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Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education

A Rose by Any Other Name: Grading and Assessment

Elizabeth C. Greville

Any assessment primer cautions that course grades are not ordinarily considered outcomes assessments. The rationale for excluding grades as an assessment mechanism uses the following logic: because grades measure a variety of learning outcomes and probably take into account factors like attendance that have nothing to do with evidence of learning, grades are not an acceptable means of assessing a discrete learning outcome. Yet the entire system by which students earn credits, maintain academic standing, and secure other benefits is built on course grades. Faculty have to award grades to students and often chafe against the idea that grades are not sufficient measures for assessment programs.

The purpose of this article is to show that the twain can meet—not to argue that grades *are* assessment but, rather, to advocate the position that assessment and grading do not have to be mutually exclusive. With careful, deliberate, and disciplined organization of teaching, evaluation, and grading, outcomes assessment does not have to be a separate activity from grading. The approach proposed in this essay takes for granted high motivation on the part of the faculty member to rethink traditional grading practices and intentionally link the components of a grade to specific learning outcomes. Adopting the proposed approach requires dismantling and reassembling a syllabus in order to align each piece of graded work to a specific learning outcome.

This idea starts from a basic assumption—namely, that the process of education relies on a teacher making expert judgments about the degree to which a student has (or has not) mastered new knowledge or skills. On the basis of these judgments, the teacher adjusts his or her teaching methods, expectations, or requirements for student performance. These judgments and the bases for making them are the essence of assessment. If a faculty member can articulate clearly an intended learning outcome and the degree to which a student expresses the knowledge or performs the skills indicative of mastery, it doesn't matter whether that judgment is represented by an "A" or an "exceeds expectations" or an "8 out of 10" or a "96 percent"; these are all simply representations that signify that learning has occurred. What matters is clarity about what is being assessed

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and the basis on which a judgment will be made. If a grading system is organized with explicit clarity about how those judgments are made, grading and assessment can coexist. These are big ifs, and a lack of such specificity is among the typical reasons that grades are not sufficient assessment measures. In order for grading and assessment to coexist, the criteria used for grading must be seamlessly integrated with the program's learning outcomes, which must be seamlessly integrated with the course goals. The following example suggests how such a system can be built.

In many undergraduate institutions, assessment at the program level occurs in a culminating course intended to synthesize learning that occurred throughout a student's career in the major—a course that might be called a *capstone* or *senior exercise* or *comp*. Presumably, each assignment in that course relates to more than one of the learning outcomes that the program is intended to facilitate. For example, a midterm exam might be structured so that three short essay questions address student mastery of three different learning outcomes. Similarly, sections of a final paper likely require varied skills; a student could write a succinct summary that demonstrates understanding of relevant theory, yet be unable to develop an original argument cogently. Test bank questions can present a time-consuming challenge because those questions are not necessarily organized according to learning objectives, and the task of re-grouping them accordingly can be cumbersome. That said, if the course grading system is organized so that the faculty member is able to assign points for each element of each assignment that relates to the relevant learning outcome, then assessment and grading can coexist.

Table 1 is a grading matrix that allows a faculty member to enter scores for each element of each assignment, which can then can be averaged in a variety of ways. The instructor can assign a formula to average the scores across a row by individual student and determine a course grade. The instructor can assign a formula to aggregate the

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Call for Contributions

The editor welcomes short articles and news items for *Assessment Update*. Guidelines follow for those who would like to contribute articles on outcomes assessment in higher education.

- *Content:* Please send an account of your experience with assessment in higher education. Include concrete examples of practice and results.
- *Audience: Assessment Update* readers are academic administrators, campus assessment practitioners, institutional researchers, and faculty from a variety of fields. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.
- *Style:* A report, essay, news story, or letter to the editor would be welcome. Limited references can be printed; however, extensive tables cannot be included.
- *Format:* In addition to standard manuscripts, news may be contributed via letter, telephone, or fax (317) 274–4651. The standard manuscript format is a 60-space line with 25 lines per page. Articles may be sent to <kblack@iupui.edu> as a Microsoft Word attachment. Please include your complete postal mailing address.
- *Length:* Articles should be four to eight typed, double-spaced pages (1,000–2,000 words). Short news items and content for the Book Review section may be 100–500 words in length. Annotations of recent publications for the Resources feature should be about 50–100 words long.
- *Copyright:* Articles shall not have been registered for copyright or published elsewhere prior to publication in *Assessment Update*.
- *Deadlines:* Each issue is typically planned four months before its publication. Future deadlines for submitting articles are December 1 (March–April 2010 issue), February 1 (May–June 2010 issue), and April 1 (July–August 2010 issue).

Please address mailed contributions and comments to Trudy W. Banta, Editor, *Assessment Update*, Rm. 140 Administration Bldg., 355 N. Lansing St., Indianapolis, IN 46202–2896. ■

Diversity as a Learning Goal: Challenges in Assessing Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes

Pam Bowers

What do faculty at your institution expect graduates to know and be able to do in regard to diversity? At Oklahoma State University (OSU), faculty have defined expectations for students' learning of knowledge, skills, and attitudes about diversity and have implemented a process to assess students' achievement of the learning goal. As was done for other general education learning goals such as written communication ability and critical thinking skills, faculty have instituted a portfolio system in order to assess students' achievement of the institution's diversity learning goal.

In the institutional portfolio, samples of students' work (artifacts) are collected from work produced in classes across the university. This central portfolio provides an institutional snapshot of students' achievement of the learning goal. A rubric created by OSU faculty is used to assess students' achievement of the learning outcome as demonstrated in the work included in each of these portfolios.

