

Improving Student Learning through a Comprehensive, Systematic, and Sustainable Assessment Practice.

Response - Version 1

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Please give your name and contact information (email address and/or phone number).

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What are some strengths of this project/Academy work? Why are these strengths?

Both mentors agree that a major strength of the Coconino Community College (CCC) project is having many organizational areas involved and including many key individuals/groups. This will help create support for the project. We also admire that their first step is to review their historic assessment/review processes as well as report templates. Many schools seem to forgo this important first step and ignore their history. It is critical to first understand where you have been and where you are now before moving forward.

When reviewing your website regarding your assessment efforts in the past, it appears that CCC has built a fairly solid foundation of assessment over the years. This will allow CCC to focus on refining their assessment processes rather than "reinvent the wheel," which will help maintain faculty and staff participation in the assessment process overall.

What remains unclear or what questions do you still have about this work to assess and improve student learning?

Kirstan Neukam

I noticed on your site, that your annual "assessment report" template appeared more like a program review template. My question is how is this report different from your program review template? Wouldn't it be easier to revise the assessment report to be an "assessment report," that will then be used in the 3-5 year program review report? This might help reduce the workload

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burden.

I also noticed that you have course-based assessment that is connected to general education assessment. Additionally, your programs submit an annual assessment report. Do your programs not have assessment plans? I know that you regularly conduct curriculum maps to track where outcomes are taught in each program; however, I never saw any reference to program assessment plans, program outcomes, a timeline of when those outcomes are assessed over a span of time (varies by level), what assessment measures will be used, who is involved in analyzing the results, how are the results used, etc.

Susan Hatfield

I am interested in the same questions that Kirstan mentions -- connecting assessment reporting to a program review cycle makes a lot of sense. We are not finding a lot of schools in the Academy that are finding value with annual assessment reports, just because of the timing -- it's hard to be able to provide timely feedback to programs before the next cycle is well underway.

What are some critical things to which the institution should pay attention as it plans its work for the next six months?

Kirstan Neukam

From your posting, it appears that the only focus of your project is reporting (e.g., creating a sustainable annual assessment report). When reviewing your website, it appears that you already had an annual assessment report in place for a number of years. I know that you mentioned that you are restructuring the campus (e.g., eliminating departmental chairs—primary people completing the reports); however, how will the establishment of an assessment committee help maintain a sustainable assessment system and culture of assessment on your campus? Are you not concerned that by taking the assessment process out of the hands of the faculty teaching the courses you will create less support for the process? For example, faculty typically do not view NSSE or CAPP results as relevant to what they teach and are reluctant to make changes in their program/courses as a result. Thus, institutions collect the data, create a very pretty trend line, but cannot report and direct impact or changes that have occurred as a result of the information. By having a 'committee' review all data and write up reports that will be distributed to various stakeholders, how will this impact faculty's willingness to make changes in their program? I know that faculty members will be part of this newly formed "assessment committee" however, are they faculty members with whom faculty from their programs/departments view as representative (e.g., speaks for them)? I've seen many campuses take this approach and end up creating wonderful systems in which reports are created and distributed to various stakeholders; however, they have

a difficult time indicating how any of the information collected resulted in improvements in student learning on their campus. Other schools seem to function very well under the committee structure, it really depends upon the school and its culture. Just keep in mind the possible pitfalls of having everything run through a single committee.

Susan Hatfield

Again (and as always), Kristan's comments are right on target. I'm all about infrastructure and applaud the focus on strengthening and streamlining the processes that currently exist. But like Kirstan points out, there's a danger of losing sight of --and support --for learning in the process (no pun intended). The further the process gets from faculty, the harder you will have to work to keep it relevant and useful.

Continuing to focus your messaging on the connection between assessment and learning is critical. I've often had a difficult time engaging faculty in assessment discussions -- it's a lot easier to get faculty to talk about learning. So positioning your conversations in this direction might be useful. Another thing we are starting to notice is that when faculty, programs, and the institutions reinforce the student learning outcomes, students are provided with both a language and perspective to think and talk about their education. This can be powerful when students are putting together resumes and cover letters, as well as interviewing for positions. (To say nothing about the conversations with relatives over Thanksgiving dinner!)

What are some other possibilities or resources that might contribute to the success of this project? For instance, can you suggest resources such as books, benchmarks, instruments, models, and processes?

Kirstan Neukam

When considering if you have program assessment plans in place, you might review Susan Hatfield's paper (http://ideaedu.org/sites/default/files/IDEA_Paper_45.pdf) or one of the other resources listed below.

- Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice (2009) by Trudy W. Banta, Elizabeth A. Jones, Karen E. Black
- Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide (2009) by Linda Suskie, Trudy W. Banta (Foreword)

Finally, you are taking on a noteworthy task of trying to streamline your assessment processes while maintaining a culture of engagement on your campus. Given this fact, remember that I am here to help. Please do not hesitate to call or email me any time you need help or want suggestions regarding how other institutions have addressed similar issues. I am happy to

assist you in any way I can. All you have to do is ask.

Reviewed by **Kirstan Neukam** (Primary Mentor)

Reviewed by **Susan Hatfield** (Senior Scholar)