of 2019. The online archive documents 150 completed report posters. Each faculty member can submit up to two action research reports per calendar year. This initiative has led to pervasive and effective use of technology-enhanced pedagogy and improved student success.

One of the keys to the success of the program was making the process easy and rewarding for faculty. (See Appendix B: Action Research Template). Faculty were provided with a poster template with clear criteria for each section, as well as a checklist of the established faculty competencies required for rank and promotion. Faculty select which of the competencies is fulfilled by the completion of the project.

The majority of the action research projects centered on the use of video. This included adding videos to course content, the use of video for online office hours, and video feedback in online courses. Among the many other topics were the effect of simulations on student learning, test preparation methods, student collaboration, student peer review, cultural competence, and mindfulness practices. Faculty testing them unanimously found that using some form of student response system (clickers, mobile device, or paper-based systems) yielded both quantitative and qualitative improvement in student satisfaction and test scores.

Each faculty member presented their poster(s) at an annual symposium. Several faculty members created unique projects inspired by the posters of others. The poster sessions allowed faculty time to meet and talk informally about their teaching practice. This had a deep effect as a catalyst for faculty moving from mostly lecture/test to some form of active learning. It created a culture of assessment as faculty experimented with new pedagogy and tools and assessed results at the assignment and course levels.

Results

- Documentation of improved teaching practice.
- At least six action research projects served as a springboard for peer-reviewed publications.
- Promoted dissemination of innovative teaching practices across disciplines.
- Created a culture of assessment of student learning at the assignment level.

SyllaBot

The SyllaBot app was developed at SMU to support faculty and to improve student learning. It collects the latest information from official university sources and automatically generates an editable draft syllabus in Microsoft Word format. The app imports the course number, title, term, section, description, pre- and co-requisites, course credits from the university's student information system. From the LMS it imports the name of each course module, assignments, assignment groups, assignment weights, and grading scales, as well as the alignment of assignments with course learning outcomes. It imports course and program learning outcomes from the CMI app and uses current university policies provided by the Office of Academic Affairs.

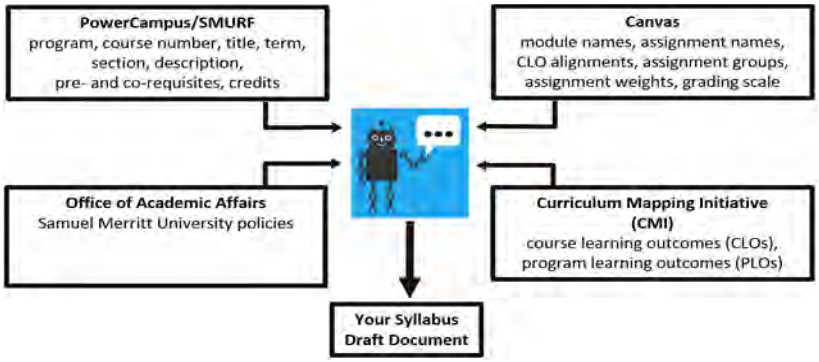


Figure 4. How SyllaBot gathers information from a variety of sources

SyllaBot is intended to save faculty time in the clerical tasks of gathering and formatting information, enabling them to devote more attention to the creative work of course and assignment design. In addition, SyllaBot has dramatically reduced the number of errors in syllabus content and has helped faculty see ways to improve their course design in the LMS.

The SyllaBot project was initiated in 2017 after the Curriculum Committee determined that many syllabi submitted for new or revised courses did not have current policies at the program and university levels or had other incorrect or inconsistent information. A preliminary review of 15 randomly selected existing syllabi across all academic departments, revealed one or more of these issues in each of the 15 syllabi:

- Inconsistent or missing grading scales
- Course descriptions not matching the catalog
- Outdated university policies
- Missing CLOs or not the approved CLOs

The LMS administrator, the Director of Assessment, and a senior instructional designer collaboratively designed and developed SyllaBot within a few months. The SyllaBot app was coded and integrated into the LMS by the LMS administrator. A link to download the draft syllabus from SyllaBot appears on the Syllabus page in all courses in the LMS. A fifteen-minute training session was provided at a Faculty Organization meeting for the initial roll-out. Using SyllaBot was not required by the institution, but some academic programs required faculty to use it. A few academic

programs requested and received training, but most did not.

