


Strategies to Overcome the Barriers in Assessment of Student Learning and Development

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Marilee Ludvik Bresciani, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Postsecondary Education and
Co-Director of the Center for Educational Leadership, Innovation, and Policy
San Diego State University
Marilee.Bresciani@mail.sdsu.edu



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Presentation Overview


- Summary of challenges that assessment presents
- Examples of common assessment challenges
- Suggested methods to address those challenges
- Resources
- Discussion and questions



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Examples from the field


- What are the greatest barriers you have faced in implementing assessment?
- What are some examples of concerns about assessment you have heard from colleagues?



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Common Challenges

Are there any similarities between our groups?



This Presentation...

- will not focus on the challenges “external” to the systematic structure and delivery of higher education.
- will address the challenges within our “locus of control”.




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Common Challenges Assessment Presents

- Understanding what it is
- Not knowing how to do it
- Finding Time to engage
- Finding time to document
- Getting support from top leadership
- Not using results to inform decision-making
- People who prefer anecdotal decision-making
- Academic Freedom
- Academic Autonomy

Source: Ewell, P. (2005); Bresciani, Zelnis, and Anderson (2004); Bresciani, Anderson, and Allen, 2006



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Common Challenges Assessment Presents, Cont.

- Lack of organizational incentives
- Lack of communication about what has been learned
- Difficulty with requesting data
- Difficulty with finding data
- Difficulty in identifying how to use data
- Difficulty interpreting data
- Fear of change, of unknown
- Concern over faculty contracts - a.k.a. - unions
- Confusion

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Source: Ewell, P. (2005), Bresciani, M.J., and Anderson (2004), Bresciani, M.J., and Anderson (2006)



Common Challenges Assessment Presents, Cont.

- Avoiding being labeled as "one of them"
- Avoiding burnout
- Lack of truly authentic instruments and evidence-gathering techniques
- Challenge of benchmarking against external standards
- Concern over student motivation and involvement
- Challenge of managing the assessment process

Source: Ewell, P. (2005), Bresciani, M.J., et alia (2006)

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In addition, see Table 1

Tips to Identifying Resistors

From Bresciani, 2006

- Treat every "excuse" to not engaging in assessment as if you heard it for the first time.
- Remember that what is being said is not always the reason for the resistance.
- Probe with empathetic questions and genuine offers of assistance to identify what the real barrier is
- Work with the "resistor" to identify the solution.

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Case Studies

Within your groups, discuss your case studies. What solutions do you propose?

Suggestions for Addressing Anxieties

Summarize your case study

What do you suggest as the solution?

What do you think will work for you?

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Suggestions

from Bresciani, 2006

- Get your leadership on board
 - Explain why assessment is not a fad
 - Explain that doing it well does require resources
- Fine balance between “top-down” expectations and “bottom-up” engagement
- Fine balance between structure and flexibility

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Suggestions, Cont.

- Know your university’s culture
- Define assessment
- Articulate a shared conceptual framework and common language for assessment
- Articulate and implement expectations
- Identify short and long range goals for the process
- Disseminate information on the process - keep the process transparent

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Suggestions, Cont.

- Genuinely interact with faculty/staff and utilize feedback to improve the process
- Design and implement a professional development plan
 - Tie to theory, delivery, evaluation methods, identifying data, interpreting data, use of data, report writing, etc.
 - Include how to reflect and how to collaborate
- Provide incentives for initial engagement
- Consider engagement in process - not generation of results - as a performance criteria and position description expectation

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Suggestions, Cont.

- Re-allocate time from doing to reflection of doing
- Involve students, where appropriate and accepted by your institutional culture
- Identify assessment successes
- Celebrate good practices in quality assessment

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Suggestions, Cont.

- Start small and grow
- Start with early adopters and then ask them to be the spokespersons
- Remind people why they are engaging in assessment - not a process for process’ sake
- Embrace the ambiguity
- Remain flexible, but systematic

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Suggestions, Cont.

- Remember that Faculty / Administrators must have ownership of the process
- Respect varying disciplines’ academic freedom
- Recruit influential faculty / administrators to lead the process
 - Stagger or turn over appointments to avoid burnout
- Offer one-to-one or group consultations/sessions as needed and requested
- Take time to get to know and cater to specific needs

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Suggestions, Cont.

- Share examples with each other
- Advertise your assessment learnings and decisions made
- Nudge and Retreat (Maki, 2001)
- Incorporate students in all facets of assessment planning and implementation, if your program is ready
- Answer the question, "What happens if I don't engage in assessment?"

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How will you know when you are there?

- Visit the Commission on Higher Education's website for Levels of Implementation matrix found at <http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/resources/assessment/index.html>
- Use or adapt self-evaluation tools found at http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/files/evaluation/evaluation.htm
- Look at what your assessment plans and results are telling you
- Ask your faculty, co-curricular specialists, and students
- Disseminate as appropriate

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Resources

- Each Other
- University Planning and Analysis (UPA) Assessment website
 - <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/>

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Questions and Discussion

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One Minute Evaluation

- What is the most valuable lesson that you learned from this session?
- What is one question that you still have?
- What is one thing you will implement on your campus as a result of this presentation?

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References

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Maki, P. (2001). *Program review assessment*. Presentation to the Committee on Undergraduate Academic Review at NC State University.

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