Ensuring Assessment Use: Linking Design to Actions

What comes to mind, when you hear the term “assessment”? List some first-impression phrases

Common evaluation & assessment concerns (Watanabe, Norris, & Gonzalez-Lloret, 2009)

No use and follow-through on evaluation
Fear for misuse by external forces
No relevance, eval reports just collect dust
Lack of understanding, knowledge, expertise
No institutional support, funding, help
Lack of time, overburdened faculty
Faculty’s lack of willingness

Outcomes Assessment
Why focus on outcomes?

Input (resources, qualified instructors, space, etc.)
Output (What is taught/delivered)
Outcomes (What students got out of the program)

Ultimately, what matters most in education is NOT what is taught, but what is LEARNED

What is student learning outcomes assessment?
- An ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning
- Making our expectations explicit
- Setting appropriate standards for learning quality
- Systematically gathering, analyzing, & interpreting evidence to do X

Workshop Outcomes

1. Be able to articulate student learning outcomes for your program/course
2. Describe how your course is linked to overall program-level learning outcomes
3. Generate a program-level assessment plan for your program

Task:
Reviewing Student Learning Outcomes/Goals

Utilization-focused approach

Rather not engage in assessment, if results are not USED!

Responding to concerns and making assessment useful (action-driven!)
- Action oriented
- Responsive & relevant
- Clear & Comprehensible
- Educational & transformative
- Iterative
- Manageable & feasible
- Action-based planning (intended use leads the design)
- Context-relevant use & purpose, credible to local purpose
- Transparent processes and outcomes
- Users learn by participating
- Evaluation pursued iteratively as a process
- Consider available time and resources
Utilization-focused approach

Utilization-focused outcomes assessment is an approach to ensure and maximize use of assessment by the primary intended users of the assessment, from the onset of outcomes assessment planning to action-taking on the basis of assessment findings.

Intended use: How do you intend to apply assessment findings? What decisions are the assessment findings expected to affect?

Individuals or a group within program stakeholders who are responsible for making decisions about the program and intend to use the assessment findings for improving student learning.

Situational & contextualized

Assessment focus, purpose, design, methods, use need to be responsive and adaptive to program’s needs, priorities, and values.

Mission—Goals—Outcomes

A concise summary of the department’s unique contribution to the institution and to the society. It reflects the purpose, value, and beliefs of the program, and provides reasons for why the program exists.

A general statement “concerning desirable and attainable program purposes and aims based on perceived language and situation needs” (Brown, 1995, p. 71).

Express specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions (values and attitudes) students develop as a result of their learning experience in a program. “Students will be able to...”

Why state outcomes?

“We have a social and moral responsibility towards our students and towards society at large to state as clearly as we can what it is that we do for them and why what we do is valuable.” (a survey respondent from Watanabe, Norris, & Gonzalez-Lloret, 2009)

Intended use of outcomes

How do you intend to use the program-level outcomes?
Where should it be stated? Who will read them?

Faculty? Upper admin?
Students? Future students & parents?
Graduates? Employers?
Generating outcomes

(a) Whose views were reflected? Whose voices need to (should) be reflected?

- tenured faculty
- non-tenured faculty
- graduate teaching assistants
- current students
- alumni
- other stakeholders (e.g., funders)?

(b) What information did you base your outcomes on?

- Department mission statement
- current syllabus, course description
- Institutional vision, mission, and outcomes
- National Standards, CEFR
- peer institutions’ outcomes
- empirical data: needs analysis (survey, FG, interviews)

Mapping outcomes & Tracing pathways

Pathways to outcomes?

BA Major Outcomes
BA minor outcomes
Language requirement outcomes
entry point
entry point

Course level: classroom assignments, activities, exams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course SLO 1</th>
<th>SLO 2</th>
<th>SLO 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture 1 &amp; 2 I (understand)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom activity 1 R/M (apply)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 1 A (apply)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam A</td>
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How is your course linked to program-level outcomes/goals?

I = Introduce R = Reinforced and opportunity to practice
M = Mastery at the exit level A = Assessment evidence collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where do they get introduced, practiced, mastered, &amp; assessed?</th>
<th>Prog SLO 1</th>
<th>Prog SLO 2</th>
<th>Prog SLO 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower-division</td>
<td>I, R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your course ...etc.</td>
<td>R, M, A</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior projects/ performance</td>
<td>M, A</td>
<td>M, A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
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Assessing Outcomes

Assessment needs

Situational analysis:
- Any internally-motivated reasons to conduct assessment?
- Any external requirements or pressure for assessment?

Sketch out current needs for assessment of student learning, in terms of WHO needs to know WHAT about students for WHAT PURPOSE and with WHAT INTENDED USES

Assessment Questions

- Consider what you need to know before you decide how to gather evidence.
- Questions may be about factors that affect learning (process questions), as well as learning outcomes themselves (outcomes questions).