Several semesters after the implementation of SyllaBot, a faculty survey found that 64% of respondents found SyllaBot useful, particularly in ensuring that policies were up to date. Comments included:

- "Helps provide a standard format for all department courses."
- "While most of my syllabus matched the format and style, it was a relief to know that all the university policies were current, and I could just leave those sections as-is."
- "It gave me direction and order."
- "Consistent template between courses."

The comments of respondents who said they did not use SyllaBot indicated a lack of understanding that SyllaBot generates an editable Word document that faculty need to review and modify. Training on how to use SyllaBot is ongoing, and more faculty have adopted it since the study was conducted.

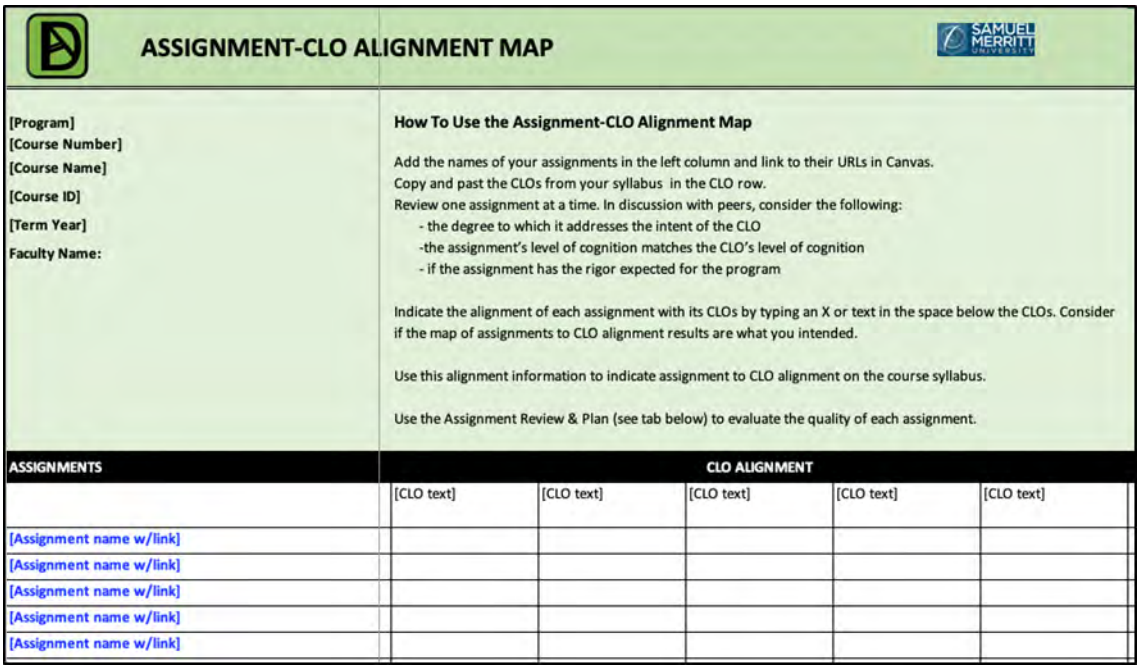
Results

- The majority of faculty surveyed found that SyllaBot saved them time and helped in formatting the syllabus.
- Reduction in errors in syllabi.
- Standardization of syllabi in some academic programs.
- Improvements in course organization in the LMS.
- Helped identify issues such as poorly written university policies, errors in program-level grading scale in the LMS, and inconsistencies between course descriptions in syllabi and the catalog
- Reduction in inconsistencies between information in the syllabus and the LMS.

