Institutional and Organizational Assessment

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Introduction

• Assessment is “in vogue” because of an increasing emphasis on institutional accountability.
Accountability Is Important
Because:

• Stakeholders increasingly demand that higher education institutions prove that students actually learn what they have been promised as graduates from these institutions.

• stakeholders feel powerless to individually confront higher education’s existing practice to regulate itself through the accreditation process.
Stakeholders

• institutional leadership, such as a Chancellor, VP for Academic Affairs, Provost, etc.;
• institutional academic administration, such as deans, etc.;
• departmental and program chairs;
• faculty;
• students;
• parents;
• alumnae;
• regional and national accrediting bodies;
• state executives such as Governors;
• state legislatures;
• state education commissions;
• members of Congress and others
Examples

• Rep. John A. Boehner, Ohio (R) heads the House Committee on Education and the Workforce
Examples

• In July 2003, Florida’s Board of Governors, which oversees the state’s public universities, considered requiring their students to take a standardized test before they graduate to determine whether they learned anything.
Examples

• H.R 4283, College Access & Opportunity Act (May 5, 2004) to reauthorize the Higher Education Act
Accountability Drives Assessment

- The pressure on higher education institutions to prove accountability has moved beyond the acceptance and reliance of self-reports and anecdotal evidence compiled during the self-regulatory accreditation process to an increasing demand from a variety of constituencies to demonstrate institutional effectiveness by focusing on quality measures, such as educational quality, and cost efficiencies.
Accountability Drives Assessment

• Accountability focuses on results as institutions quantify or provide evidence that they are meeting their stated mission, goals, and objectives.
Accountability Drives Assessment

• As a result, there is growing interest in answering such questions such:
  – What should students learn?
  – How well are they learning it?
  – What measures and procedures does the institution utilize to determine that it is effective?
  – To what extent does the institution offer evidence that demonstrates its effectiveness to the public?
  – What does the institution plan to do with this evidence to improve learning?
Outcomes

• Student outcomes refer to aggregate statistics on groups of students
  – Graduation, retention, transfer rates, etc.

• Student learning outcomes document the change in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in students over the duration of a program of study
  – What do students know that they did not know before?
  – What can they do that they could not do before?
Need for Planning

• To meet the needs of the accrediting agencies and other institutional constituencies, the student learning outcomes assessment effort should originate from an institutional planning process
Outcomes Assessment Planning

• is a continuous, systematic process of institutional effectiveness focusing on planning, discovering, understanding and improving student learning.
Planning Culture

Along a continuum of

“we do it because we have to”

to

“we do it because it is a tool in helping the institution review, evaluate and improve educational quality.”
Institution and Organization

• Outcomes assessment has placed shared responsibility on all institutional units for providing evidence of their contributions to desired educational outcomes and to incorporate outcomes assessment into planning and improvement.
Institution and Organization

• One may view a higher education institution as being comprised of both horizontal and vertical organizations.
Institution and Organization

• As a result, outcome assessment plans are usually created and implemented at three levels:
  – Institution
  – academic departments
  – academic support departments such as the library
Institution and Organization

• Assessment begins with educational values.

• Goals for student learning should be embedded within the context of the larger institutional planning process and its institutional mission.
Institution and Organization

- The plans created at the academic department and academic support department levels (organization) should be based upon the mission statement which publicly declares the institution’s educational goals, as well as its values and principles.

- While the identification for student learning objectives may originate from the institutional level, educational quality and its assessment are primarily a program-based effort implemented and even managed at the course level.
Process

• To directly impact upon all students and faculty, these educational expectations are reinforced by creating objectives and standards in the core (general education) curriculum, by the academic discipline, and program.

