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Title of Session: *Why Don't They Use the Results? Assessment Assumptions Which Deter Use of Results*

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Presentation Summary

After investing a great deal of time and energy to implement an assessment process, many institutions ask themselves, "Why aren't we utilizing the results to make improvement? The answer frequently lies in the institutional assumptions upon which the assessment process has been based.

1. "Continuous improvement based upon assessment results is everyone's responsibility."

If it's everyone's responsibility, then it's nobody's responsibility. There needs to be one person responsible for assessment (i.e. at the university and college levels). That right person will be respected by faculty, work independently, and know how and when to use quantitative analysis.

2. "The same data utilized for public accountability can also be utilized for program development."

This is a generally not the case. However, there is a growing feeling that most of the data which is currently collected at the institutional research level will be of little value for future accountability standards. Therefore, it is important to design assessment measures that will adequately address multiple external stakeholders and expectations.

3. "Assessment plans once established will naturally be carried out by the faculty."

There needs to be buy-in by the entire faculty, not just some of them. Faculty are experts in their field, but they need to be taught how to do meaningful outcomes and assessment. When faculty say they have a good program and they are doing assessment, then all they need to do is demonstrate it; confirm with supporting evidence; provide proof. There should be regular reporting by programs at the department and college level.

4. "The focus of assessment based continuous improvement in administrative and educational support units should be on their contribution to student learning."

While all services should be assessed for their impact on a student's total learning experience, there should be greater emphasis on improving processes that impact directly on the student experience.

5. “Faculty trust academic administrators not to misuse assessment results in a punitive manner.”

If you are collecting data for assessment or accreditation purposes, then the President, Provost, or Vice President for Academic Affairs should indicate in writing to faculty that information or data collected will not be used in a punitive manner, or for anything other than what they were intended.

6. “It is necessary for faculty to be threatened by or rewarded for assessment data to stimulate continuous improvement.”

If continuous improvement is viewed as something that can be done in phases, or parts (“chunking”), within a reasonable amount of time without adding immensely to workload, the faculty will accept it.

7. “If assessment results are available on a campus, they will be voluntarily and widely used to improve student learning.”

Results will be used only if the assessment impacts actual student learning in the classroom.

8. “We don’t have any funds with which to support assessment and continuous improvement.”

If it is a priority, then it should be funded accordingly. If financial support isn’t provided, it gives the appearance that it isn’t all that important.

9. The use of assessment results will bring about sudden and revolutionary improvements in student learning.

The process is slow and continuous. There aren’t any “best practices,” because we are always continuously improving.

10. “Not all programs are required to take part in continuous improvement based upon assessment results.”

All programs must submit a document that lists the outcomes that were assessed during the academic year; a description of the measure used to assess each outcome; the results of the assessment; the process used by faculty to review the process and results; and the actions and/or revisions that were implemented in response to the assessment. There should also be a description of assessment plans for the upcoming academic year.

In closing, a recent study by Institutional Effectiveness Associates found the biggest factor in turnover of administrators was in large part due to embarrassment caused by failure to meet accreditation requirements or external stakeholder expectations.