Assessing Student Learning

Huston-Tillotson University

January 2008
Brain Games

Huston-Tillotson University Mission

Students

Learning

Ideal Student Graduate Characteristics
The Promise of Assessment
Institutional Improvement
Public Accountability

This session will

* demonstrate meaningful assessment of student learning in a small college environment

* Be interactive- allowing you to think about your campus and your plan for improvement
Margaret Miller  

Change

“The major challenge continues to be that we cannot tell the public anything meaningful about the most important result of a college education—what students learn.”

19th Century Challenge: build system of higher education
20th Century Challenge: Provide access to higher education
21st Century Challenge

Ensure the quality of
Higher Education
Assessment

A learning system rather than a learning unit

Faculty know students, evaluate individual student learning and assume that in-class assessment and final grade is enough to demonstrate quality.

IT IS NOT!!!!!!! No more than one puzzle piece put in the right place is enough to see the full picture.
Infusing a Spirit of Inquiry

The key to a strong assessment system in a small college is_______________.


*People who believe they are likely to win are also likely to put in the extra effort at difficult moments to ensure that victory.*
Faculty lead the dialogue of a true learning organization

1. How well are our students learning?
2. How well are our administrative services supporting student learning?

Must never be afraid of the answers.....

Miller: “In an era of questioning, both our professionalism and our self interest require us to answer the question of how we are doing as honestly and as concretely as we do our best scholarly work.” Change 2007
The Purpose of Assessment

1. To demonstrate quality and excellence and ensure the same level of quality continues.

2. To identify areas needing attention, support and development and decide how to improve those areas.

3. To plan changes to improve policies, procedures, services, curriculum, resources, teaching, campus climate and ultimately improve student learning.
Assessment is different than planning

Planning: Checklist completed or not
Add one faculty member with a background in medieval history
Increase faculty development money to support incorporating a global perspective into coursework

Assessment: SO WHAT?
How did the addition positively increase student learning?
Did faculty development money increase the global perspectives of students taking the coursework?
The Six Accountability Questions

1. What will you assess? Learning goals.
2. What tools will you use to gather the information? Assessment methods.
3. From whom and how will you gather the information? Assessment plan.
4. How will you analyze the results? Data review process.
5. How will you use results to improve student learning? Closing the loop.
6. How will you communicate results to various publics? Accountability and Branding.
## Assessment

### Student Learning Outcomes

**Assessment: value**

- A. Course
- B. Program
- C. Campus culture

### Student Learning:

1. Individual
2. Students one course/multiple sections
3. Students in Program/Major/Minor
4. Impact of General Education
5. Overall impact

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You cannot assess what you have not defined:

Establish Clear Learning Goals

Are your learning goals clear?
Are they shared goals?
Can you talk about them easily? Are they distinctive? Are they branded?
What are you assessing?

Knowledge of the subject matter?
Specialized skills and competencies?
Critical/ integrative thinking?
Writing skills?
Verbal communication skills?
Attitudes or values?
Habits/ behaviors?
Career/ Graduate school success?
Columbia College

General Education Goal: An appreciation of the liberal arts. Students will have a base of knowledge in the liberal arts and an acquaintance with the distinct modes of inquiry of various disciplines.
How would you evaluate this goal?

Identify at least three ways you could assess this goal at Huston Tillotson University.
Assessment Methods

Multiple methods
- Qualitative and quantitative methods
- Standardized and non-standardized methods
- National and cohort comparative methods
- Internal and external assessments

Looking for patterns
Planning for dialogue
An appreciation of the liberal arts. Students will have a base of knowledge in the liberal arts and an acquaintance with the distinct modes of inquiry of various disciplines.
Measured by

Common LA 101 exam question: On the basis of what you have learned in this class, argue for or against the value of studying the liberal arts in college. Regardless of your argument, use the modes of inquiry of at least two of the liberal arts to make your points.

Academic Profile: first year and senior year

Sophomore/ Junior focus groups

Senior portfolio review

Senior survey
Goal: Higher order thinking and communication skills

The ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate information and problems

The ability to communicate effectively in both written and spoken forms

Critical Thinking
  * pre-post first year critical thinking test
  * Academic profile 1st year senior year
  * NSSE
  * Capstone portfolios

Communication Skills
  * Speech 104 video external review
  * NSSE
  * Writing and speaking across curriculum rubric evaluations
  * internship evaluation
  * Leadership semester evaluation
Understanding both the commonality and diversity of the human experience

An awareness of human commonalities and differences

The ability to live and work with people who are different from oneself

NSSE  CSEQ  Senior Survey  CIRP/ SCC
Leadership Semester  Residence Life Survey
Curriculum Inventory  Alumnae First Destination
Other CC Learning Outcomes

Increased understanding of women in our culture and the world

Understanding of the nature and application of moral, ethical and religious values

Skills and habits for life-long learning
What assessment methods work?