At OSU, each faculty-created rubric clarifies expectations for student learning and answers the question "What do we expect students to know and be able to do?" in regard to a particular learning goal. Each rubric was developed by OSU faculty to answer this question by defining criteria by which to assess achievement of the outcome and describing characteristics of work that demonstrates varying levels of achievement. The portfolio provides an authentic assessment; students' work is evaluated based not on correct answers but on their ability to demonstrate achievement of the learning goal in their work (Mueller, 2006; Wiggins, 1990; Stiggins, 1987). Since the method was implemented at OSU in 2001, institutional portfolios and corresponding rubrics have been developed for assessment of students' written communication skills, critical thinking ability, science problem-solving skills, analytical reasoning ability and, most recently, knowledge, skills and attitudes about diversity.

The portfolio provides an authentic assessment; students' work is evaluated based not on correct answers but on their ability to demonstrate achievement of the learning goal in their work.

The faculty group that created the first rubric used for institutional portfolio assessment—the one that assesses students' written communication skills—found examples of writing rubrics and many other sources of information to guide their work of describing the characteristics of effective written communication. Even though the faculty committee members had multiple sources of information available and were generally in agreement about the characteristics of effective written communication, the development of a rubric for this assessment process still required considerable time and effort. The process involved many faculty discussions and revisions of draft rubrics before the group achieved agreement on the criteria for assessment and the characteristics of excellent written communication that defined the learning outcome for OSU graduates.

When the committee began seeking guidance on creating a rubric for assessment of diversity as a learning goal, resources and examples were not as readily available. In fact, the committee found only a few examples from other institutions (University of Michigan–Flint, retrieved November 18, 2007; University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, retrieved November 18, 2007) and little other work on which to base the rubric as they envisioned it, so they drafted a rubric based on OSU policy documents. The document "OSU Criteria and Goals for General Education" states that general education is intended to "assist students in understanding and respecting diversity in people, beliefs, and societies." The committee also considered OSU's statement "Core Values," developed in the strategic planning process, which states, "We respect others and value diversity of opinion, freedom of expression, and other ethnic and cultural backgrounds." To represent this core value in the assessment criteria of the rubric, the committee provided the following interpretation of that statement:

- Respecting others includes demonstrating an interest in increasing one's knowledge of others as well as applying that knowledge in interaction.

- To value diversity of opinion is to consider all opinions in decision making and problem solving.
- Freedom of expression occurs in a social and cultural environment that is supportive of the same. One should be aware of factors that lead to the suppression of ideas of inclusion (such as hate speech) as well as factors that encourage positive contributions to public discourse.
- To value other ethnic and cultural backgrounds, one must appreciate the complexities of the same and understand that our interactions with and perceptions of others are informed by our conceptions of a wide variety of differences (such as notions of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, veteran status, nationality, religion, age, ability status, sexual orientation, and so on).

Although the rubric was developed primarily by a group of four faculty members, this group solicited the input of colleagues through faculty workshops. Input from these sessions was used to make revisions to the rubric as faculty engaged in discussions about the knowledge, skills, and attitudes in regard to diversity that they expect OSU graduates to possess and characteristics of student work that demonstrate achievement of this learning goal.

Like the rubrics for all of OSU's general education learning goals, the assessment rubric for diversity is based on a five-point scale and describes characteristics of student work at each scoring level. The diversity rubric and other general education assessment rubrics are available on the Web site of Oklahoma State University's Office of University Assessment and Testing, at <www.uat.okstate.edu/assessment>.

After multiple faculty discussions and revisions, the rubric defines four criteria of the diversity learning goal and describes characteristics of student work that demonstrate the highest level of achievement of each criterion (a score of 5) as follows:

1. *Conceptual understanding:* [Work demonstrates that the student] understands diversity as multidimensional in nature, shows strong appreciation for the value of knowledge and understanding in application and in navigating the social and cultural environment.
2. *Values diversity:* [Student's work] demonstrates a strong perspective of inclusion; demonstrates strong tendency to try to understand and to value multiple perspectives.
3. *Knowledge of historical context:* Student's work demonstrates substantial knowledge of historical context and how that history applies to present-day situations relating to inter-group relations.
4. *Sources of understanding, value, and knowledge:* Student's understanding and values regarding diversity are based on reflection and integration of substantial factual knowledge and personal observation; strong apparent influence of personal experience outside own immediate environment.

The diversity rubric is not intended to suggest that students should agree with any specific ideology; rather, it describes expectations that students should develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to understand and consider diverse points of view. The content of the diversity rubric—and that of all the rubrics at OSU—is always open for discussion and further input from faculty.

To conduct an assessment of students' achievement of a general education learning outcome, faculty use the rubric to evaluate samples of students' work in the portfolio and assign a score for each criterion as well as an overall score for each paper. Average overall scores of all papers provide an indication of OSU students' achievement of the learning outcome. Comparisons of overall scores by student classification indicate whether students' achievement increases from freshman to senior year. Criterion scores help pinpoint areas of greatest strength and weakness relative to the learning goal, providing direction for efforts to help students improve their achievement.

In any assessment, the process of defining and evaluating students' achievement of learning goals requires thinking about where and how in the curriculum students are provided with opportunities to obtain the desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In the case of general education learning goals at OSU, especially those pertaining to written communication skills, critical thinking, and diversity, it is expected that students will have opportunities to gain knowledge and practice skills in many classes across the curriculum, not just a few specific courses.

The group has found it difficult to collect a reasonably representative sample of student work for some of the portfolios in past years, and this is true for the diversity assessment as well. Faculty have had very limited success in identifying and collecting samples of class assignments that require students to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes pertaining to diversity. In some cases, artifacts have been collected for the diversity portfolio that were not suitable for the assessment because they did not provide a demonstration of students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes as described in the rubric.