Caveats for forming assessment questions
- Empirical question
- Answer shouldn’t be predetermined
- PIUs care about the answer to the Qs
- PIUs want to answer the Qs for themselves
- PIUs can specify the relevance of an answer for future action

Forming Assessment Qs: examples

1. Process questions
   - Were intended, sufficient, and high quality learning opportunities provided to the target students?
   - How were students engaged in the learning activities?
   - To what extent are students satisfied with the program?
   - What are the instructors doing that is (not) working well?

2. Outcomes questions
   - Is student progress at a certain curricular juncture as expected?
   - What do graduating students think they can do by the end of the program?
   - Are the outcomes valuable to students and others?

Questions to indicators/evidence

What information will provide the most accurate and meaningful picture of whether students achieved the outcomes?

Prioritization:
Focus, focus, focus!

- Assessing all possible student learning outcomes all the time will tend to overwhelm the capacities and resources of assessment users.
- One question may require multiple indicators.
- One indicator may require multiple methods.
Prioritization strategies

Prioritize by...
- critical issues or concerns
- future decisions that need to be made
- interest and meaningfulness

Case study Duke Univ. 2-yr FL program

Based on the assessment questions, what are the variety of indicators that need to be elicited?

- Indicators?
- Key informants?

Planning

Methodological choices

Methods decisions are never purely technical and are always constrained by...
- limited resources & time
- competing & conflicting priorities
- pragmatic considerations
- disciplinary biases & measurement traditions

Methodological Choices

Variety of methods
- Provide different aspects of learning
- Suited for different information needs & purposes

- Lab reports
- Discussion observations
- Presentations
- Essays
- Assignments
- Minute paper
- Projects
- Blog, learning log
- Focus groups
- Peer assessment
- Self assessment
- Portfolio

Case study

Duke Univ. 2-yr FL program

Based on the selected indicator which method will be most feasible, accurate, credible, and useful?

- Methods?
- Informants?
- Timing of data collection?

- Consider strengths & weaknesses of potential methods (see the methodology table in your handout)
- Recognize limited time & resources
- Access to informants?
- Judge the utility of design options and data types (e.g., scale [central tendency, ranking, variability] or open-ended [in-depth insights])
- Negotiate criteria for judging methodological quality and credible evidence prior to data collection less-than-perfect data available in time to affect decisions > more-perfect data (Patton, 2008)
Data gathering & analysis

Data gathering
• Who is going to collect data? Do you have access to the data source?
• Who should store and monitor data? Potential bias? Trustworthiness?
• Were there any threats to data credibility during data collection?
• Were you able to gather sufficient data?

Data analysis
• To whose eyes should the analysis process and the results be credible and trustworthy?

Data interpretation
• Whose perspective counts? Who should be involved & why?
• How will interpretation be checked?
• What is the judgment based on? Any pre-set criteria for judgment?
• Are the interpretations and recommendations evident from the data and clearly articulated in understandable language for the intended users (and other stakeholders)?

Information gathering

Making sense of information

Now what?

Reporting and Using Findings

Utility Standard #7

Evaluations should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage follow-through by stakeholders, so that the likelihood that the evaluation will be used is increased.

Audience & purpose: Who & why?

Who are potential reporting audiences?
Who contributes to reporting?
Collaborative? Involvement? At what point?
What do PIUs expect from reporting?
PIUs

• Be intentional = purposeful
• Be user-focused
• No surprising PIUs

Reporting format
Which reporting format will be most usable, accessible, and appropriate for your intended audience?

- workshop
- oral presentation
- meeting
- poster
- online communication
- video-tape presentation
- executive summary
- research monograph
- Brochure
- full report
- newsletter
- internet article

Timing
(When?)

When is the best time to report?

Multiple reports necessary?

How much time do you need for analysis, interpreting, and writing?

Report ethically!
anonymity, negative washback, etc.

Positive → negatives

Half full or half empty?

Recommendations

• Data → Findings →
  → Recommendations
• Provide options
• Consider…
  • cost (time + money)
  • benefit
  • potential challenges
Dissemination ≠ action

Accessibility of findings

Ownership of findings

Findings provide guidance for future action

Increased control over assessment

✓ Is action plan needed?
✓ Is action already in place?
✓ What about the next assessment cycle?

Evansville Univ., Dept. FLs
(Grau Sempere, Mohn, & Pieroni, 2009)

...months of hard work sparked very animated and fruitful conversations among all department members (adjunct, contract, junior tenure track, and tenured faculty)... a small committee of faculty members worked well together and always kept departmental colleagues involved. As a result, the entire group experienced an enhanced can-do attitude, a positive feeling of teamwork, a sense of collective ownership of the project, and a better understanding of our identity and goals as a department. Who could have predicted that an evaluation project would elicit faculty excitement?

http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation
Five-minute formative evaluation
On the index card, please write...

1. Now, when you hear “assessment” what comes to mind?
2. One thing you are still not sure about.
3. What was useful about today’s workshop?
4. What can the facilitator do to improve the workshop?

Questions?

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