Assignment Designer Toolkit

The Assignment Designer Toolkit is a resource that assists faculty in improving assignments. Faculty are encouraged to use the toolkit in small groups of peers to discuss assignments and course design. This toolkit includes two sections. The first is a template for creating a visual curricular map showing the alignment of assignments to CLOs (Figure 5). Faculty align each course assignment with CLOs and examine evidence of student learning to see if they are achieving the desired results. Figure 6 shows a segment of a completed template. The second section (Figure 7) provides criteria for assignment review. Faculty critically assess assignment quality and rigor and develop an improvement plan (See Appendix C: Criteria for Assignment Review).

The Assignment Designer Toolkit was piloted in 2016 to small group of pioneering faculty members who were asked for feedback on its effectiveness and how to improve it. One faculty member described the Toolkit in this way: "It's objective and systematic, and it includes important aspects that we should be looking at when assessing an assignment." The roll-out of the tool has been gradual and offered with support from an instructional designer upon request. No formal survey has been conducted at this time.



ASSIGNMENT-CLO ALIGNMENT MAP

[Program]
[Course Number]
[Course Name]
[Course ID]
[Term Year]
Faculty Name:

How To Use the Assignment-CLO Alignment Map

Add the names of your assignments in the left column and link to their URLs in Canvas.
Copy and past the CLOs from your syllabus in the CLO row.
Review one assignment at a time. In discussion with peers, consider the following:
- the degree to which it addresses the intent of the CLO
-the assignment's level of cognition matches the CLO's level of cognition
- if the assignment has the rigor expected for the program

Indicate the alignment of each assignment with its CLOs by typing an X or text in the space below the CLOs. Consider if the map of assignments to CLO alignment results are what you intended.

Use this alignment information to indicate assignment to CLO alignment on the course syllabus.

Use the Assignment Review & Plan (see tab below) to evaluate the quality of each assignment.

ASSIGNMENTS	CLO ALIGNMENT				
	[CLO text]	[CLO text]	[CLO text]	[CLO text]	[CLO text]
[Assignment name w/link]					
[Assignment name w/link]					
[Assignment name w/link]					
[Assignment name w/link]					
[Assignment name w/link]					

Figure 5. Screen shot of Assignment to CLO Alignment Map

ASSIGNMENT-CLO ALIGNMENT MAP

BSN
N108
Nursing Research
2020-1SP-01-NBSN-108-LEC-OAK-01
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How To Use the Assignment-CLO Alignment Map

