Using Assessment Data

(video says “Using Data Effectively” but header says “Presenting Data to Different Audiences”)

***What are some examples you have experienced on ineffective uses of data that prevented a program or institution from “closing the loop”***

Liz MetallinosKatsaras: Ive observed that at the institution level there is a lot of data collected that never is disseminated to the faculty and staff who are working with the students And it may not be disseminated because there arent resources at the institution to actually analyze the data and disseminate it in a way for the recipients of that to understand it or it may be theres too much data but I have observed that you know unfortunately sometimes we as faculty dont get the institutionlevel data Perhaps Im on an assessment committee so I might see more of that data than others and I know that theres a lot of rich data out there that we dont see

Meghan Finley: A common example that I see happen is that people have their assessments They have their assessment data but theyre not quite sure how to look at it So perhaps they havent had quantitative training or theyre just overwhelmed by it all and it really would behoove them to reach out to maybe their institutional research resource or someone else who can help them make heads or tails of their assessment data Again they dont have to know everything they dont have to be an expert in everything Reach out to the other resources on campus who can help Conversely I see assessment happen where the assessment artifacts the data is handed off to an institutional researcher or the assessment person and theyre expected to analyze the data essentially in a vacuum And they do not understand the content of what this is They dont know the discipline they dont know the assignment Theyre not maybe even sure what the book is So it really is important that these two entities work together to make sense of the data A specific example I can think of is at my previous institution there were some larger sets of data where we tried to understand the degree to which students were prepared coming into college and then again when they left college how much did college impact certain skillsets So for instance they looked at quantitative reasoning they looked at verbal skills and they found that as incoming freshman they improved over the course of their time at the college so that by the time they left as seniors there were statistically significant improvements for these students However when we looked at critical thinking skills there was no change and thats not to say they were off the charts to begin with they were not they were just flat change throughout the course of the students time at the college So in presenting this information back to the college what happened was the question I thought was going to be how can we improve critical thinking skills what are some ways we can infuse critical thinking and I was armed with my Blooms taxonomy and all these other resources so we could really roll up our sleeves and get ready Instead the reaction was This cant be right This is not right There is something wrong with the instrument for measuring critical thinking So what had happened was and this happened before I arrived people the faculty did not choose this instrument So they didnt have an investment They didnt believe in it They didnt believe it was sound So whatever you know the results especially if they were negative were not believed because they were not confident in the instrument itself So what ended up happening even though it was a valid instrument its widely used we ended up spending the next year and a half trying to find a new instrument that was that faculty agreed upon and that they believed was sound and valid and that it would work So that instead of doing that and adding critical thinking and infusing critical thinking into coursework and into the curriculum the focus was on the instrument And that to me what was really disheartening

Liz Metallinos-Katsaras: Faculty themselves are very busy and sometimes dont have the time to really sit down with the data reflect on the data and actually make changes to their courses or programs And one way weve tried to help with that is to have these assessment discussions at our faculty meetings But still faculty frequently get so many pieces of data and also are just so overwhelmed by the actual teaching of the course that sometimes thats where things fall through the cracks

***What do you see as the most important steps to take to ensure that data is used effectively to close the loop***

Liz Metallinos-Katsaras: Having a formal process to close the loop such as meeting as a faculty you know having a retreat going through the assessment data and determining what changes need to be made based on the assessment data And we do this in the Nutrition department once a year we have our retreat and we actually look through the assessment data discuss the profession how the profession is changing and based on those pieces of information we change our curriculum or we add topics to our courses

Meghan Finley: In addition to being humble and to believe in your instruments and your assignments and your process your rubrics and to be timely to make sure that youre going to have a quick turnaround its critical that you collaborate with other people in your group or at your college so you can understand the data Talk with your colleagues who are in the same discipline are you seeing this too what else could this be Talk with people who have other skills who can help you understand something Less is more in many ways so if you do feel like something needs to be changed somethings not quite working dont overhaul everything make a small incremental change Because if you overhaul everything youre not really sure what is working and what is not working You really need to take your time and tweak it accordingly And finally I would say just share share share Whether its your challenges your successes solutions youve come up with it is so important to be able to share with other people And I know thats hard to do but its so important At our college we recently had a showcase an assessment showcase we had had a rough year coming up with different ways to assess as a lot of colleges experience there are competing demands for assessment whos going to do what How are we going to do it And I think faculty were really burnt out So we worked as the assessment committee we worked with the academic dean to come up with a showcase Lets figure out what people are doing right now Right here Lets try to understand it Because a lot of the solutions are right here already So faculty from all different disciplines all different programs came together and provided a showcase of what theyre doing And they didnt need to be complete assessments they certainly didnt need to be perfect assessments but they just needed to talk about what theyre doing so we could share Oh thats a great idea Im going to use that for my course too have you thought about this using this as well And it really it made assessment informal it made it accessible and people became more excited about it because as we all know the “A” word on campus can send faculty screaming

Liz Metallinos-Katsaras: Hire assessment experts at least one at your institution probably more who will be liaisons with the faculty and the staff will collect institutionwide data and also guide faculty in assessment because some faculty many faculty are not wellversed in assessment methods and may not have any support to do additional assessment beyond the course evaluations So you need resources And the resources also need to hear from the faculty and staff about what concerns they have and what sorts of areas should be assessed maybe theyve heard informally from students

***When pulling together faculty and/or staff as an audience for assessment data with the goal of using this data to inform potential program or institutional changes how do you decide who should be at the table for these discussions about the data***

Liz Metallinos-Katsaras: Anyone who the data reflects for example if the data are academic data about courses it has to be faculty If its student life data it should also be faculty but also staff dealing in student life Anyone who can have an impact on the program or on the courses to make them better to close the loop should be involved in the assessment meeting to hear about what the results of the assessment are

Meghan Finley: So once the data is collected and we have it its important that faculty have their own time and space to explore it to understand it to turn it over a little bit to really get into it And once theyve been able to talk about it discuss it and maybe they need to bring in other resources such as the assessment person or an institutional researcher to help them give a different lens thats great I think once they are comfortable with the findings and theyve been able to process them then I think its important to bring in people from the administration academic deans perhaps with particular attention to not just the institutional researchers but also the people who are deeply involved in the strategic planning of the college Those two worlds need to be connected in order for the two to be able to improve both in the classroom and at the institutional level

***Once you have brought together an audience to talk about data are there important differences about how you present frame and explain the data depending on the audience or the nature of the data itself***

Meghan Finley: The Fine Arts are among the hardest things to assess Right the coursework how do you do it Its sort of akin to the Olympics In the Olympics much like the Sciences the Maths and even in Sociology where I study it is easier to measure outcomes right its akin to track and field How fast did someone run How high did they jump Those are easier measures for us to do Gymnastics the figure skating diving those are harder right Theres a level of subjectivity to that and that goes for things like the fine arts and creative writing but there still are these things that need to happen Did the person stick the landing Did they do the triple axel Those same fundamental things need to be there but you need faculty who understand it and who can convey it to other faculty and the administration so they can fully understand it If you dont have someone from the fine arts from a more creative field there to explain it were going to miss the success of the students and their ability to meet these certain outcomes We need it translated by these faculty

Liz Metallinos-Katsaras: The audience dictates the way you would present assessment data because if an audience is very analytic and already understands research you can present it in a more sophisticated way you can even get input from them in the beginning before you analyze the data about how it should be analyzed But if the audience is less analytic then you really need to provide more well what does this all mean Here is the data but what does it mean Help with the interpretation of the assessment data So it does vary the presentation does vary based on the audience