

Assessing Student Learning



Small College Initiative

April 27, 2007

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Vice Presidents
Commission on Colleges

1

Goals for this Session

- develop a stronger appreciation for the link between stages of the reaffirmation review
- identify specific areas of institutional challenges related to the development of student learning assessments
- provide interactive examples of how assessment decisions can be made

2

**“SACS said we
have to ...”**



3

The SACS-COC Reaffirmation Process: The Institution's Perspective

- **The Off-Site Process**
 - Submit Compliance Certification
 - Wait for Preliminary Findings
- **On-Site Process**
 - Submit Focused Report and QEP
 - Host On-Site Visit
 - Wait for Report of the Reaffirmation Committee
- **Commission Action**
 - Submit Response to the Report
 - Wait for Commission Action
 - Wait for Action Letter

4

The SACS-COC Reaffirmation Process: Findings

■ The Off-Site Process

- Preliminary Findings
- Compliance/Non-Compliance

■ On-Site Process

- Report of the Reaffirmation Committee
- No Recommendations/Recommendations

■ Commission Action

- Reaffirm/Deny Reaffirmation
- No Monitoring/Monitoring

5

CS 3.3.1

The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs (*including student learning outcomes for educational program*) ... assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results. (Institutional effectiveness)

6

CS 3.5.1

The institution identifies college-level competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those competencies. (College-level competencies)

7

Reasons for Non-compliance: CS 3.5.1

- **The committee could not determine if the evidence provided demonstrated that graduates had attained the competencies.**
- **In the professional judgment of the committee, grades alone are not enough to accurately assess general education competencies.**
- **While the institution provides data on graduates who transfer, evidence of comparable data relative to graduates who do not transfer is not provided. [Level 1]**

8

Reasons for Non-compliance: CS 3.5.1

- The College states, “The evidence that students have attained college-level competencies is demonstrated in the students’ successful completion of individual courses. The evidence that graduates have attained the general education core competencies is demonstrated when the graduates have been awarded a degree.” This statement does not comprise convincing evidence of compliance to the committee.

9

5 Most Frequent Areas with Recommendations: On-Site Findings

2006: All Institutions (n=76)

Item	Brief Description	Small Institutions (n=21)		All Institutions (n=76)	
		Rank	% non-compliance	Rank	% non-compliance
2.12	Quality Enhancement Plan	1	76%	1	71%
3.5.1	General education competencies	2	44%	2	41%
3.7.1	Faculty Qualifications	3	33%	3	36%
3.4.1	Program Approval/ Learning Outcomes	4	29%	4	33%
3.10.1	Financial Stability	5	24%	8	8%

10

CS 3.5.1: On-Site Example

The academic officer's General Education task force has been formed to develop a plan to assess whether students are attaining the college competencies in the general education core. Currently, this task force has begun the process of taking the State Board's competencies and distilling them into a smaller set of general education learning outcomes for the institution. ... The learning outcomes have not been assessed.

Recommendation: The committee recommends that the institution demonstrate the assessment of competencies in its general education core and demonstrate the use of the results for improvement.

11

5 Most Frequent Non-Compliance Items Commission Review: June & December 2006 All Institutions (n=76)

Item	Brief Description	Small Institutions (n=21)		All Institutions (n=76)	
		Rank	% non-compliance	Rank	% non-compliance
3.10.1	Financial Stability	1	24%	6	7%
3.5.1	General education competencies	2	22%	1	26%
2.12	Quality Enhancement Plan	3	19%	2	25%
3.3.1	Institutional Effectiveness	4	14%	3	17%
2.11	Resources	5	10%	8	3%

12

Percentage of Small Institutions with Favorable Outcomes: 2006 Reaffirmation Cycle

	CS 3.5.1 General Education	CS 3.3.1 Institutional Effectiveness
The Off-Site Process: Compliance	28%	48%
On-Site Process: No Recommendations	56%	81%
Commission Action: No Monitoring	78%	86%

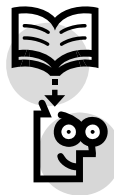
13

Truth or Dare

Option A:
**Small Colleges don't
do assessment of
student learning
outcomes well.**



Option B:
**Small colleges are the
most effective in
assessing student
learning outcomes.**



14

Small College Assessment requires a Paradigm Shift

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

IT IS NOT ENOUGH!!!!!! No more than one puzzle piece put in the right place is enough to see the full picture.

15

Why 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 that will improve policies, procedures, services, curriculum, resources, teaching, campus climate *and ultimately improve student learning.***

16

Assessment is different than planning

Planning: Checklist completed or not

Assessment: SO WHAT?