These situations—too few assignments and some assignments that don't fit the rubric—can be explained in various ways. Perhaps many faculty are asking students to demonstrate knowledge about diversity in class assignments but are doing so with

Average overall scores of all papers provide an indication of OSU students' achievement of the learning outcome.

assignments that are not well-suited for this type of assessment. It may be that the content of the rubric does not accurately reflect what faculty across the institution expect students to know and be able to do in regard to diversity, so we are not able to identify many assignments that fit. Or it may be the case that few faculty are giving class assignments that ask students to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes pertaining to diversity. If the latter is the case, the clarification of institutional expectations for student learning provided by the rubric may help faculty more intentionally incorporate diversity as a learning goal into their courses. In any case, the process will improve as faculty continue to refine the rubric to more accurately represent institutional learning goals and discuss types of course assignments that advance students' achievement of the learning outcomes while providing opportunity for assessment.

The faculty committee is working to connect with faculty members who already incorporate diversity assignments into their classes and to engage more faculty in the discussions about this effort. Faculty who conduct this assessment are encouraging their colleagues to consider creating or revising a class assignment to include a diversity component in order to provide more opportunities for students to develop knowledge and practice skills pertaining to diversity and to provide samples of student work for assessment. The faculty committee members encourage wide participation by suggesting that classes do not have to be focused primarily on diversity to include such an assignment; an instructor may include an opportunity to consider the relevance of diversity to an issue discussed in the course. For example, an assignment used in assessment this year was part of an environmental engineering course and asked students to write an analysis of the social justice or diversity aspects of an environmental quality policy.

In the diversity assessment, as in other assessments for general education learning goals, faculty recognize the importance of creating assignments that focus on institutional learning goals as well as the more specific goals of the course in which they are created. For example, to help students achieve higher levels of performance in writing, faculty in many disciplines now require more writing assignments and share the rubric for writing assessment in order to help students understand the characteristics of effective written communication and how their writing will be evaluated—even though writing is not the primary focus of the assignment. Some faculty members experience constraints on this effort—such as class size—but many are making the effort. As in the case of the learning goal for writing, responsibility for helping students achieve the learning goal for diversity is shared across the university.

Responsibility for helping students achieve the learning goal for diversity is shared across the university.

One of the advantages of this type of authentic assessment is that the intervention for program improvement begins with the development of the assessment tool. Expectations for student learning about diversity have been spelled out and are open for discussion. Although all faculty members may not agree with the content of the rubric, they are at least talking about diversity as a learning goal. Faculty members are beginning to ask each other—and themselves—how they are contributing to student learning about diversity in the courses they teach. The rubric is already being used in some individual courses to explain to students what is expected of them in class assignments. Whether or not the rubric is the ideal method of assessing student learning about diversity, it is having an impact on the campus as faculty discuss the learning expectations as defined by the rubric and consider class assignments intended to encourage students to learn about diversity. ■

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Challenges to the Credible Assessment of Learning

Don Noel Smith

The assessment movement in higher education is now into its fourth decade. Although real and worthy progress is certainly evident to those of us who have been in the profession at least that long, the changes remain largely superficial. Well-intentioned mandates have received respectful accommodation. At the institutional level, we have become more orderly and systematic about planning and assessment. We have incorporated learning objectives into program descriptions and course syllabi. But we evaluate what students learn much the same as always. Accommodation is, of course, our preferred means of survival. We have a lot to do; efficiency demands routine; routine resists disruption. When the times demand fundamental change, however, mere accommodation seems maladaptive. If we cannot demonstrate the results of learning or even define them very clearly, it is hard to convince anyone that the results achieved, whatever they may be, are worth the price. The challenges, however, are formidable.

Challenge 1: Respecting the Values of Development and Dissemination

The first challenge is inherent in the defining characteristics of the academic enterprise, which are interdependent yet distinctive in their needs. *Development* of knowledge requires exploration; *dissemination* of it requires standardization. The former builds necessarily upon the latter; the latter depends on the former for continuing sustenance. The body of knowledge is not a dead body; it is living, ever developing.

The teaching and learning process itself, of course, constitutes a body of knowledge that must undergo experiment and change. Neither teaching nor the subject matter taught can become so fixed and formulaic as to stifle trial and error and thus improvement. But it is difficult to assess something that is always in motion, and so there have to be compromises that recognize the value of exploration in fields of inquiry while sustaining the ongoing need for standardization in programs of study.

Development of knowledge requires exploration; dissemination of it requires standardization.

The challenge comes when we assume or pretend that one value is more important than the other or is to be had at the expense of the other. If standardization can stifle development, we should give individualism free rein. But though laissez-faire works fine for generating new knowledge, it does not work for creating programs of study and evaluating what students learn from them. If a program is to produce measurable results and thus provide information that can itself become the subject of research, the body of knowledge taught requires commonly established, well-understood principles, purposes, content, objectives, and means of assessment.

In curricular debates over the years as an academic administrator at different universities, I have seen this seemingly self-evident distinction between the value of exploration in a field of inquiry and the value of standardization in a program of study ignored, misunderstood, misrepresented, and, at times, victimized on the much abused altar of academic freedom.

Challenge 2: Agreeing on What Students Are to Learn

The second challenge follows from the first. It has long been an article of faith that the strength of American universities lies in their diversity, their autonomy, their uniqueness. Although diversity is indeed a strength, any strength pursued without attention to counterbalancing values becomes a weakness. Nonetheless, diversity continues to be a defense for the status quo. As a result, general education and many major programs are largely incoherent, typically consisting of a limited core of requirements, if any, and an extensive array of electives, with the result that each student has a different learning experience, depending on the courses chosen. Though there may be strengths in diversity, credible assessment of learning outcomes is not one of them.