Add the names of your assignments in the left column and link to their URLs in Canvas.
Copy and past the CLOs from your syllabus in the CLO row.
Review one assignment at a time. In discussion with peers, consider the following:
- the degree to which it addresses the intent of the CLO
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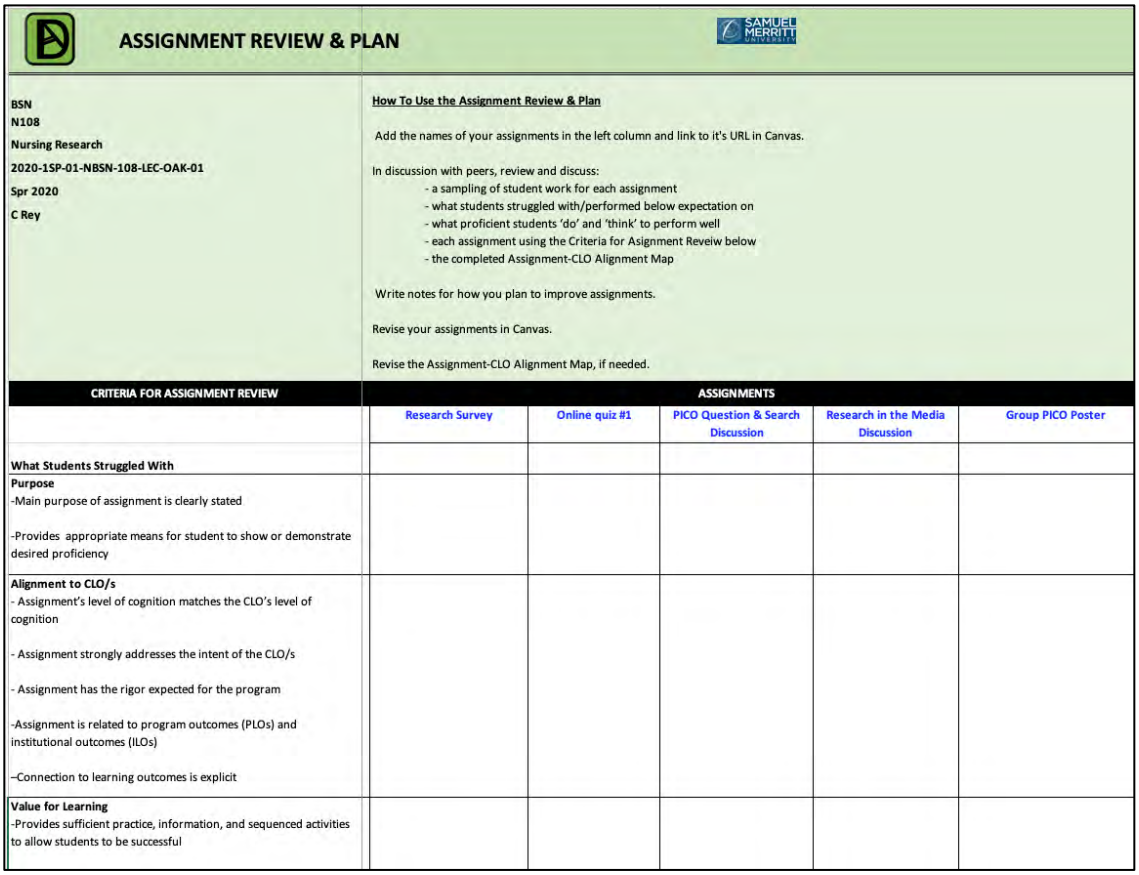
Use this alignment information to indicate assignment to CLO alignment on the course syllabus.

Use the Assignment Review & Plan (see tab below) to evaluate the quality of each assignment.

ASSIGNMENTS	CLO ALIGNMENT				
	N108_01 Integrate theories from nursing research and practice to facilitate patient-centered care.	N108_02 Develop a beginning understanding of nursing research methodology and the research process.	N108_03 Differentiate between quantitative and qualitative research.	Nf108_04 Discuss the utilization of nursing research and other types of evidence for evidence based practice.	N108_05 Utilize critical thinking, clinical judgment, interprofessional perspectives, and patient preferences to plan, implement and evaluate outcomes of care.
Research Survey	X	X		X	X
Online quiz #1	X	X	X	X	
PICO Question & Search Discussion		X		X	X
Research in the Media Discussion		X		X	X
Group PICO Poster	X	X	X	X	X

Figure 6. *Screenshot of Completed Template*



ASSIGNMENT REVIEW & PLAN

BSN
N108
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How To Use the Assignment Review & Plan

Add the names of your assignments in the left column and link to it's URL in Canvas.

In discussion with peers, review and discuss:
- a sampling of student work for each assignment
- what students struggled with/performed below expectation on
- what proficient students 'do' and 'think' to perform well
- each assignment using the Criteria for Asignment Reveiw below
- the completed Assignment-CLO Alignment Map

Write notes for how you plan to improve assignments.

Revise your assignments in Canvas.

Revise the Assignment-CLO Alignment Map, if needed.