Assessment methods do not have to be costly; each one does not have to be done every year; they do have to be effective measures.

Pre-post group inventories/ tests-
standardized or non standardized
skill/ attitude/ behavior/ knowledge

Curriculum maps

Course embedded assessments

Rubrics for goal assessment throughout courses
Assessment measures

Comparative analysis: benchmark colleges/programs

Portfolios/ Capstone course evaluations (internal and external evaluators)

Focus groups: Junior Year

Student surveys

Employer surveys: Internships and after graduation

Graduate School placement/ scores
Match course and course assessment measures to each learning goal. Make it meaningful!

Course Assessment: student evaluations; faculty evaluations; sequence assessment; senior survey; standardized tests; common tests; independent faculty review of sample work.

Changes at CC: faculty development, texts, sequence of topics, use of on-line material; assignments, time on specific subjects/ skills.
Course Sequencing

Common writing assignments; linked writing assignments; academic profile; NSSE; rubric assessment of writing and/or knowledge skills; faculty review of sample work.

Changes at CC: course sequencing; courses not appropriate for first year; infuse writing and oral communication throughout; emphasize service learning.
Assessment at CC led to

Re-design of General Education Program with attention to four year integrated experience.

Reduction in required coursework coupled with commitment to common experiences to enhance student learning.

Design of two signature courses, infusion of leadership into curriculum, implementation of leadership semester and leadership transcript

Creation of Center for Engaged Learning, student mentoring, sophomore learning communities emphasizing social justice
How does your assessment data get into the planning system?

Identify one “learning” you’ve gathered through assessment data.

How did that “learning” get to decision makers?
How does change occur?

All assessment of student learning comes to the Assessment Committee and the Core Curriculum Committee.

Assessment of student learning that has institutional impact comes to the President’s Council and the Department Chairs.

Assessment information is shared with faculty and staff at opening meeting, opening workshops and all faculty and staff meetings.
Provost and Assessment Committee are Information Hubs

Any group reviewing assessment data can recommend follow-up to improve learning outcomes.

To faculty committee: Instruction class and community time

To college committee: Diversity to improve learning to live and work with others
Issues raised through assessment data

Student writing and reading scores on the Academic Profile were not showing the expected improvement from 1st to senior years.

Referred to Pearce Communication Center to infuse writing across the curriculum.

Referred to Department Chairs to increase the amount of reading in upper level courses.
NSSE Trends

2000 Indicators: CC distinctive in 1st year but not senior year. By 2005, indicators were positive for both 1st and senior years.

Changed timing of 2 signature courses
Sophomore Learning Community
Junior: Leadership infusion in each major/
  Leadership semester/ service learning/
  Leader2leader
Senior: Capstone course in each major/ Leadership
  Transcript/ Leadership semester presentation
Assessment of Educational Experience

CIRP/ CSS
- Academic Profile
- Employer Survey
- Focus groups
- Job placement

NSSE
- Senior Survey
- External reviews
- Portfolio review
- Graduate Scores

Leadership portfolio review
Leadership semester review
Capstone project reviews
The Habits of Highly Effective Assessment Systems

1. Shared, believable learning goals communicated to students
2. Multiple measures
3. Organized feedback system
4. Broad based involvement
5. Open sharing of data
6. Dialogue with spirit of inquiry not culture of fear
7. Changes resulting from assessment
Accountability: communicating a unique brand of student learning

Clear goals - use mission/ values/ vision language to communicate your unique impact

Structure communication processes that work on your campus - BOT/ Alumnae/ Community leaders/ Parents/ Students

Gather data re market impact of your brand.
Columbia College Promise
Statement

The Columbia College community empowers motivated students to

Explore new ideas
Develop their voices
Cultivate within themselves the leadership abilities
To build a better world
How do you measure a promise?

Leadership Semester
Leadership Transcript
Leadership Portfolio
Capstone Presentations
Learning Communities
Conference Presentations
NSSE
Employer Survey
Continuous improvement

Check to see if action made a difference.

Keep track of trends. Don’t expect immediate results.

Benchmark against national and international excellence.

Set priorities and allocate resources to achieve your student learning goals.
Columbia College is where young women become strong leaders. Leadership is not the position you hold but the difference you make. It is a fundamental value and a pervasive force throughout campus.

At Columbia College we put **You First** as you develop your courage, commitment, confidence and competence to build a better world for others.
Creating A Culture of Assessment

Integrated involvement of faculty, staff and students in assessment

Organized system of getting assessment information to faculty and staff

Benchmark and trend analysis to let you know how you are doing
Ponder Failure

Each action that does not work is another opportunity for assessment and planning.

The more you assess, the more you understand the root causes of your learning dilemma.

The more you know the root causes, the more effectively you can plan for changes.

Assessment becomes real and meaningful in these kinds of dialogues.....
Celebrate Success

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But in ourselves.

Small colleges are havens for excellent student learning. Embrace assessment, learn to measure student learning, communicate it and celebrate it!