Developing Sustainable Assessment Practices

Efforts to Create Sustainable Assessment Practices

***What have been your biggest successes (either in your area or more broadly at your institution) in developing sustainable assessment practices***

Melanie Jenkins One of the biggest successes has been getting the college of arts and sciences to complete the template for learning outcomes assessment for all the departments And The surprise when I first look at it intimidated because it had six columns of information that needed to be populated but when you take it stepbystep and then having the Deans buying and support and encouragement and you know encouraging the department chairs to get this done and it looks fantastic I mean it still needs to be reviewed and this will be the first year that we started this so will prepare us for continued learning outcomes assessment that has been a huge success and I think that it will encourage the schools to have A better process for collecting in maintaining this information overtime as opposed to just being a one stop one you know one time thing so you know I think thats been The biggest success another success has honestly been just the motivation that faculty have now to even get involved in assessment and evaluation its not just a very stressful these two words they run for the hills when you say assessment program review assessment evaluation its very stressful but I think that a lot of faculty members more than the ones that were when I first began you know even in other locations where I have worked in assessment initially its very scary but it takes just a lot of encouragement from the deans and for the assessment person not to make it seem scary for them to get motivated you know so thats been a success more faculty are in assessment and a valuation than they were at the beginning

***What factors do you think have contributed to sustainability***

Melanie Jenkins Being very clear you know educating the departments about what data is available how you can actually answer the question through numbers through projects through outcomes and just because the outcome is I expect for students is to be able to communicate effectively you know determining what exactly that is and working with them you know just going over well what does this really mean what does communicate effectively really mean is critical analysis different than just analysis you know is it redundant what do you mean and how are you providing this exposure to information so that a student can move from just an analysis to a critical analysis So its been communication and just constant engagement with faculty and constant engagement with the departments and you know for me having an open door so that when they want to evaluate something we can look through the rubrics and you know that maybe philosophy can tweak the oral communication rubric so that it meets their needs thats OK you know theres no one way do things So thats I think communication with the faculty has been a big factor

Elizabeth Gordon So I think being part of the process sort of beginning to end so getting involved in thinking specifically about our general education I was able to be involved in when we were first developing rubrics and were finding rubrics to use to have some kind of common language to be able to evaluate student work and then being able to contribute student data or student work I should say to generate the data and see where our students were following you know to what degree they were completing these objectives and being able to use those data in my own classroom and seeing the connections I guess between the general education work and my own teaching And so kind of the entire involvement seeing that whole process has definitely been very useful

 ***Tell us a story of one assessment work wasnt sustained what factors do you think contributed to this***

Melanie Jenkins In a previous location there was an exam that was used to measure whether or not students required information in various aspects of veterinary school and the exam was used using a statistical technique called item response theory rationanalysis The analyst was working on and then left right So then someone else takes on this project and they are able to you know present the same information but the problem is the faculty involved or that were evaluating the outcome of these exams because it was a Preand a post test couldnt understand exactly what was being presented all together even when the first analyst was doing this and one of the mistakes people make is assume that you need highlevel statistical analysis to get the answers to things Now you can determine that a student has you know that there has been a level of scaffolding from initial to you know final that they learn some information but that could be attributed to just mirror expos her or it could actually be knowledge acquisition Its important for faculty to understand what it is theyre being presented so that they can take that data and move on it and make changes Now what was really happening was the development of an exam and trying to make sure it was standard so no matter what cohort took the exam if they took it in the initial stages because theyre in the beginning they have this outcome if they took it at the end you to have this outcome regardless of the cohort So there was a miscommunication about the purpose of the exam They wanted to see whether or not students were learning and what they really were seeing is how good the exam was that item response there is for that purpose to show that the you know there is a level of movement or that certain questions are difficult or not difficult for everyone or some people or a certain student thats stellar is more likely to get this question correct versus someone who does not achieve as well that is what was really happening and what the information was being used for was to determine whether or not students were learning

Elizabeth Gordon I think as a faculty we really came together to develop learning outcomes that we felt our students should have by the time they graduate and we have two majors in our department so for each major we developed a set of learning outcomes and we talked about how we would make sure that our students achieve those outcomes map to the curriculums so that we saw which courses would be required to make sure that achieve those and then started to collect data and or be able to look at student work and see how they were achieving these outcomes and so that stalled partly because when we have our assessment of certain skills we have more opportunities I guess to be able to catch those skills and in different courses through you know writing for example And but the content knowledge is harder to catch because we have we dont often times we have our upper division courses that get canceled because of low enrollment and so we are not able to capture that content because the students arent being exposed to it so that allowed us to see that we have to modify our curriculum a little bit in a way to make sure that students get there but that also was a difficult thing for faculty because when we say these are the things we expect our students to know and then you know we kind of need the administration to support allowing those courses to run to make sure the students actually get that content

***Are there any connections (or lack of) between assessment activities and other campus processes such as committees strategic planning annual events or retreats that you think have contributed to or hurt sustainability why or why not***

