The Importance of Student Learning Outcomes: An Institutional Perspective

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Johnson C. Smith University

- HBCU, private, undergraduate institution
- Liberal Arts → Comprehensive
- Located in Charlotte, North Carolina
- 103 Faculty
- Enrollment 1474
- Faculty Development Program
- ThinkPad University (Technology Infrastructure)
- Freshman Academy – Learning Community Model
Our Mission

http://www.jcsu.edu

...The University endeavors to produce graduates who are able to communicate effectively, think critically, learn independently as well as collaboratively, and demonstrate competence in their chosen fields...
Our QEP

• Strengthening the Quality of the Freshman Year Experience through Increasing Student Engagement

• http://www.jcsu.edu/jcsusacs
History of Assessment of Learning Outcomes JCSU

• Phase I: 1987-92
  - Retention and Academic Achievement

• Phase II: 1993-1995
  - Early Outcomes Assessment by Program

• Phase III: 1996-2003
  - Technology and Learning Outcomes

• Phase IV: 2004 to Present
  - Transformative Assessment: Emerging Framework
Phase I

- 1987-1992 Retention and Academic Achievement
  - Freshman Studies
  - Sophomore Competency Assessment
  - Major Field Assessment (MFAT, ACAT)
  - Establishment of Center for Teaching and Learning
    - General Studies
    - Faculty Development
    - Office of Assessment
    - Academic Support Services
Phase I: Lessons Learned

- Continuous Improvement as a standard for Institutional Assessment Practices
- Improvement statistically defined as an increase in means with a decrease in standard deviation
  -- Deming

*Senior Norms*

**Sophomore Competency Testing**

*Academic Profile - Sophomore Cohorts*

[Graph showing academic progress over years with lines for Writing, Math, and Reading.]
Freshman to Sophomore Year Retention Results

- Freshman Studies Inquiry Curriculum
- Retained
Phase II: Assessment Activities

- 1992-1996 Institutional Coordination of Outcomes Assessment by Degree Programs
  - Formalization of MFAT, ACAT for degree programs
  - Student Satisfaction Surveys
  - Standardized Testing Day (Each Semester)
  - Senior Seminar and Capstone Courses
  - Senior Investigative Paper
  - Service Learning
  - Establishment of the combined Office of Institutional, Planning, Assessment, Effectiveness and Research (IPAER)
  - Formal Strategic Planning Initiative
Phase III: Assessment Activities

• 1996-2003 Technology and Learning Outcomes
  - Bush-Hewlett Faculty Development Program
  - Mellon Technology Improvement Project
  - ThinkPad University Planning
  - Teaching and Learning with Technology Roundtable
  - Flashlight Online and Small Classroom Studies
  - UNCF Faculty Development and Technology Project
  - Introduction of the Mini-Grant as Assessment Learning Strategy
  - STA Program Initiated
  - Instructional Technology (Information Services)
Phase III Lessons Learned

• How technology is used to carry out an educational activities determines the nature of learning outcomes, not the technology itself

• “Seven Principles of Good Practices in Undergraduate Education”

• Mini-Grants team projects of small classroom studies
Phase III Strategy: Mini-Grants Faculty Development Projects

- Early and Successful Strategy
  - 2 to 3 faculty working together on a classroom improvement project
  - Required an assessment plan
  - Pre-Faculty Learning Community focus which emphasizes Learning Outcomes within the context of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) values
  - Transformative Assessment Strategy
Phase IV

• 2003 – Present  Transformative Assessment as an Emerging Framework
  – The **Purpose of Assessment** is align with institutional plans and supports collaboration of faculty, staff, and students
  – **Data Acquisition and Analysis** should be informed by multiple sources that can illuminate student learning processes and purposes
  – **Assessment Findings** are used for the improvement of teaching and learning and to support the operational “culture of evidence”
  – **Dissemination** internally and externally with the intention to expand collaborative partnerships
Transformative Assessment

- Transformative assessment systems are institution-wide assessment strategies that are:
  - Based on institutional vision and goals.
  - Implemented in an integrated way for all levels (the course, the program, and the institution)
  - Aligned around systematically transforming teaching and learning, to improve student learning outcomes.
  - Used as a tool for communicating the nature of the desired transformation of teaching and learning.
  - Includes the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of the use of technology.

-- Brown, Ehrmann, Suter, Lippencott
Phase IV Project Activities

• BeTA Project (Better Teaching through Assessment)
  - Transforming course evaluation data for the improvement of teaching and learning
  - Creating a culture of reflective practice among faculty and students
  - Linking learning outcomes to practices
  - Institutional ownership of course evaluations process

• Visible Knowledge Mapping (VKM) - useful technique for working with faculty, administrators, and students to clarify their ideas, individually and then collectively, about the nature of good teaching and good courses.

