2018 URI ASSESSMENT CLIMATE SURVEY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Administration: November 2018, online survey
Lead Researcher: John Stevenson, Professor (Emeritus), Psychology
Sample: URI Department Chairs/Directors, Faculty in Functionally Equivalent Roles[1]
Past Administrations: Fall 2009, 2012, 2015
Next Administration: Fall 2021
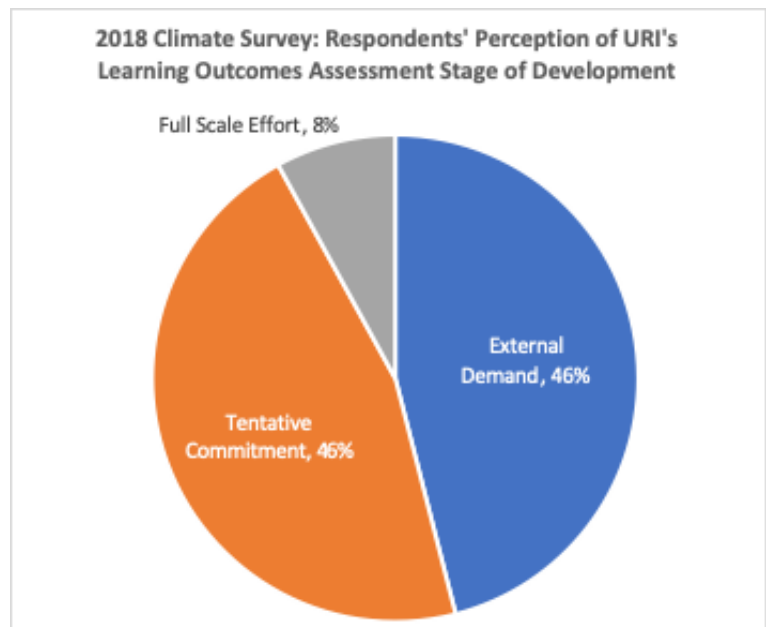
Survey Overview

- The purpose of the Assessment Climate Survey is to look at progress in the implementation of the program-level student learning outcomes assessment process at the University of Rhode Island (URI) and to give guidance for future policies. Chairs' perceptions were selected as a particularly useful indicator of this climate.

- Content is organized into six major domains: (1) Chairs' personal attitudes toward assessment; (2) institution-wide faculty norms regarding the value of assessment; (3) leadership commitment, including both administration and faculty peer leadership commitment; (4) infrastructure support for assessment; (5) department-level implementation; and, (6) university-wide implementation, including general education. A final item addresses Chairs' perceptions of how far URI has come in the development of a useful, sustainable assessment system.

- Currently the survey consists of 56 5-point rating items (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") and one open-ended question. The response rate in 2018 was 49.1% (26 out of 53), similar to past administrations.

Survey Highlights

- Chairs are reasonably certain that program-level learning outcomes assessment is now a standard expectation for all degree programs at URI: 68% agree that "it is here to stay." They are also relatively positive about its value within their own programs: 65% agree that assessment for majors is very important, and 92% agree that it is valuable to continue checking to improve the "skills and attitudes" of the students we graduate. A few believe this should be the job of the administration rather than faculty (12%). And, more than half acknowledge that faculty have useful discussions about their aspirations for their students in the context of assessment (56%).

- However, with regard to Chairs' perceptions of faculty norms across the campus, about a third of respondents (31%) agree that most departments are taking assessment seriously, and only 35% think that faculty value the sharing of assessment results. Assessment is not yet a "valued aspect of faculty culture."

- Perception of leadership commitment is varied. The sense of administration support for assessment is relatively high (65% agreement for "Provost" and 76% for "our college dean"). Only 40% agree that faculty leaders convey positive views of assessment.

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[1]Herein referred to as Chairs.

- In terms of more tangible forms of recognition from the administration, responses are not very positive: only 31% agree that their dean actually discusses their report with them; 92% see "no rewards or incentives" for the assessment reporting work they do; 81% say there is not enough time or other resources for this work; and only 35% are aware that the administration keeps track of program's assessment activities and results (e.g., the annual Faculty Senate recognition event for excellence in reporting).

- On the other hand, the Chairs do recognize that there are a variety of instrumental forms of assistance: clear policy (60%); models for what is expected (60%); an office to provide support and guidance (80%); and a policy-setting committee with faculty representation and leadership (72%).

- Most departments are now actively and routinely doing the required reporting at both undergraduate and graduate levels: 68% have a "workable plan" for undergraduate degree programs (60% for graduate programs); 92% of undergraduate programs have reported in the past two years (67% for graduate programs). Internal use of those reports is not as high: 44% have changed how courses are taught, 40% used results to inform curriculum design; only 33% report using assessment in strategic planning, and only 35% feel they are making effective use of their reports in the Academic Review process.

- Despite Chairs relatively positive views of the role of assessment for their own majors, overall they do not perceive program-level assessment as well spread across the university: about 25% of respondents believe programs are making use of assessment (undergraduate programs, 28%; graduate programs, 25%); only 12% believe departments discuss their assessment ideas with other departments; and only 16% believe assessment is used in university-level strategic planning.

- There is relatively positive news, however, about the perception of general education assessment: 54% support their department's role in general education assessment; 60% agree that general education addresses meaningful goals. However, only 43% believe that general education assessment is now occurring on a "regular basis."

- Finally, Chairs were asked to identify the "stage of development of learning outcomes assessment" they think URI is situated. Chairs' view of URI's current stage is split between "external demand", with administrative leaders requiring faculty compliance to meet that demand (46%) and "tentative commitment," with leaders and faculty moving toward commitment (46%). Very few (8%) believe the university is in the stage of "full-scale effort."

2018 Climate Survey: Respondents' Perception of URI's Learning Outcomes Assessment Stage of Development

Full Scale Effort, 8%

External Demand, 46%

Tentative Commitment, 46%

- These responses suggest that while program-level learning outcomes assessment is now well established, both within departments and as evidenced in the institutional support structures, there is still a strong sense that it is not being done enthusiastically nor recognized, rewarded, and respected as time-consuming professional achievements with value for the institution.

Next Steps

The 2018 results will be included in the longitudinal trend data from previous administrations and analyzed for campus-level trends.