CRITERIA FOR ASSIGNMENT REVIEW	ASSIGNMENTS				
	Research Survey	Online quiz #1	PICO Question & Search Discussion	Research in the Media Discussion	Group PICO Poster
What Students Struggled With					
Purpose -Main purpose of assignment is clearly stated -Provides appropriate means for student to show or demonstrate desired proficiency					
Alignment to CLO/s - Assignment's level of cognition matches the CLO's level of cognition - Assignment strongly addresses the intent of the CLO/s - Assignment has the rigor expected for the program -Assignment is related to program outcomes (PLOs) and institutional outcomes (ILOs) –Connection to learning outcomes is explicit					
Value for Learning -Provides sufficient practice, information, and sequenced activities to allow students to be successful					

Figure 7. *Screenshot of Assignment Review and Plan*

Results:

- Faculty reported the toolkit improves their understanding of the value of aligning assignments to CLOs.
- Faculty indicated that the Criteria for the Assignment Review was helpful in critically assessing assignments and capturing improvement plans.

Faculty Development

Faculty development was in some ways the most challenging task. Faculty workshops, mentoring, and events became increasingly difficult to schedule as the institution grew, with a variety of academic calendars and increased faculty workload. Despite this, a series of effective workshops and mentorships for the small number of attendees was conducted. A campaign to educate faculty on how to more effectively design courses in the LMS was carried out beginning in 2016.

Faculty participated in interactive workshops where they outlined plans for improving their teaching strategies. Topics included:

- Creating impactful presentations (Landau & Broz, 2019)
- Techniques to improve student engagement and long-term memory (Landau & Broz, 2017-2019)
- Developing effective rubrics (Landau, 2017)
- Universal design for learning (Landau & Broz, 2019)

Results

- One academic program reduced the number of assignments and improved assignment design by coordinating assignments across courses.
- Documentable improvement in design of the courses in the LMS in at least 25% of courses.
- Faculty presentation quality improved.
- Faculty and staff implemented universal design into their teaching practice, with over 40 documentable practices.

Participation in the Faculty Organization

The Office of Assessment and the Department of Academic and Instructional Innovation collaborated with SMU's Faculty Organization Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Development Committee to support their work and champion the goal of creating a continuous cycle of improvement to promote excellence in teaching and learning. They regularly attended committee meetings and provided support to the Faculty Organization helping with design and administrative tasks, including offering advice and support to improve processes and remove barriers to make their work more efficient and effective.

Results

- Process for submitting new and revised courses for approval to the Curriculum Committee was streamlined and improved by adding clear guidelines and rubrics.
- Support staff are now included in faculty development events.
- Faculty and staff embraced universal design for learning.
- Improved quality of faculty research symposium events, including development of rubrics for peer review.
- Improved quality of faculty scholarship presentations.
- Redesigned and improved the Faculty Organization website.

Conclusion

Using philosophical guiding principles that are staunchly pro-faculty informs our practice and motivates faculty to engage in improving student learning. The result was a robust change in curriculum and pedagogy in almost every academic program. The majority of faculty now incorporate active student learning in their courses and have a demonstrated willingness to experiment with new forms of pedagogy. They regularly conduct meaningful assessment of teaching and learning.

One key factor in this shift has been incentivizing faculty for their scholarship of teaching and learning through action research. Faculty received a small grant to experiment with new forms of pedagogy, gather evidence of student learning, and reflect on the results. The success of this strategy is evidenced by the numerous faculty action research reports presented at faculty research symposiums over the past seven years. The scholarship of teaching and learning is now pervasive at SMU.

Another key factor is providing tools and policies that facilitate faculty work. Actively working to eliminate compliance-based bureaucracy provides credibility and gratitude from faculty that helps create buy-in for a robust assessment framework.

It is now part of the fabric of each academic degree program for faculty to regularly meet to improve curriculum and pedagogy, and best practices for improving teaching and learning are shared openly.

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About the Authors

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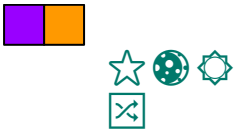
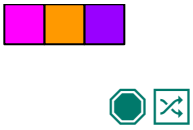
APPENDIX A

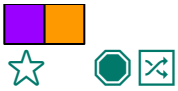
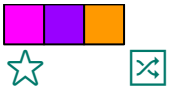
Assessment Department Strategic Plan

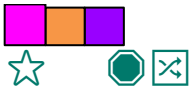
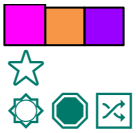
Goal: Create a continuous cycle of improvement to promote excellence in teaching and learning to ensure student success		
Objectives		
Faculty regularly engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning.	Teaching excellence is regularly rewarded and supported.	Experimentation and transformation to enhance student learning is the norm.

