



Faculty Concerns About Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

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Through the years, assessment literature has been filled with information describing the importance of faculty involvement in an institution's assessment efforts. In fact, to some it is considered to be a kind of gold standard (Hutchings, 2010). Faculty, however, are not always willing participants and when faculty are not fully engaged in the process, it is difficult for an institution to have an assessment program that is both meaningful and useful for improving student learning. To involve faculty in assessment processes it is in our best interest to identify potential reasons why engagement might not be occurring.

In an attempt to gain some insight into the attitudes and concerns faculty have about assessment, I surveyed over 500 full-time Illinois community college teaching faculty and asked them to identify their top three concerns about student learning outcomes assessment. What I found in their responses both enlightened and troubled me. Some of their responses validated a common theme in the literature -- that faculty are concerned about the amount of time it takes to effectively conduct assessment activities. Whereas some responses suggested assessment was a "waste of time" or that it "takes time away from the real job of teaching," others recognized that faculty have competing priorities for their time and assessment is but one of them. While comments regarding time constraints represented typical concerns and ones that continue to be challenging for both faculty and administrators when attempting to encourage faculty participation, they did not overly trouble me.

The concerns that did in fact trouble me were those that raised issues related to trust and beliefs that student learning outcomes assessment was conducted solely for compliance. Faculty responses focused on linking performance evaluation directly to student learning and holding faculty professionally responsible for that learning. The word *penalized* appeared in several responses which suggested strong concerns by faculty that punitive action might be taken if assessment results were not deemed by the administration to be satisfactory. Additionally, statements that, "... some assessment is just done to meet the needs of external agencies" demonstrated the perceptions of some faculty that the assessment of student learning outcomes was conducted more as a compliance exercise than as a process for improving student learning.

Acknowledging that the negative tone of some of the comments was likely prompted by the survey question which only asked faculty to identify their concerns, the statements did provide some insight into the perceptions and beliefs of the respondents as it relates to assessment. Having this knowledge can be very useful for administrators who are attempting to enhance faculty engagement in assessment at their institutions. Rather than simply mandating faculty involvement in assessment, administrators may use this information to develop strategies to address faculty concerns prior to their involvement and explore opportunities to recruit faculty as partners in assessment processes.

Viewpoint

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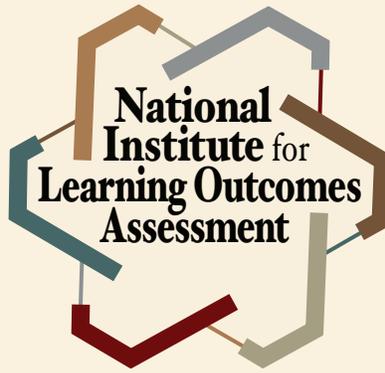
While it is true that faculty participation is critical for an institution's assessment efforts, assessment is not solely the responsibility of the faculty. It should be an institutional priority and administrators should also be knowledgeable about and involved in the assessment of student learning. Faculty engaged in assessment need support from administration and as an administrator myself, I feel we can open the dialogue by educating ourselves about the challenges and concerns faculty have, and provide the resources and support faculty need. We can do that by reading, attending conferences, and participating in professional development activities targeted on assessment. This will allow us to engage in meaningful conversations with our faculty and to provide the level of support they need when faced with challenges. It will also send a unified message throughout the institution that assessment is valued and has meaning for our students and for the college.

Faculty concerns about student learning outcomes assessment have the potential to become a barrier to their engagement in assessment activities and the subsequent use of evidence to improve student learning. By acknowledging the legitimacy of faculty concerns or at least attempting to understand the faculty perspective, administrators can address their concerns and potentially remove barriers to faculty engagement in assessment. After all, "...the real promise of assessment depends on significantly growing and deepening faculty involvement..." and we must support them in their efforts (Hutchings, 2010, p. 6).

Reference

Hutchings, P. (2010, April). *Opening doors to faculty involvement in assessment*. (NILOA Occasional Paper No.4). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.

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