• These objectives are then refined and structured at the course level to be more specific and measurable.
Process

- Educational objectives are then implemented, and later measured and compiled at the course level.
Process

• The outcome findings are then reported through the academic program to the institutional level for summary compilation, analysis and reporting to stakeholders.
• In turn, the institutional assessment is usually a compilation of the reported findings of the broad educational objectives restated as measurable outcomes.
Library as Academic Support

• The academic library is an important and central academic support department in the higher education institution. As a contributor to the educational mission of the institution, the library must identify and be responsive to the following:
  – what are the institutional goals?
  – what do institutions think is important to learn or achieve?
  – what does the library do/provide to support these goals?
  – how does the library measure its contribution?
  – how is that contribution reported?
  – how does the library use the findings to improve its resources and services?
Library as Academic Support

• one direct contribution the library makes to institutional educational goals and objectives is its role in developing student learning outcomes for information literacy skills
Library as Academic Support

• While assessment efforts and results should focus on the primary role of the teaching-learning library, other performance indicators must measure and document the library’s impact on other identified campus wide outcomes:
  – supporting faculty teaching efforts
  – supporting faculty scholarly activity
  – supporting intra-institutional services and activities such as committee work
  – developing of new knowledge or information-retrieval products.
Library as Academic Support

• Academic libraries have measured their contribution to institutional effectiveness using inputs and outputs.
Measures of Library Use

- **inputs**
  - are the resources used to support the library’s infrastructure: collections, staffing, the physical facility and installed information technologies.

- **activities**
  - what the program does with the inputs to fulfill its mission (conduct the program; teach classes)
Measures of Library Use

• outputs
  – direct products of program activities
  – measures quantifying workload undertaken and/or completed, such as the number of books circulated or the number of reference questions answered
Measures of Library Use

• As part of the effort to improve accountability measures, regional accrediting bodies are increasingly focusing on determining learning results rather than counting library books.
Outcome Measures of Library Use

- is user oriented rather than institution centered
- measures changes in library users as a result of their contact with an academic library’s programs, resources and services:
  - new knowledge
  - new skills
  - changed attitudes or values
  - modified behavior
  - improved condition or altered status
Differences

• Differences exist among inputs, outputs, and outcomes by:
  – Definitions
  – Methodologies used to compile data
  – Usage and analysis
Direct Methods

- **Qualitative**: developmental portfolios, think-aloud protocol, and directed conversations
- **Quantitative**: content analysis, evaluation of theses/dissertations, tests (even ones administered as pre- and post-tests), videotape and audiotape evaluation, and nationally developed tests
Indirect Measures

- **Qualitative**: focus group interviews, curriculum and syllabus evaluation, exit interviews, external reviewers, observation, self-assessment
- **Quantitative**: general surveys
Differences

• Usage and analysis: How are the data compiled used?
Outputs and Information Competencies

• As an example, apply the objective “to reduce the number of retrievals (hits) per search on electronic aggregate and specialized databases.”
Outcomes and Information Competencies

• Outcomes would consider:
  – is the objective measurable?
  – can this objective be taught?
  – can one measure if anything was learned?
  – can a change in the person be identified and/or measured?
  – can the results be used to improve instruction?
Outcomes Assessment and Info Lit

• Create an assessment plan
• Implement the plan and measures
• Compile and analyze the measures
• Report the findings
• Return the compiled and analyzed measures and reported findings to the library’s planning process.
Outcomes are Not Necessarily Outputs

• While some outcomes are outputs, learning outcomes are not necessarily outputs.
One Perspective

Inputs → Outputs → Outcomes

Outcomes → Service quality Satisfaction
Institutional Effectiveness and Improvement

Outcomes
Student outcomes (aggregate outputs)
Student learning outcomes

Analysis/Review/Evaluation

Inputs

Outputs

Satisfaction
Service Quality
An Example

• “life long learning”
Conclusions

• Outcomes assessment measures the contributions the library made to the university or college’s educational mission as a whole

• Conducting student learning outcomes assessment is designed to improve library services.
Conclusions

• One does not have to measure everything
• One does not have to measure outcomes continually
Conclusions

• A single measure will not address the complexity of the library’s contributions to support educational goals and other aspects of institutional effectiveness.
Conclusions

• What is learned from one library is likely usable in another library of similar nature
Conclusions

• The impact of outcomes assessment is only starting to unfold and it is intended to alter institutional and organizational (e.g., library and academic programs) cultures over time.