Add one faculty member with a background in medieval history

How did the addition positively increase student learning?

Increase faculty development money to support incorporating a global perspective into coursework

Did faculty development money increase the global perspectives of students taking the coursework?

17

The Five Questions of Assessment

- 1. What are you assessing? 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? Assessment data review process.**
- 5. How will you use the results of assessment to improve student learning? Closing the loop.**

18

Pick a program at your institution and do 1-3

- 1. What are you assessing? 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.**

19

Pick a program at your institution and think about how you would do 4-5

- 4. How will you analyze the results? Assessment data review process.**
- 5. How will you use the results of assessment to improve student learning? Closing the loop.**

20

**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?**



21

PAIR AND SHARE

Learning Outcome: “Think creatively to develop new ideas, processes, or products.”

- How would you ensure students have the opportunity to learn this?
- How would you evaluate this in a way that is NOT dependent on a course instructor’s opinion or grade?
- How would you compile the results of your evaluation?
- How would you share the results?
- If you were dissatisfied with your findings, what do you do about it?

22

General Discussion

Are general education competencies taught only in general education core curriculum courses?

Should general education competencies be assessed only through general education courses?

23

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

■ **Bad Practices**



■ **Good Practices**



24

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

■ Bad Practice #1

- Doing assessment because SACS-COC says we have to do it.**
- The Evidence**
 - Reports titled “SACS Report”**
 - Standard required template with reports partially filled out**
 - Identical wording year after year**
 - No evidence that anyone reads the reports**
 - Software/structure more important than content**

25

PAIR AND SHARE

One of your departments submits its annual evaluation of program and student learning outcomes. For every goal/objective/desired outcome the department reports the following:

“Objective met. No action needed.”

What is your response?

26

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

■ Bad Practice #2

- An environment where administrators are entirely responsible for program assessment.
- The Evidence
 - Report contents show no indication of broad faculty involvement
 - No linkage of course content to program goals
 - No faculty development activities related to assessment/evaluation techniques

27

Deal or No Deal

DEAL:

Faculty are willing and interested in assessment of learning outcomes because...

Four Aces

NO DEAL:

Are you kidding me? Faculty will not be interested in assessment of learning outcomes unless SACS insists on it.

Bust Hand

28

Faculty are critical to a true learning organization

“We also learned early in the process that periodic and active participation of the department faculty and support from the department head are crucial.”

...

“Include as many of the faculty as feasible in the process. If one lone faculty or staff member is assigned the assessment task, the plan will almost assuredly fail. Develop a management structure that balances day-to-day assessment activities with periodic input from the program faculty.”

Ronald Miller, Colorado School of Mines

29

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

■ Good Practices #1

–Administrative Support is Essential.

30

PAIR AND SHARE

Who reads assessment reports on your campus?

Vice President for Academic Affairs?

Director of IE/IR?

An Assessment Committee?

A standing faculty committee?

31

PAIR AND SHARE

What faculty development opportunities have you conducted on your campus in the past three years related to:

Improving course grading?

Making student assignments meaningful?

Improving student engagement?

Program assessment?

32

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

■ Bad Practice #3

- Confusing course assessment with program assessment.**
- The Evidence**
 - Program assessment based on course completion as evidence of competence/outcomes attainment**
 - Faculty as free agents – no interaction among faculty teaching the same subject**
 - Faculty not teaching “core” general education courses view the general education content as “their” (not our”) responsibility**

33

PAIR AND SHARE

Give each other clear, concrete examples of where program assessment might:

- 1. Complement classroom assessment but is different in certain ways**
- 2. Differ significantly from classroom assessment**

34

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

■ Good Practices #2

– Start with things that clearly work.

- Curriculum maps
- Capstone courses
- Capturing existing assignments as “artifacts” for review

35

Curriculum Mapping

Program Outcomes	Required course #1	Required course #2	Required course #3	Required course #4	TOTALS
Learning outcome #1	0 hrs	0 hrs	0 hrs	0 hrs	0
Learning outcome #2	3 hrs	6 hrs	6 hrs	12 hrs	27
Learning outcome #3	0 hrs	0 hrs	2 hrs	3 hrs	5
Learning outcome #4	1 hr	2 hrs	6 hrs	3 hrs	12

36

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

- **Advantages of Curriculum Mapping**
 - **Think about LEARNING INPUTS**
 - Things in place before learning begins [prerequisites, placement, class size, facilities & equipment]
 - **Think about LEARNING PROCESSES**
 - Time on task, active learning opportunities
 - **Think about LEARNING CONTEXT**
 - E.g., professional v. liberal arts program, professional expectations, attitudes toward learning]