• Concept Mapping - Strategy for creating consensus and inquiry among a diverse constituency for program planning and evaluation

JOHNSON C. SMITH UNIVERSITY
Phase IV Major Development

• Leaning Outcomes Assessment incorporated in Strategic Plan

• Increased Use of Technology to facilitate assessment activities (SharePoint Assessment Portal, Flashlight Online, TrueOutcomes Assessment Archive)

• JCSU QEP encourages the development of practices to increase student participation in Assessment as critical to increasing Student Engagement
  - Reflective Practice
  - Improving the quality and quantity of student responses and participation levels
  - Student academic and career development
Phase IV Current Status

- Increased granularity at the course and instructional activity level
- The university as Learning Community
- From Mini-Grants to Faculty Learning Communities

- Assessment Archive and Management Software - TrueOutcomes
- E-Portfolio Assessment Tools
- Learning Outcomes Assessment in each degree program
- QEP Focus on Student Engagement
- Learning Outcomes Institutional Process
- Emergence of Faculty Learning Communities
Special Focus: The JCSU QEP

• SACS QEP Requirement invites institutions to engage the issues of learning outcomes in the context of a transformative framework

• “Strengthening the Quality of the Freshman Year Experience through Student Engagement”
  - Active Learning
  - Critical Thinking
  - Student Engagement in Assessment
  - Student Planning for Future
Phase IV Strategy:
Faculty Learning Community (FLC)

• A faculty learning community (FLC) is a cross-disciplinary group of 6-15 faculty and staff engaging in an active, collaborative, year-long curriculum program about enhancing teaching and learning

• Transformative Assessment Strategy
Current Faculty Learning Communities

- Institutional Effectiveness
- E-portfolios
- Hybrid Courses
- Teaching with Course Management Packages
- Learning Communities in the Classroom
- Student Engagement (QEP Focus)
- Research and Scholarship of Teaching (SoTL)
- Mobile Computing and the Classroom
- Teaching and Scholarship (New Faculty Cohort)
Activities of J CSU FLCs

- Bi-weekly meetings
- Website development
- Seminars and workshops on FLC topic
- Post School workshops on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- Community Retreat on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Research Projects
- FLC Collaborative with Miami University to recruit other HBCUs for FLC projects
The Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan

- Mission
- Program Goals and Objectives
- Assessment Measures
- Program Alignment – Curriculum Matrix
- Explicit Assessment Implementation Plans
- Assessment Archive and Results Reporting
- Meaningful Assessment and Use of Results
- Continuous Improvement
Reflect on the Mission

Mission Statement
The values and philosophy of the department or program

Goals
General aims or purposes of the program or curriculum

Cognitive
What does the student know?

Performance/Skill
What can the student do?

Affective
What does the student care about?

Objectives

Objectives

Objectives

Objectives

Objectives

Objectives

Objectives

Objectives

Objectives

Objectives
Use Variety of Instruments

Assessment Measures

Senior Thesis or Research Project
Performance Experience
Capstone Course
Student Portfolios
Senior Essay and Interview
Comprehensive Exam

Other Alternatives
Course-embedded, Student Self-Assessment, Student Peer Assessment, Secondary Reading, External Examiners, Department Historical Data on Student Performance and Placement, Focus Groups, Alumni Surveys and Studies, Research Studies
Seek Coherence

### Program Matrix

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<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objective 1</th>
<th>Objective 2</th>
<th>Objective 3</th>
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Explicit Implementation Plans

Assessment Implementation

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<tr>
<th>Assessment Activity</th>
<th>Who Responsible</th>
<th>When Analyzed</th>
<th>When Implemented</th>
<th>When Reported</th>
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Schedules and Responsibilities
Simple and Consistent

Data Archive and Results Reporting

Outcome Dimension

Outcomes Databases

Baseline 2004 2005 2006 2007

Year
Meaningful Use of Results

Document Use of Results

- Syllabus Revision
- Curriculum Change
- Instructional Changes
- Assessment System Changes
- Resource Changes
Continuous Improvement

Assessment Cycle

- Identify Outcomes
- Implement Change
- Gather Evidence
- Interpret Change
Some Challenges

• Trying to measure everything that moves
• Being overly rigorous or too precise
• Not focusing on really meaningful outcomes
• Lack of collaboration and public sharing
• Evidence should be cumulative and be collected throughout a program (Curriculum Matrix)
• Encouraging multiple perspectives, judgments, dimensions of student learning
• Developing a consensus of assessment tools and reflective practices
• Transforming “folklore” and “anecdotes” into “evidence”
Creating the Shift

• Commitment to change through planning and operational decision making; Assessment and Strategic Planning, and Budgeting are linked

• Collaboration among institutional stakeholders; Everyone must be engage to sustain a true transformation

• Organizational motivation with a commitment to individual and organizational learning

• Use of technology to facilitate change and assessment

• Faculty Development with on-going training and community support for Learning Outcomes Assessments
Our Networks

• Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS)
• NYU Faculty Resource Network
• HBCU Faculty Development Network (HBCUFDN)
• Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD)
• The Collaboration for the Advancement of College Teaching and Learning
• Teaching Learning with Technology-Group
Primary Contributors to the JCSU Campus Dialogues on Assessment

- Milton Cox – Faculty Learning Community
- Vincent Tinto – Retention, Learning Community
- Steve Gilbert – Technology, Dangerous Questions
- Tom Angelo – Classroom Assessment, CATS
- Steve Erhmann – Technology and Assessment, Flashlight 1.0, 2.0
- Robin Zuninga – Technology and Assessment, BeTA Project
- James and Karen Nichols – Outcomes Assessment
- Virginia Lee – Inquiry in Education, Action Research
- Gillian Kinsey – Student Engagement and Assessment
- Gary Brown – Transformative Assessment, Rubrics, Critical Thinking,
- Jean MacGregor – Learning Community
- Barbara Lee Smith – Learning Community