Guiding Principles				
☆ Support and defend faculty • Assume every teacher wants to be a great teacher, therefore improving teaching and learning is in their interest. • Ensure all policies and initiatives are in the interest of the faculty and directly benefit them.	Make assessment meaningful and flexible.	Create institution-wide goals and honor individual approaches.	Remove barriers, annoyances, and bureaucracy.	Leverage technology to add value and eliminate tedium.

Actions
Infrastructure categories help organize actions and tactical implementation.

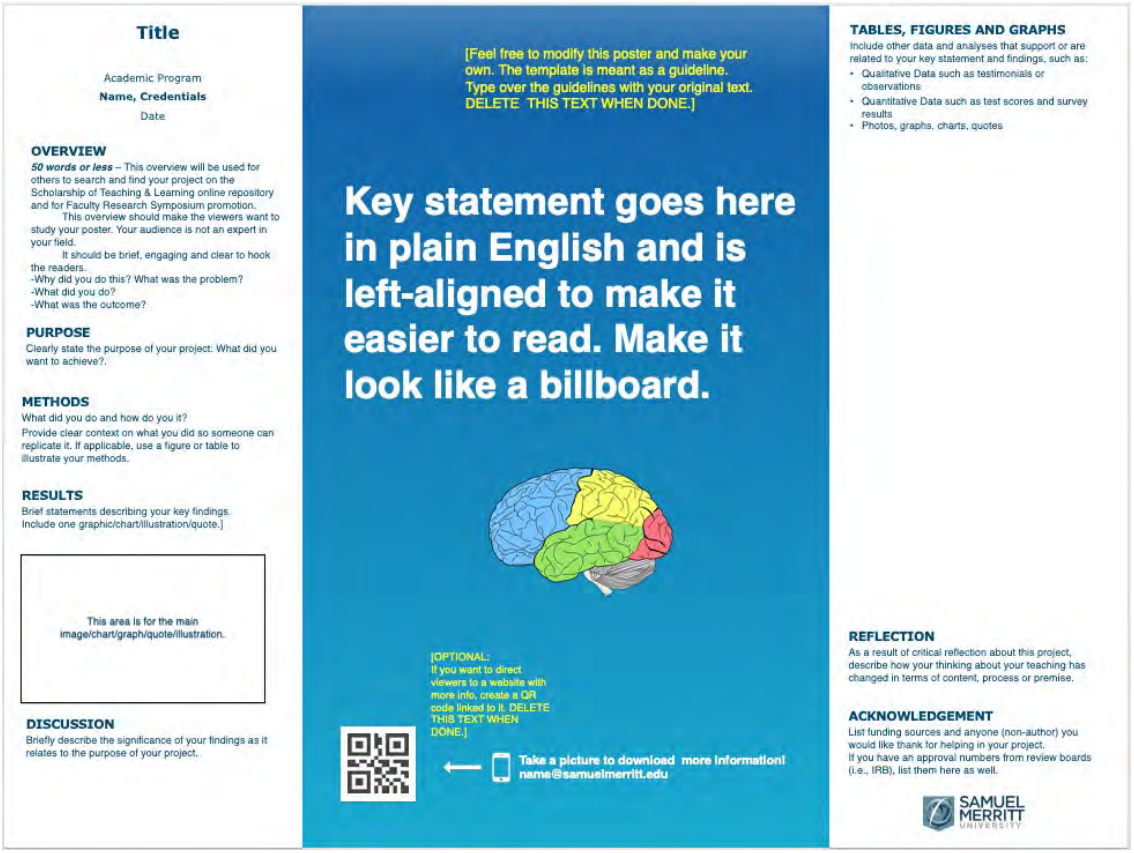
Policy/Process	Services	Technology	Incentives
 Encourage each academic program to assess and improve student learning in a way that is meaningful to them.	 Facilitate academic program meetings to assess and improve curricular maps at the course and program level. Help faculty align assignments to CLOs.	 Use an innovative curricular mapping tool that facilitates insight and aligns learning outcomes with evidence of student learning, assignments, and rubrics and is engaging by incorporating sound, color, and animation.	 Faculty showcase excellence in teaching and learning.
	 Provide training and instructional design support for aligning assignments to learning outcomes and creating more engaged classrooms.		
	 Provide assistance for specialty accreditation.	 Integrate assessment software with LMS (Canvas).	

