



TracDat: Technology for Sustaining Assessment

Katharine Cummings
Western Michigan University

Overview

- Context: Assessment and Higher Education
- Context: WMU
- Introduction to TracDat
- Implementation of TracDat at WMU
- Lessons Learned
- Future Directions



The Context of Assessment & Higher Education

Who is asking these questions and why would we care to respond?

Assessment Mandates

- Regional Accreditation Agencies
 - Assessment and Strategic Planning are the most frequently cited areas of concern from these agencies
 - Demands for assessment data and evidence of institutional use of such data is increasing
- Professional Accreditations
 - All major accreditation agencies are now asking for more than a “plan to assess”
 - Performance measures, student success, authentic assessments, resulting improvements
- Internal Program Reviews
- Internal and External Planning
- Consumer Concerns
 - Rising costs of higher education lead to questions about value-added

Assessment Plan Requirements

- Clearly stated student learning outcomes, addressing
 - Knowledge
 - Skills
 - Dispositions or Attitudes
- Criteria
 - How much do students need to know—or how well do they need to perform a task— for us to decide that the outcomes have been achieved?
- Performance Measures
 - Authentic tasks or assignments
 - Rubrics defining the performance
 - Valid & reliable measures

Beyond Plans

- Accreditation agencies require evidence of:
 - Programs using assessment results for improvement
 - An internal review process to assure that plans are kept up-to-date
 - Maintenance of records and data over time
 - Having a system of assessment that encompasses the institution
- Reports on assessment results are required for purposes beyond accreditation
 - Internal resource allocation
 - Institutional review of quality
 - Institutional strategic planning



The Context of Western Michigan University

Why should this institution's experience inform what we want to do on our own campus?

Western Michigan University

- Regional, comprehensive university of approximately 23,000 students
- Carnegie classification of “research extensive”
- Strong faculty union
- Administrative turnover
 - Since 1999, five different presidents
 - Since 1999, seven different provosts
- 2001 regional accreditation visit cited deficiency in assessment and strategic planning
- Complete overhaul of student information system in past several years

Additional Contextual Factors

- State and institutional budget issues
 - Increased calls for program reviews & justification
 - Greater competition for dwindling resources
 - Staff cuts coupled with increased demands on staff time & energies
- Increased emphasis on externally-funded grants and projects
- Infrastructures lagging behind needs
- Large non-traditional and first-generation student population
- Multiple doctoral programs added in relatively short time frame



Introduction to TracDat

How does this solution address the contextual factors?

TracDat

- Hosted on-campus
- Management tool for assessment processes and results
 - A “garage” to park your assessment
 - Input plans, using the framework provided within the solution
 - Enter results of assessments
 - Provide remedies/interventions resulting from assessments
 - Track data and actions over time
- Security of data
 - Access based on role
 - Departments create and maintain their own records
- Reporting features

Sample Reports

- Sample “Assessment Plan”
- Sample “Assessment Impact”



Implementing TracDat at WMU

So many programs and so little time....

Implementation Process

- Engaged faculty “champions”
 - Assessment is faculty-driven
 - Found faculty members who had been involved in assessment activities already
 - Provided consultation with Nuventive and on-campus personnel
- Available to all who wanted to use the solution
 - Academic departments and student affairs areas
 - Created “virtual” departments for accreditation where needed
- One staff position envisioned for support
 - Banner implementation at the same time resulted in loss of staff person to other efforts
 - Staff member shared TracDat & iWebfolio support



Lessons Learned

How to avoid the “challenges” we faced

What we did RIGHT

- Faculty and staff formed cohesive group
 - Clear goals for the group
 - Built a network
- Consultant time
 - We didn't scrimp in this area
 - Consultant time was used less for technical aspects and more for guidance about assessment & “excuse” to focus on TracDat
- Office of Institutional Effectiveness
 - Coordinated assessment planning
 - Provided link between faculty champions and assessment steering committee
 - On-going support for assessment training

Where we struggled

- Too much at once
 - Tying TracDat to the Student Information System (SIS) implementation tended to minimize its effect
 - Both assessment AND the use of TracDat were new to many faculty and staff
- Assumption that existing plans were ready for input
 - Belief that it was a “clerical” task when the process actually required substantive review of plans
 - Some approved plans lacked key elements
- Assessment knowledge across campus was less developed than we predicted
 - TracDat would have helped shape plans for approval if available earlier
 - Minimal guidance about structure and key elements had been provided prior to TracDat implementation

Struggles Related to Context

- Lack of trust
 - Administrative turnover
 - Budget constraints
 - Lack of experience with assessment
 - Management versus Employee mentality
- Urgency
 - Regional accreditation focus visit in November 2005
 - Effort to demonstrate value of SIS expenditures
- Top-down perception
 - Some believed that assessment (and TracDat) were being forced upon the unwilling
 - Strong personalities at various levels
 - Displeasure with some aspects of administration

Recommendations for Other Campuses

- Use the resources available
 - Consultants
 - On-campus assessment resources
 - Literature base on assessment
 - Wide availability of examples from other campuses
- Know your context and use the “power” people
 - Not always the official hierarchy
 - Opinion-leaders (for example, engage union leadership)
- Tie TracDat to existing assessment efforts
 - Annual reports using TracDat reporting
 - Highlight (and reward?) programs using TracDat to manage assessment
- Emphasize the supportive nature of TracDat

Future Directions

- All annual assessment reports will be prepared in TracDat starting May 2009
- 2008-09 academic year will include a review and consultation process for department plans
- New features in TracDat should streamline the data collection process
- Increasing understanding of assessment on campus (panel discussions, etc)

Questions ?

- Specific questions about TracDat?
- Questions about implementation?
- Questions about assessment efforts and support?
- Other?