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Assessment necessarily begins before, not after, the learning experience. If the expected results are not defined in advance (in measurable, though not necessarily quantifiable, terms); if the program is not designed to support achievement of the intended results; and if testing is not focused on determining the extent to which all students have met the expectations, there is little way to assess afterward what was learned or whether the learning experiences provided were more or less effective.

Because fields of inquiry are so broad and productive, carving a coherent program of study from them is difficult, and even more difficult is agreeing on the individual courses that make up the parts of the whole. But if there is to be credible assessment of learning outcomes, there must first be a carefully delimited body of knowledge that infuses the program of study and that is divided into coherently related and sequenced learning experiences—with relevant objectives, with content relevant to achieving those objectives, and with testing procedures relevant to determining whether the objectives have been met at a level considered sufficient to represent at least basic proficiency. All this seems self-evident, but we do not do it. It is doubtful that there are any two general education programs or English majors (to pick on my own discipline) that are the same throughout the country—doubtful enough that any two sections of the same course at the same institution are sufficiently similar to enable determination of whether students in them achieve comparable results.

Defining specific content and assessment procedures collectively, rather than leaving them to the diverse inclinations of individual instructors, is contentious and time-consuming. Faculty members have their preferences and know how to argue for them. And certainly there can be more than one kind of coherence, more than one array of learning experiences, more than one set of learning outcomes, and more than one way of testing. But they cannot all be accommodated in the same program. There has to be agreement before there can be assessment. As long as institutions and program faculty reject the claims of standardization as unwelcome threats to diversity and autonomy, there can be no credible assessment of learning. Further, we limit our ability to develop useful knowledge about our own teaching and how we might improve student learning. None of this is to deny the value of experimental offerings and elective courses within a program, but those should be purposeful, sensibly limited, and separate from the standard courses all students must take.

Assessment necessarily begins before, not after, the learning experience.

Challenge 3: Separating Instruction and Assessment

The third challenge may be the most formidable. Although faculty members do collectively approve the broad requirements for general education and major programs, they individually develop and deliver course content; design, administer, and grade tests and other assignments; and decide the extent to which each student has succeeded—in accordance with standards the faculty member has set. There may be common course objectives, a common text, and sometimes even a common syllabus for courses with multiple sections, particularly at the freshman and sophomore levels. There may be exceptions in which program faculty collectively evaluate certain student accomplishments. But the individual faculty member remains largely responsible for every part of the instructional process, serving as creator, facilitator, and judge. This model is entrenched in the culture and feudal history of the professoriate. It has its merits. Credible assessment is not one of them. No one believes that students of faculty members who give the most As learn more from them than they do from other faculty members.

Could we move assessment of learning out of the individual classroom? There are serious issues. Grades are a primary motivator in getting students to do the work; being in control of them gives the instructor great leverage. Further, if learning were evaluated externally, faculty members might fear that their teaching performance could be judged solely on how well their students do.

On the other side, faculty members have long lamented the contrary roles they play as both teacher and judge, and indeed, that dual role can create poor learning dynamics. To learn, one must reveal weaknesses, make errors, and seek constructive criticism; to do well on evaluations, one must conceal weaknesses, avoid errors, and escape criticism. When we encourage the one behavior but reward the other, we may seem disingenuous, if not hypocritical. Credibility is necessarily compromised when the instructor must be both advocate and judge. Though separating instruction and evaluation may be a fearsome prospect, my own experience indicates that we should not fear such separation unduly.

Years ago when I was head of a large English department, we developed a competence-based approach to the first semester of required freshman composition. Students were taught by individual instructors, but the departmental faculty collectively defined the outcomes expected, established the grading criteria, and set the standards for passing. Students had to pass a grammar and usage test and then an essay written in a supervised setting on topics assigned by the department. The faculty graded the essays, but never those of their own students. As we intended, the approach ensured that students who passed the course had met the same proficiency standards. But the approach also yielded a surprise. In mandatory student evaluation of instruction, English 101 had been receiving the lowest average ratings of any course taught in the department. Suddenly, after only one semester, it was receiving average ratings (from hundreds of students) that ranked at the top, comparable to ratings for small, senior-level courses for English majors. The students hated the course. They thought the department head was a very bad guy and said so. However, as their evaluations revealed, their own instructor was a good guy, the one who was trying to help them meet the unreasonable standards of a mean department. Never mind that their own instructor helped set the standards and participated in the grading! Instruction and assessment were separate matters.

Yes, it did become evident that some of us were better at enabling our students to pass the course than others. But as department head, I promised and ensured that such differences would not enter into the annual evaluations of faculty performance. To evaluate faculty performance on the basis of their students' performance, however seemingly logical in the abstract, would be in practice a serious distraction and would compromise the collegiality on which effective learning eventually depends.

Moving the assessment of learning out of the individual classroom may be scary to contemplate and is not without real risk, but it is the one thing within our power to accomplish that would make the most difference in the integrity and credibility of our assessments of learning.

Challenge 4: Public Ambivalence

If the first three challenges described could be effectively addressed (a very big if), might public discontent subside and support come with less intrusive strings attached? Discontent surely would not disappear, but it would likely have a different slant—because the public, in the end, wants to have it both ways. The contradictory desire for rigorous standards that everyone can meet is yet another challenge to integrity and credibility in the assessment of learning.