 Improve process for curricular change in the Curriculum Committee.		 Create the SyllaBot tool that automatically builds a draft syllabus from info from the LMS, the learning outcomes, and policies. Saves faculty time and reduces syllabi errors.	
 Work with Curriculum Committee and Registrar to streamline small curricular changes to save Curriculum Committee time.		 Use SyllaBot as a catalyst for improving course communication.	
 Research Committee changed policies to include “The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” as research.(Boyer’s model).		 Create online repository for reports/posters of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning program.	 Robust Scholarship of Teaching and Learning action research program “Improving Teaching with Technology Grant” to encourage the majority of our faculty to experiment with new pedagogy and tools, and conduct ongoing meaningful assessment of student learning.

 Faculty Development Committee includes Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Faculty Research Symposium.	 Collect, archive, and print the STL posters for the Faculty Research Symposium.	 Create a PowerPoint poster presentation template as the grant report.	 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning counts toward scholarship for the poster presentation and as receiving a grant.
	 Faculty attend workshops to improve teaching and learning.		

Appendix B

Action Research Template



Appendix C

Criteria for Assignment Review

Purpose

- Main purpose of assignment is clearly stated.

- Provides appropriate means for student to show or demonstrate desired proficiency.

Alignment to CLOs

- Assignment's level of cognition matches the CLO's level of cognition.

- Assignment strongly addresses the intent of the CLOs. List CLO.

- Assignment has the rigor expected for the program.

- Assignment is aligned with PLOs and ILOs.

- Connection to learning outcomes is explicit.

Value for Learning
- Provides sufficient practice, information, and sequenced activities to allow students to be successful.

- Assignment scaffolds from previous assignments and courses.

- Prepares students for subsequent related assignments in this course and/or program.

Clarity
- Title indicates assignment topic and is distinct from others.

- Instructions or a document with directions are available on the Canvas assignment page.

- Instructions are in one place (not duplicated in other documents/locations in Canvas or syllabus).

- Dates or points are in assignment settings, not in body of assignment.

- Order for instructions are indicated with bold headings or numbers.

- Instructions are clear and concise.

- Describes required format and length range.

- For online graded discussions, expectations (length/due date) for initial post and replies are clearly defined.

- For group assignments or peer reviewed assignments, collaborative expectations are clearly defined.

- Links to any outside source are included with instructions for accessing it.

- Format (graphic layout) doesn't interfere with the content.

- Model assignment or example is provided.

Engagement
- Value of assignment in the field of study is articulated as it relates to the CLOs.

- Establish value of work to the individual student. Will the student say, "Learning this is of direct benefit/interest to me?" or "This will help me in my practice."?

- Can this assignment be made more interactive?

- Allows for individual approaches by students.

- Is it possible to make the assignment collaborative to create a greater sense of community so the student feels supported and engaged?

- Different learning styles are accommodated for (Hear, See, Do).

- Incorporates elements of Structural Competency in a meaningful way.

Grading Rubric

- Provides feedback to student by describing how proficiency and excellence is measured for each skill or knowledge category.

- Prioritizes the most important elements of the assignment.

- Includes all elements of the assignment.

Assignment Value and Weighting

- Value (points and % of final grade) related to the other course assignments within the assignment group and within the course is appropriate.

- Assignment and its assignment group weighting follows program requirements.