Preparing a Graduate Program Assessment Plan

Workshop I: Goals and Outcomes
Agenda

• Overview of the Program Assessment Cycle
  – Big picture
  – Assessment Plan Template

• Establishing Program Goals and Outcomes
  – Grouping programs by current stage
  – Sharing and comparing ideas
  – Models for good goals and outcomes
  – Where to look for help

• Engaging Colleagues and Students
  – Brainstorming ideas
  – Timeline: what can work for your program?
Today’s Take-Aways

- Template sheet for goals and outcomes
- At least two tentative program goals
- At least two tentative program student learning outcomes
- Draft timeline for faculty engagement activities
Big Picture

- Overarching goal: Learning at multiple levels
  - Promotion of faculty study, reflection, and conversation…that also includes students.
  - Meaningful program improvement.
  - Manageable integration into routine practices.
What Makes Assessment Meaningful?

• Faculty have a voice in defining their program.

• Faculty have an investment in the program assessment.

• Provides faculty-approved indicators for gauging the effectiveness of the program.

• Provides data-based guidance for program improvement.
What Makes Assessment Manageable?

• Look at what you are doing already that can serve assessment purposes:
  – standard assignments
  – thesis proposal and defense

• Make sure faculty have an investment in the results.
Plan for Assessment

Plan for assessment

Refine assessment tools and procedures

Collect data

Analyze data

Reflect on results and propose changes

Make the changes
Building an Assessment Plan

1. Research and reflect: Establish goals and outcomes
2. Ratify with faculty input
3. List program requirements in developmental sequence
4. Look for opportunistic assessment methods for each outcome
5. Ratify Curriculum Map with faculty input
6. Link outcomes to requirements, coding for Introduce, Reinforce, Emphasize
7. Prioritize assessment activities in a timeline
8. Submit Assessment Plan for review
9. Ratify Curriculum Map with faculty input
Getting There from Here

Today’s workshop: Goals and Outcomes

Workshop II: Curriculum Mapping

Workshop III: Evidence and Timeline

***Ongoing individual consultation provided***
Establishing Goals and Outcomes

• Where is your program on the developmental timeline?

• Let’s form groups:
  1. Just getting started
  2. Already have some tentative outcomes
  3. Already have established outcomes
  4. Already have conducted programmatic outcomes assessment
Building an Assessment Plan

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9. Ratify Curriculum Map with faculty input
10. List program requirements in developmental sequence
11. Look for opportunistic assessment methods for each outcome
12. Research and reflect: Establish goals and outcomes

Submit Assessment Plan for review
Sharing

• Share the ideas you brought with you.

• Do you see:
  – Similarities?
  – Contrasts?
  – New ideas you can use?
Program Goals

• **Goals are broad, general statements of:**
  – what it means to be an effective program in terms of what students should know and be able to do upon completion of the program, in broad, qualitative terms.
  – Success in achieving goals is evaluated directly by measuring specific student learning outcomes related to the goal.

• **Goals should relate to the mission** of the department, college, and university in which the program resides.

• **When defining goals, think about the characteristics of your most successful graduates?**
  – Knowledge
  – Skills
  – Professional practitioner attributes
  – Scholarly researcher attributes
Drafting Goals

Exercise:

Which **goal statements** look promising, and why?
(Discuss in your group: 3 min.)

1. Program X will obtain the resources needed to offer outstanding graduate education.
2. Program X will produce the best graduates possible.
3. Graduates will know how to think critically and perform professional responsibilities ethically.
4. Graduates will be able to conduct research appropriate to scholarship in the field.
5. Graduates will be able to write research reports following the conventions of the discipline.
Drafting Goals

Exercise:

Individually, write two goals for your program on the provided sheet (3 min.).

Prompts:

- What would we like to write in a letter of recommendation for a graduating student?
- What would we like to say when advertising our program?
  “Our students succeed after graduation because they can…”

In your group, compare and discuss your goals (5 min.).
Learning Outcomes

• Definition and content of learning outcomes:
  – Specify what a student is expected to know or be able to do throughout a program.
  – Statements of observable, measurable results of the educational experience.
  – Detailed and meaningful enough to guide decisions in program planning, improvement, pedagogy, and practice.
  – Linked to program goals.
Drafting Outcomes

Exercise:

Which **outcome statements** look promising, and why?

(Group discussion: 3 min.)

1. Students should be knowledgeable about the field.
2. Graduates should be able to write technical reports that meet professional standards, and communicate effectively in oral presentations of those reports.
3. Students should get at least a B in required courses.
4. Graduates can demonstrate familiarity with rhetorical theories and histories from the classical period to the present.
5. Students should be able to use the concatenate function in Microsoft Excel 2003.
Drafting Learning Outcomes

Exercise:

Individually, select one of your draft program learning goals and write two outcomes under this goal on the provided sheet (3 min.).

Prompts:

- What specific kinds of knowledge and types of skills would reflect the goal?
- Start with “Students will be able to…” and use verbs like describe, apply, analyze, synthesize, critically evaluate, followed by the content.
- For specific required courses or other requirements in your program, what abilities are they supposed to impart to students to meet program goals?

In your group, compare and discuss your outcomes (5 min.).
How Many Is Enough?

- Goals: 2 - 5
- Learning outcomes under goals: 1 - 4 per goal
- Think about how you will use your findings to improve your program:
  - One big goal is uninformative for improvement (e.g. “able to get jobs”)
  - 20 goals is overwhelming, and you will end up picking out the ones you care about the most for follow-up
  - For outcomes, think about the key indicators, the reasons for the goal
Engaging Colleagues

• Some ideas for going forward: Opportunities for engaging colleagues:
  
  **Brainstorm:** What are your ideas?
  – Set up an assessment committee
  – Set aside time on the agenda at regular department meetings
  – Design special meetings or retreats (academic calendar timing?)
  – Sakai – post materials, conduct discussions
  – Program listserv
  – Meet with students in a required course or schedule a special meeting
  – Just go to lunch!

• Use the Timeline worksheet to construct a plan for when each step of the Assessment Plan will need program faculty/student input and ratification.
Building an Assessment Plan

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The University of Rhode Island
THINK BIG • WE DO
Additional Sources for Goals and Outcomes

- Program vision/mission statement
- Program Catalog description
- Program website description
- Required course syllabus statements of learning outcomes
- Professional society statements of model outcomes
- Outcome statements from comparable programs at other institutions
- Other ideas?
Thank you …

… for joining us to make assessment work for continuous program improvement.