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If assessment were to be based on rigorous standards uniformly applied, initial pass rates would create consternation. The pass rate in the freshman composition course referred to in the preceding section was 65–70 percent for first-timers. Among repeaters, it dropped to around 50 percent. After three semesters in the course, no more than 80 percent of the persisting students had passed it. Those are not unreasonable or anomalous figures. If standards are sufficiently rigorous to challenge most students and are uniformly applied to all, there will be some who find the standards too challenging for their level of preparation, motivation, or ability. This unpleasant reality does not sit well with those who believe that higher education should improve academic standards but also should graduate a higher percentage of students.

When one seizes the high ground of integrity and credibility, however, the nature of the engagement shifts along with the relative positions. The public, as represented by its elected and appointed officials as well as self-appointed voices in the media, may be an unreasonable client and unfair critic, but it can understand when it has asked the impossible and has put itself in an ambivalent and thus defensive posture.

There is no battle between the public and higher education; the relationship is not adversarial. Those of us who serve higher education serve the public. All of us want to make college degrees accessible, affordable, achievable—and yet worthy. But those values coexist only in the abstract. In reality, we must make trade-offs among them. The trade-offs would work better if faculty and administrators could both demonstrate their commitment to the credible assessment of learning and at the same time effectively explain its implications to a public that may be disenchanted with our product, our price, and our seeming intransigence but is also ambivalent about its preferences. ■

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Integrating Assessment and Budget Planning Processes: A Good or a Bad Idea?

Jeff E. Hoyt

Griffith, Day, Scott, and Smallwood (1996) state, "Planning cannot survive without a budget, [and] neither planning nor budgeting can survive with integrity without assessment." If the integrity of planning and budgeting processes is affected by assessment, then perhaps there are effective ways in which assessment can be integrated into these processes and play a larger role than it has previously in college and university planning and budgeting.

Successful Integration

The literature provides a few examples of higher education institutions that have successfully integrated assessment with planning and budgeting processes, to varying degrees. Administrators at California State University, Sacramento, reviewed assessment data when developing that institution's strategic plan. "The resource priorities were drawn from the various themes of the strategic plan" (Shulock and Harrison, 1998, p. 30). The council examined theme papers containing results from all relevant assessments in order to establish budget priorities. However, an important question arose concerning how assessment could be central to budgeting at the unit level, given that "allocation decisions made in the schools and departments have a substantial impact on the degree to which the strategic plan goals are realized" (Shulock and Harrison, 1998, p. 36). The authors believed that "these decisions need to be informed by assessment information as well" (Shulock and Harrison, 1998, p. 36).

Paradise Valley Community College integrated planning, budgeting, and assessment data not only at the institutional level but also for departments. Quantitative indicators were used to "monitor learning outcomes and successes of students" and to determine whether departments were effectively supporting the college's strategic goals (Hart, 2000, p. 4). Assessment results were part of an annual program and budget request for resource allocation (Hart, 2000, p. 11). Similarly, at San Jacinto College Central, outcomes assessment was "linked with strategic planning and budgeting through all levels" (departments, divisions, and offices) (Braswell and May, 2000, p. 4). Units must describe their purposes and objectives (which are tied to college goals), action steps, criteria for success or benchmarks, evidence of progress, and their reflections on desired program improvements and budget requirements. At San Jacinto College Central, "all budget requests must be related to and supported by an institutional effectiveness unit plan" (Braswell and May, 2000, p. 8).

Reducing Paperwork: A Unified Reporting Template

The assessment director in the Division of Continuing Education (DCE) at Brigham Young University (BYU) proposed modifying an existing planning and budgeting template to both satisfy assessment reporting and provide the document for unit budget requests. The template effectively merges the processes into one report that is completed during the annual budget process. The merged process reduces paperwork, eliminating the need for an additional assessment report, and requires directors to report on and consider assessment results in the annual process of establishing budget priorities. This article summarizes the reasoning that led to this proposal.

The template was developed for several academic and administrative departments and should be versatile enough for use at different institutions. The DCE at BYU is made up of the following program departments: Evening Classes, Salt Lake Center, Conferences and Workshops, Independent Study (including online courses), Bachelor of General Studies, and Church Educational System Adult and Youth Programs. The program departments enroll approximately 25,000 full-time equivalent students. There are also seven service area departments: computer operations, Web development, conference center, financial services, human resources, registration services, and visual communications.

Process of Development

An assistant to the dean for assessment was hired to develop assessments of learning outcomes, particularly for the program departments, and to coordinate outcomes assessment for administrative departments. Each academic and administrative department already had an established assessment plan as a result of efforts to meet the requirements of a recent accreditation visit. However, there was no formal reporting of assessment results other than a unit self-study required by the university every seven to eight years and the institutional accreditation review every ten years. The assessment director proposed an annual formal reporting system so that assessment would not be neglected during the interim between the self-study and accreditation visits.

The division had an annual budget process that incorporated a standard form required by the university. Form A: Strategy and Planning Progress Report required departments to report on their accomplishments since the last planning cycle. A simple change that also required departments to report program improvements and link them to assessment results when appropriate would satisfy both the existing budget requirements and the need to close the loop for assessment.

On Form B: Strategy and Planning Document, directors detailed the goals and objectives for their departments, tied department goals and objectives to the university's goals, reported on their current status with metrics, and outlined their plans to close any gaps. At this point, it was noted that the goals and objectives on Form B were not always the same as goals and objectives on each department's assessment plan; however, in most cases, they were very similar. The assessment director met with department directors and created a consistent set of goals and objectives for both the assessment plans and Form B, including learning goals and objectives. The section on Form B that required directors to report their current status in regard to metrics was very close to the assessment requirements to document student achievement of educational outcomes. Thus, directors were instructed to also report on learning outcomes in the same document. This format worked well because learning goals and objectives are now part of the overall goals and objectives for the departments.