37

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

Curriculum maps

Course embedded assessments

Rubrics for goal assessment throughout courses

Portfolios/ Capstone course evaluations(internal and external evaluators)

Focus groups

Student surveys

Employer surveys

Graduate School placement/ scores

38

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

■ Bad Practice #4

- Insufficient concern about matching assessment tools to expected outcomes.**
- The Evidence**
 - Assessment reports say the exams were given but do not present the results**
 - Provide general results from national exams (e.g., general ed exams, ETS MFAT) with no interpretation of results**
 - Using national exams to reach conclusions not related to the desired competencies**
 - Programs have a dozen or so outcomes with no priority as to importance**

39

PAIR AND SHARE

Within your current means of assessing student learning outcomes, are you using any tools or instruments that measure something other than your stated learning outcomes? Give examples.

40

Improving Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

■ Good Practices #3

- Emphasize keys of Institutional Effectiveness: use multiple measures and seek external validity.**

41

PAIR AND SHARE

How would you improve upon these examples? [Taken from actual annual assessment reports]

- Since the majority of the upper division students passed these courses with at least a “C” average, the goal was achieved.**
- The department offered courses leading to completion of the major.**
- Several courses required term papers, proving students obtained written communication skills.**

42

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**



43

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.

44

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.

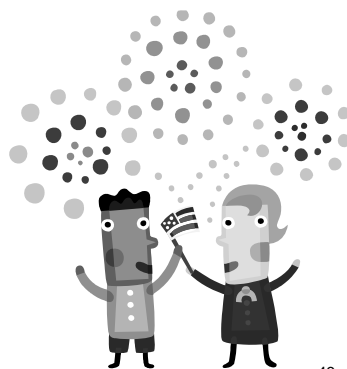
The more you know the root causes, the more effectively you can plan for changes.

45

Celebrate Success

Small colleges are havens for excellent student learning.

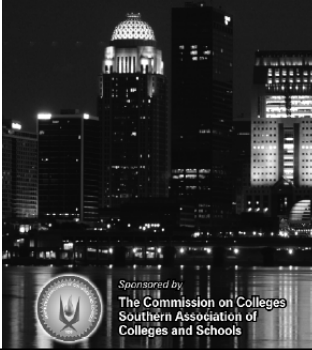
Embrace assessment, learn to measure student learning, communicate it and celebrate it!



46

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Discussion and Questions

Suggested Resources

- **Linda Suskie, Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide (Anker Publishing, 2004)**
 - Avoids excessive jargon
 - Seeks results, not perfection
 - Covers both program- and course-level issues
 - Lots of examples
 - Great discussion/case study questions for group use

49

Suggested Resources

- **Barbara E. Walvoord, Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education (Jossey-Bass, 2004)**
 - Has a framework very compatible with accreditation
 - Has an easy-to-follow standardization without being rigid
 - Good examples of reporting formats

50

Suggested Resources

- Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, “Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: A Guide for Institutions and Evaluators”
- _____, “Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: Improving Institutional Practice”
 - Good bibliographies, but lack examples
 - Available free from our website:
 - www.sacscoc.org – follow links to “policies & publications” then “handbooks”
 - [direct link:
<http://www.sacscoc.org/handbooks.asp>]

51

Websites: College & Universities

- NC State U
 - <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm>
- U Central Florida
 - <http://oeas.ucf.edu/>
- U Texas-Austin [Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment] – On-line assessment
 - <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cit/index.html>
- Winona State U (MN) [sample rubrics]
 - <http://www.winona.edu/air/rubrics.htm>

52

Websites: Specialty Accreditors and Professional Associations

- ABET – “Assessment Planning”
 - <http://www.abet.org/assessment.shtml>
- American Psychological Association – “Assessment CyberGuide”
 - <http://www.apa.org/ed/guidehomepage.html>
- American Political Science Association
 - http://www.apsanet.org/section_563.cfm
- American Sociological Association [PDF manuscript]
 - <http://www.asanet.org/galleries/APAP/Assessment%20Final%20Copy%202005.pdf>
- Association for Institutional Research [AIR] – membership needed for much of site
 - <http://www.airweb.org/>
- National Communication Association – “Assessment Resources”
 - <http://www.natcom.org/nca/Template2.asp?bid=264>
- QUE – Quality in Undergraduate Education [Georgia State – has sample learning outcomes]
 - <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwque/index.html>