A few questions we're no longer asking about assessment: The assessment landscape and possible futures

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As context, my starting “what if” questions: What if degrees are superseded by “stackable certificates?” "What if 10-week quarters or 16 week semesters are replaced by successions of 2-4 week instructions modules—In their own way stackable? What if we become authenticators of prior/experiential learning?
“The future effectiveness of institutional accreditation in promoting good practice and reinforcing the academy's assumption of consistent and transparent standards of student achievement lies entirely in the hands of the academy and its leadership.”

—Peter Ewell

http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/occasionalpaperone.htm
Collegiate Learning Assessment

I'M IN SALES.

HERE YOU GO.
“The vast majority of students in the U.S. exercise little choice about where they attend because the primary drivers of this decision are institution location and price.”

—Zemsky, 2005, in Ewell, 2010

“Even where competitive markets do exist among selective institutions of higher education, information about academic performance is rarely decisive.”

—Zemsky, 2005, in Ewell, 2010
The federal government is dead serious about holding colleges and universities accountable for their performance, and can be counted on to impose undesirable requirements if higher education officials don't make meaningful changes themselves.

Molly Corbett Broad, president, The American Council on Education
States Quietly Raising Speed Limits Near Failing Schools
Yet the prevailing attitude toward assessment still ranges from infinite caution to outright hostility.

—Kevin Carey

http://chronicle.com/article/Measure-or-Perish/125671/
“Daddy works in a magical, faraway land called Academia.”
“By every possible measure the majority of college graduates are far from prepared for the challenges of either the economy or our democracy.”

—Carol Geary Schneider, president
American Association of Colleges and Universities
http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-wi10/le-wi10_president.cfm
American creativity scores are falling…

A recent IBM poll of 1,500 CEOs identified creativity as the No. 1 “leadership competency” of the future.
“I’ll be happy to give you innovative thinking. What are the guidelines?”
Arum and Roksa studied CLA results from 2,300 undergraduates. Forty-five percent of students made no gains on the CLA during their first two years in college. Thirty-six percent made no gains over the entire four years.

Is this OK?
This new report says that nearly half of U.S. college students learn nothing in the first two years of college! Their parents, however, are learning...
“All means all.”

Northwest Commission for Colleges and Universities to WSU
The Center for Teaching, Learning, & Technology is a resource for everyone teaching at WSU. The center provides information and support related to assignment and syllabus design, use of educational technology, facilitating group work, and assessment. CTLT can help with your efforts to:

- design assignments that connect concepts and skills across courses and make use of collaborative learning;
- refine syllabi, which can include guidelines that clarify expectations about learning and set a positive classroom atmosphere;
- incorporate innovative teaching approaches and techniques that help engage students;
- assess your courses as the semester unfolds and make adjustments. CTLT provides a variety of assessment tools and can help faculty interpret results to refine teaching practices.
Genuine

instructor/programmatic
curiosity for improvement
Assessment of Assessment

Overview

It is expected that each program will focus and implement assessment in ways appropriate to its own distinct context, needs, and questions.

1. **Assessment Team and System**
   The assessment process engages program faculty, leadership, students and other stakeholders involved with the program (cross-institutional faculty, accreditors, alumni, advisory boards, and employers) as appropriate. The system is recurring and dynamic. It is implemented and refined over time for continuous improvement.

2. **Program Goals, Outcomes, and Measures**
   Goals and outcomes reflect stakeholder consensus and, curricular alignment, and support WSU strategic initiatives. Multiple evidence-based measures are complementary and are designed to illuminate questions faculty and administration care about, yielding useful information.

3. **Analysis and Action Plan**
   Assessment system informs and guides demonstrable change and engages all instrumental program personnel in the scholarship of teaching and learning. There is follow-through with actions that may include changes and improvements to pedagogy, curricula, faculty development, and/or assessment practices in order to enrich the student learning experience.

   *It is not necessary to fill out the "Analysis and Action Plan" section for the December 18, 2009 report.*

4. **Administrative Leadership & Support**
   The assessment process is prioritized and robustly supported by program leaders, including significant allocation of time and resources. The policy engages all relevant stakeholders. The assessment process yields information used by administration and faculty with demonstrable impact on curriculum, teaching practice, and student learning outcomes.
The Invitation
Systematic Responsiveness to Changing Contexts
What to Report?
“Transparency demonstrates that the academy takes its education mission seriously.”
“Such openness is risky.”
Transparency: “Strategic Image Management”

—Alexander C. McCormick
November/December 2010 Change, pp. 35-43.
The percentage of programs collaborating with communities of practice...
Stakeholders Have Reviewed Goals/Outcomes

- Yes: 47%
- No: 31%
- Planned for 2010-11: 15%
- Unclear: 7%
Stakeholders Have Reviewed Student Work

- Yes: 31%
- No: 46%
- Unclear: 14%
- Planned for 2010-11: 9%
1190 Graduating Students
17% of WSU Undergraduate Programs
Almost 20% of Graduating Class
WSU Outcomes Progress

Critical & Creative Thinking: 4.17
Quantitative & Symbolic Reasoning: 4.14
Information Literacy: 4.08
Communication: 3.8
Self & Society: 3.86
Specialty: 4.48
Information type WSU Programs used in the 2009-2010 cycle to inform or guide change
What is Learned & Applied
Sample Findings

Finding:
More than 50% consistently fail intro calculus

Action:
1. Ask Why
2. Follow Successful Students
3. Experiment
4. Isolate Problem—exponentials
Sample Findings

Rater Reliability on Assignment Prompt #2 Hist 300
History, Spring 2009, 6 Raters

Score on the Rubric

Issue ID  Context  Data/sources  Diverse Persp  Info Literacy  Conclusions  Communication

Rater 1  Rater 2  Rater 3  Rater 4  Rater 5  Rater 6
Finding:

Inconsistent perceptions of goals, performance expectations as reflected in assignments and grading....

Action:

“Imagine how students perceive our curriculum?”

Initiate peer assignment review.
What NOT to Report?
Sample Findings of Concern
Finding: Students overwhelming failing to think critically.

Action: Stop assessing critical thinking.

Is this OK?
Junior faculty:

"How should we respond to the Office of Assessment’s feedback on our assessment plan?"

Tenured professor:

"Oh -kiss my ass! I have been here long enough to know that THAT thing will be flushed down the toilet, so I wouldn't worry too much."
“The future effectiveness of institutional accreditation in both promoting good practice and in reinforcing the academy’s assumption of consistent and transparent standards of student academic achievement lies entirely in the hands of the academy and its leadership.”

—Peter Ewell

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Sample Findings of... Concern

Finding:

Report submitted to NWCC&U in October...

The report reveals that 33% of units have problematic assessment initiatives.
Dear xxxx

I hope this message finds you doing well.
“The University indicates, which is good, that a majority of the programs have "established processes for providing independent review of their assessment efforts to ensure that the assessment is verifiable and credible."

“Please provide greater explication of these processes.”
“How are the results of the assessment efforts being utilized to inform future planning, decision making and budgetary allocations?”
“We trust this is helpful as you move forward in preparing the University's response.”
EFFECTS OF THE BUDGET CUTS ON FACULTY, STAFF, AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS: A FEEDBACK REPORT
Faculty report they are devoting less time to providing service ... and more time to providing service to their professional organizations.
“The future... lies entirely in the hands of the academy and its leadership.”

—Peter Ewell

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