Metrics were underutilized by directors; however, templates were developed that included metrics or specific criteria for success under each objective. An example of a criterion for success listed under a learning objective is "80 percent of students will meet expectations for writing on reflective papers." A metric for an administrative objective might be "75 percent of employees will be satisfied to very satisfied with their employment, and any areas rated low will be improved where possible." Although some efficiency measures and enrollment goals were previously included as metrics, overall benchmarks from surveys already being conducted by the department were not. When reading through the prior budget documents, one would not be aware that any customer satisfaction or other surveys were being implemented by the division. With these changes, overall survey results were visible and would be reported and referenced in budget documents for both program and administrative departments.

> Learning goals and objectives are now part of the overall goals and objectives for the departments.

State, university, and division goals and objectives can be incorporated in department documents where appropriate, with specific criteria for success. Departments can also add their own goals and objectives. In our case, several common goals were developed across the division—for example, remaining within budget, offering adequate training for staff, providing a positive work environment, and implementing effective marketing.

Finally, instructions on Form C: Reallocation and Resource Request require directors to prioritize tactical objectives that require resources, specify possible reallocations that can be made with existing resources, and report on new resources needed in the coming year. No changes were needed on this form for assessment reporting purposes.

Conclusion

This proposal was by no means readily accepted by all directors, and its use is still in the process of being encouraged within the division. Nevertheless, why should an assessment director request a separate report and reporting process when those can be integrated into the existing budget process? The idea of assessment is not popular among directors who wish to dedicate their time and resources to getting the job done versus completing additional reports. With the proposed changes, directors need to give more attention to assessment and put more information in the existing budget documents, but this only increases the quality of current reporting processes and does not add another set of deadlines and reports that a director must complete to his or her busy schedule.

Implementing such an assessment system and integrating it into the budget process requires commitment from top leadership. Leaders must be skilled at identifying political gamesmanship and rejecting lack of funding as an excuse for a lack of performance. Effective use of existing resources is also an important criterion for success. The integration of outcomes assessment with the budget process can keep performance readily visible rather than hidden in a computer file or collecting dust on a department shelf. Assessment becomes part of a meaningful existing process rather than an accreditation requirement that is quickly forgotten or an additional burdensome reporting process that directors reluctantly complete. With the current emphasis on assessment in higher education, colleges and universities must find ways to integrate assessment with existing processes. Perhaps this proposal is an effective way to accomplish these ends. ■

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From the States

"Shovel-Ready" Data: The Stimulus Package and State Longitudinal Data Systems

Peter T. Ewell

The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, commonly referred to simply as *the stimulus package*, is poised to pump over $100 billion into U.S. public education in the next few years. This allocation reflects the Obama administration's new commitment to education as a public good, which is embodied in President Obama's ambitious goal of 60 percent of the country's citizens' having a postsecondary credential by 2020. As the president put it in his speech announcing the goal on February 24, 2009, "In a global economy, where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity; it is a prerequisite. The countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow." This agenda powerfully coalesces the calls for raising citizens' rates of attainment that have been advanced by dozens of policy leaders and think tanks over the past two years, largely stimulated by lagging U.S. performance in attainment among younger citizens as reported by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. But it also sets the stage for some unprecedented investments in state longitudinal data systems that may significantly affect postsecondary accountability.

Dissecting the many strands of the stimulus package that will potentially be invested in state data systems is a challenge because there are so many of them. The most straightforward of these is $250 million to support the development of state longitudinal data systems (SLDS), much of which will probably already have been allocated by the time this column is published. These funds are in addition to a smaller set of competitive grants for SLDS managed by the Institute of Education Sciences, which were awarded in three rounds of funding, starting in 2005. Virtually all of the states have received some funding to enhance databases in K–12 education in order to support continuing implementation of federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The promise of the new $250 million effort, though, is that postsecondary education will be in on the game. State education agencies (SEAs), which serve K–12 schools, will continue to be the formal recipients of these new funds, but the guidelines call for them to work with postsecondary and workforce agencies in their states to create data systems that are capable of tracking students from preschool through elementary and secondary education, into and through postsecondary education, and, ultimately, into the workforce. And these are not the only funds available. An additional $53.6 billion in stabilization funds will be made available to assist state education budgets in four areas, including improving the collection and use of P–16 longitudinal data. Another $5 billion in state incentive grants with similar provisions is part of the Secretary of Education's Race to the Top initiative. In fact, these provisions are coming so thick and fast that the Department of Education is having a hard time keeping up with them as it tries to produce guidelines that prevent duplicate efforts. For example, as I write this in July, the guidelines for the $250 million in SLDS grants, promised in March, still are not out.

> President Obama's education agenda sets the stage for some unprecedented investments in state longitudinal data systems that may significantly affect postsecondary accountability.

The investment of sums of this magnitude in state longitudinal data systems, however they are made, are likely to have a major impact on states' and the federal government's ability to track student progress and develop more comprehensive accountability measures. But the evolution of this story also illustrates several themes that have become familiar in conversations about higher education accountability more generally. One is the continuing difficulty of bridging the cultural gap between K–12 education and higher education. In the assessment of student learning, for example, it is a well-known phenomenon for a state legislature or governor's office to initially base any testing or reporting proposal for colleges and universities on what the state is already doing in K–12 education. This phenomenon occurred in the mid-1980s when the first state assessment mandates were enacted, and it has been a pronounced feature of the many government assessment-for-accountability proposals that were developed recently in the climate of NCLB and the Spellings commission hearings and report.