Melanie Jenkins I think there is a significant disconnect that something as simple as the boards participation in meetings being used whether or not that theres all you know theres all types of things that student affairs SUP theres aspects outside just Learning or assessment can be used to determine whether or not we are using resources appropriately space is being utilized sufficiently But I think the bigger disconnect is its just the student areas knowing that they need to evaluate the programming that is effective and improving the student experience thats the biggest disconnect that I have experienced you know if your diversity services office has all of these programs but student still feel that they dont have a place to be represented then how do you know that how do we change that We stay focused on the assessment in the educational realm but theres also assessment in the social and psycho social realm

Elizabeth Gordon So when I think of or about general education assessment that is part of committee work so we have general education committee and because its part of a committee and contributes to service of the campus community that helps to sustain that that work We do also not necessarily a retreat but when we do the assessment work the committee deals with a lot of general education issues but when we do the assessment work we sometimes hold what we call a hootenanny where we have a pizza and we have several faculty you know at least two faculty members assessing each piece of student work and so we kind of bring everyone together and it feels like a collaborative environment when we are doing that assessment and so I think those things have contributed to the sustainability of that assessment work Of course we have to do assessment accreditation and things like that but I dont think thats the reason its sustained on our campus I think The reason is because of the community that weve built for assessment

 ***How have the availability of resources such as staff support funding or software contributed to or hurt sustainability***

Melanie Jenkins I do think there needs to be a person committed maybe at each school to do the evaluation and assessment of the school and thats just like I said The conduit between institutional research or the university assessment person and the schools and make sure that there is that constant contact you know when it comes to evaluating or even assessment for example writing samples there needs to be someone to do it or has time to do that you know there are a small institutional research offices that have loads and loads of work to do and they cannot read 300 samples of writing from various courses and then do the analysis and provide the information back to the school so there needs to be probably a significant amount of support needed when these things are being conducted and technology So something like a scanner Now we all have moved towards something like course evaluations online but you know you also probably need something that can take in information physically paper evaluations So you know those things interfere with The departments for the deans you know being able to evaluate how well a faculty member was rated and of course now these things dont necessarily go in like a learning outcomes assessment but they are part of just the departments a valuation of whether or not its you know functioning in the best way or whether or not it has the appropriate resources or whether it has too many classes or maybe theres too many adjuncts you know If valuation assessment goes way beyond you know just whether or not students are learning even though thats one of the main focuses but its important to have just even the standard technology that can interfere with us getting things done if someone is hand entering something into the system you know that slows things down So I think its important to have you know very useful technology but if its not available that will slow things down

Elizabeth Gordon So I think that funding is something that I have heard that there are a lot of campuses that support assessment work with funding and we dont have that on our campus and I imagine that tying funding to some assessment work may help to get more faculty involved and so I think that has that may have limited the assessment work on campus just being able to provide some funding for that work When there are assessment projects that have funding associated with them so for example Fitchburg State collaborated with mount Wachusett community college to do assessment work across our campuses developing rubrics and looking at stupid work and saw that there was a stipend that was associated with that work and there were a lot more faculty involved at that point and so I think there is a connection between the availability of funding and assessment work on campus

***How is the value of assessment work recognized (or not) on your campus For example are their presentations to the Board of Trustees is the assessment recognized as service or are there professional development opportunities or funds available for assessment***

Melanie Jenkins I think the Provost greatly recognizes assessment and the need for it its an imperative and a requirement as far as she is concerned As far as outside of that you know its a job one faculty participate in assessment a valuation tasks they are not given service hours and you know its kind of an expectation that you want to make sure that you are providing again I mean this is a service to students a stellar education and appropriate and frequent opportunities for learning and demonstration and practical applications So there could be more in that sense and I believe that we probably have more faculty by and if it was considered a service and something that they you know as one of their professional development opportunities you know that they participate in more depth But you know it is respected greatly by the Provost Its respected greatly by the vice provost the Deans have like I said must have their support so here at the institution I think we have that I think that as we move forward and as other things take precedence over the fact that we have accreditation coming up or theres a site visit once those things go into the background keeping them motivated

Elizabeth Gordon So we do have several opportunities on our campus to be involved in assessment and to have that value and so I did talk a little bit about some funding thats available for faculty to apply for to do assessment work beyond their normal classroom assessment and so thats been a nice incentive I think to have faculty involved in assessment work we do have a lot of professional development opportunities I would say at the assessment office so that supports faculty who want to attend a local conferences or national conferences so for example the NEAN has several conferences a year the AMCOA conferences and then the AACU General education and assessment conferences so weve been able to L campus has sent faculty to all of these conferences and that helps a lot because we can hear from other campuses what theyre doing modify our process if necessary so we also have professional development opportunities on our campus kind of internal ones and so I think that helps to spread the word of what we are doing on campus and have some faculty are using it in their own classrooms and hopefully the idea is that other faculty will see that there is value in doing that assessment work and that you can tie it to your own classroom so there are a lot of professional development opportunities I would say