The SLDS conversation has been similarly dominated by K–12 concerns over the past two years. For example, opinion leader organizations like the National Data Quality Campaign and funders like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation seem continually to revert to the position that postsecondary student unit record systems (SURs) should "grow out of" the K–12 data systems now being built, despite the fact that many states have had a postsecondary SUR capability for more than twenty years. SEAs, moreover, have been the actual recipients of past SLDS grants since 2007 and are expected to be the lead agencies for proposals to access the new $250 million grant monies this fall. It is a promising development that grant guidelines encourage SEAs to incorporate state higher education executive offices (SHEEOs) in their planning and to pay more attention to linking databases. But data content, data standards, and the uses to which data are put remain vastly different in the two sectors.

Another important issue in the SLDS conversation is the complete absence of independent institutions. This omission again reflects the dominance of the K–12 perspective, shaped decisively by the reporting needs of NCLB, wherein private elementary and secondary institutions are not addressed. In higher education, in contrast, independent colleges and universities are major players, constituting more than half the institutions and enrolling about a fifth of undergraduate students. The accountability provisions of Title IV of the Higher Education Act therefore affect both public and independent institutions. Including independent institutions significantly extended assessment's reach when accreditation entered the fray two decades ago, and accreditors now constitute a far more important stimulus of assessment on campuses than do state governments. How independent colleges and universities are treated when the new SLDS grants get going next year will be interesting to watch. The organized opposition of this sector was what killed the national unit record proposal by the National Center for Education Statistics four years ago. But large and growing numbers of independent institutions already provide unit record data to their SHEEO agencies as a condition of participation in lucrative state student aid programs.

> Data content, data standards, and the uses to which data are put remain vastly different in the K–12 sector and the higher education sector.

A third important issue with respect to longitudinal database development is how to address the increasing challenge of student mobility across state lines. Student mobility is not a big issue in K–12 education, but it is of substantial concern in higher education; of the some 60 percent of students who earn a baccalaureate after attending two or more institutions, more than 40 percent are multistate enrollees. This phenomenon has led to several recent efforts to track postsecondary students more broadly. I described one of these efforts, based on the data holdings of the National Student Clearinghouse, in my last column (*see Assessment Update*, Volume 21, Issue 3, 2009). Findings from this effort for all fifty states have just been published by the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education (author of the biennial *Measuring Up* reports); they show that six-year graduation rates for four-year starters can be boosted by almost eleven percentage points by identifying graduates through multistate tracking, just under half of which occurs at out-of-state institutions. In parallel, the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education is spearheading an effort to link data drawn from SEAs, SHEEOs, and workforce agencies across a four-state region that includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Hawaii, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The last and most important point is that all this investment will unquestionably turn up the heat under the accountability pot. First, the very existence of linked databases increases state (and federal) capacity to ask more specific questions about student progress. And being able to do something in the accountability world usually leads to doing it. Second, spending on the nation's educational providers at such an unprecedented level and velocity will inevitably raise the question of what the taxpayers are getting for their money. Whatever piece of the stimulus bonanza comes our way, we in higher education should be grateful for it. But like the increasingly federalized bailed-out banking industry before us, we should be prepared for the other shoe to drop.

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A Rose by Any Other Name: Grading and Assessment

(continued from page 2)

scores by learning outcome for the full class. If an instructor wants to count attendance toward the course grade, it can be included in the course grade average and excluded from the measure of a specific learning outcome.

Table 1. Grading Matrix							
	Learning Outcome #1						
	Response Paper #1	Midterm Essay #3	Section III of Final Paper	Total Outcome #1*	Attendance	Total Including Attendance	Course Grade
Total possible points	30	15	25	70	20	96	
Student A	19	13	21	53	20	73	81% B-
Student B	23	14	23	60	16	76	84% B
Student C	28	15	23	66	16	82	91% A-
Entire class				60/70			

* For learning outcome #1, the faculty member can tabulate the performance of individual students as well as aggregate the group performance.

This chart is incomplete due to lack of space; it shows only one learning outcome, but in an Excel format, it could be extended to show each learning outcome and each respective element of each assignment. By tabulating a total for each learning outcome, faculty members could quickly see individual and group performance across the goals of a program.

Table 1 does not show two important elements that must accompany the process in order to meet the goals of outcomes assessment: a rubric and interfaculty review.

By using a rubric to guide the assignment of points for each element of each assignment, faculty can bring consistency to grading, as well as provide a basis for additional review by colleagues. In this case, a faculty member develops a score range and a definition for the level of performance at each range. Each assignment does not need to be subject to interfaculty review; the final paper is the most common artifact that would be reviewed. In addition to providing a consistent guide for faculty members, the rubric and scoring ranges can be provided to students, who would use them in the same way that a grantseeker would consult a solicitation announcement for insight on how to organize and orient a grant proposal.

Finally, this example uses the culminating course as the assessment event for a program. However, program faculty can back this approach into every course that constitutes a major requirement by ensuring that the course goals include a subset of the overall learning outcomes for the program. This alignment can be a useful complement to program-level outcomes assessment in which student learning across the variety of courses in the major is evaluated. While the approach could reach a point of diminishing returns by becoming overly reductionist about a complex curriculum, a modicum of common sense and attention to balance can help determine the desired degree of alignment.

In summary, if a faculty member can distill the assignments and elements of assignments so that they correspond with specific learning outcomes, an evaluation system can be built that accommodates both grading and assessment. Because both are necessary components of teaching and learning, it seems only logical to identify and develop processes that complement both. ■

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Assessment Measures

Using the IUPUI Faculty Survey to Assess Civic Engagement

Gary R. Pike

Civic engagement has become an important element in the mission of many colleges and universities. O'Meara (2005) found that almost two-thirds of the chief academic officers responding to a survey reported that their institution had updated its mission or strategic planning documents to include statements about civic engagement. However, only about one-third of the respondents indicated that their institution was able to document higher levels of civic engagement. Clearly, the assessment of how effectively institutions engage with their communities lags behind the desire to be engaged.

To date, many of the efforts to assess civic engagement have relied on students' self-reports of civic engagement. Both the National Survey of Student Engagement's *College Student Report* and the Higher Education Research Institute's *College Senior Survey* have been used to document levels of civic engagement (Bringle and Hatcher, forthcoming), but these surveys are limited in that they only measure student involvement in a relatively narrow range of civic activities. In a previous column, Judith Ouimet and I described a survey that the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) is developing that provides students with opportunities to respond to a much wider array of questions about civic engagement and service learning (Pike and Ouimet, 2009). Although the AASCU survey represents an important step forward in measuring levels of civic engagement, it does not provide information about what works in promoting service learning and civic engagement. To address this question, we have included several questions in the faculty survey at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) in order to assess faculty beliefs and behaviors related to service learning and civic engagement.

Faculty members' attitudes toward civic engagement and service learning, and the extent to which faculty members are themselves engaged with their communities, can have a significant effect on the success of civic engagement and service learning on campus (Bringle, Jones, and Pike, 2009). It is not surprising, therefore, that both the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Higher Education Research Institute have included questions in their faculty surveys about attitudes toward civic engagement, engagement in civic activities, and whether faculty members include service-learning activities in their courses. Both surveys provide useful baseline data about the use of and support for civic engagement and service learning. They also provide data that can be compared against results for other colleges and universities. However, both surveys measure faculty attitudes and behaviors at a very general level. Neither survey provides insights about why faculty members do or do not support civic engagement and service learning.

Faculty members' attitudes toward civic engagement and service learning, and the extent to which faculty members are themselves engaged with their communities, can have a significant effect on the success of civic engagement and service learning on campus.

To address the limitations of commercially available surveys of college faculty, IUPUI faculty have added nineteen items about service learning and civic engagement to their faculty survey. Nine of the questions are intended to measure intrinsic and extrinsic factors related to faculty attitudes toward service learning and civic engagement. IUPUI faculty are asked whether they strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree with statements such as "Faculty in my discipline have a professional obligation to apply their knowledge to problems in society" (intrinsic), "Preparing students for responsible citizenship should be an integral part

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of the undergraduate experience" (intrinsic), "Devoting professional or academic expertise to the community is valued highly in my department or program" (extrinsic), and "There is a high level of commitment on this campus to civic engagement as an integral part of IUPUI culture" (extrinsic).

The survey also asks faculty members about their levels of involvement in a wide variety of civic activities, including teaching service-learning classes, providing professional services to a community group, and participating actively in a campaign for public office. Faculty members are asked how frequently they engaged in each activity over the last three years. Response options are *never, once or twice, occasionally,* and *frequently*.

The survey was first administered to full-time IUPUI faculty during the spring 2005 semester. Two slightly different versions of the survey were developed for medical school and non–medical school faculty, but the civic engagement items were identical on both surveys (see http://www.imir.iupui.edu/newsite/surveys/reports/details/?GroupID=6&ID=43). Complete responses were received from 1,001 faculty members in 2005—a 53 percent response rate.

A factor analysis of faculty members' responses to the nine items about attitudes toward service learning and civic engagement identified two scales corresponding to intrinsic and extrinsic factors associated with attitudes toward civic engagement. The four items that constitute the first scale all deal with faculty members' attitudes about service learning and civic engagement and represent an intrinsic orientation. The three questions that constitute the second scale represent an extrinsic orientation because they focus on perceived institutional support for service learning and civic engagement. Two items were not aligned with either scale. Interestingly, these two questions were worded to measure negative attitudes toward civic engagement. Measures of internal consistency were 0.73 and 0.79, respectively, for the first two scales.

Factor analysis of the ten activity items identified two interpretable factors. Eight items were associated with a general community involvement dimension and could be used to construct a reliable scale of faculty members' involvement in the community ($\alpha = 0.81$). The remaining two questions focused on faculty members' involvement in political activities and did not provide a dependable measure that could be used as a second activity scale.

As institutions move forward to implement their civic engagement agenda, systematic assessment will be needed in order to understand campus culture, design service opportunities, and allocate resources.

These scales have been very useful in assessing the status of faculty attitudes and identifying opportunities to improve civic engagement, particularly at the academic unit level. For example, faculty members at IUPUI generally hold positive attitudes toward service learning and civic engagement, but some units (for example, the School of Social Work) are substantially more favorable in their attitudes than others (for example, the School of Science). Results from individual questions have also been useful assessment tools. Faculty members in the School of Social Work reported the highest levels of involvement in civic activities and also perceived campus support for civic engagement to be strong. In contrast, faculty members in the School of Medicine reported relatively low levels of involvement and tended, on average, to disagree with the view that the campus supported civic engagement. These results have led some schools to reevaluate their support for civic engagement and service learning. The faculty survey continues to be administered on campus in order to track, among other things, progress toward the institution's goals in regard to civic engagement.

As institutions move forward to implement their civic engagement agenda, careful assessment of the effects of their efforts will be essential. Systematic assessment will be needed in order to understand campus culture, design service opportunities, and allocate resources. Surveys of faculty members are only one source of data about civic engagement, but they are an important source. These surveys can provide information about levels of faculty engagement, faculty support for service learning, and faculty perceptions of institutional commitment to civic engagement. All of these elements help define the campus culture in regard to civic engagement.

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