Supporting What Faculty Do Best: Teachers, Scholars, Researchers, and Critics Take on Assessment

Jeannine Pinto, Assessment Officer, Office of Institutional Research
• Decentralized
• 10 schools, 3 campuses, international sites
  – 3 undergraduate liberal arts colleges
  – 1 undergraduate business school
  – Graduate schools in Arts & Sciences, business, education, law, religion & religious education, social work
• Regional and national accreditations
Commonalities:
- Highly resistant
- Accreditation provided initial motivation
Thorough & Systematic

• Specialized accreditor provides well-developed SL standards

• Faculty committee developed and implemented system for measuring attainment

• Computer system: Strong administrative and peer support for training

• Data collected on all objectives at every level every semester using multiple measures
A common approach

• Departmental faculty committees developed broad goals and objectives.

• Area coordinators (faculty) receive stipends to conduct assessment annually.
  – Determine how to measure attainment
  – Report results to area colleagues
Some differences

- Planned assessment of competencies
- Training in measurement strategies limited
- Assessment reports submitted to low-level administrator
- Assessment results rarely used
- Faculty buy-in low and decreasing

- As-needed assessment focused on program priorities
- Question-driven training
- Assessment reports submitted to deans and incorporated in annual reporting/planning
- Faculty buy-in increasing
• Meets accreditation requirements
  – Probably (use of results low)
  – Clean & bureaucratic
• Harder to sustain faculty motivation
• Administrative effort to obtain compliance

• Risky
  – Potentially less thorough
  – Organic and messy
• More easily sustained
• Administrative effort to support work
Themes

• Administrators’ attitudes influence faculty attitudes
• Keep faculty working as teachers, scholars, researchers
  – Minimize their functions as bureaucrats
• Keep assessment about learning and teaching
  – Keep managerial demands in the background
• Value usefulness most
Teachers, Scholars, Researchers

- Deeply involved in teaching
- Concerned about learning
- Responsible for course and program curricula
- Possess research and reasoning skills
- Creative
- Experts in their fields
- **Intellectually active and engaged**
Obstacles & Loss of (Intellectual) Power

- Language of assessment is unfamiliar
- Intellect & expertise ignored
- Purpose of assessment is disconnected from teaching and learning

Photo credit: Lillian Whitney-Morley, Nov. 2012
Example: Theology Department

- Focus on dissertation quality
- Rubric generated using Barbara Lovitts’ *Making the Implicit Explicit* and *Developing Quality Dissertations* examples
- Assesses knowledge accumulated throughout graduate career
# Theology Department

## Program goal and student-learning objectives

Excellent dissertations should clearly **define a compelling problem**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outstanding (4)</th>
<th>Very Good (3)</th>
<th>Acceptable (2)</th>
<th>Unacceptable (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- well written</td>
<td>- competently written but not eloquent</td>
<td>- is not well written or well organized</td>
<td>- poorly written and organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- succinct, interesting, and compelling</td>
<td>- interesting; has breadth, depth, and insight</td>
<td>- makes a standard case for a narrow or pedestrian problem</td>
<td>- not clear or succinct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- provides a clear statement of the problem</td>
<td>- poses a good question or problem</td>
<td>- does not do a good job of explaining why it is important</td>
<td>- provides no motivation or justification for the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- shows independent thinking about the problem</td>
<td>- explains why the problem is important and significant</td>
<td>- provides minimum of poor context for the problem</td>
<td>- does not state the problem (or it is wrong or trivial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- explains why the problem is important and significant</td>
<td>- makes some attempt to situate the problem—albeit in a less interesting or compelling way</td>
<td>- has a routine introduction of the problem</td>
<td>- does not make the case for the importance of the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- places the problem in scholarly and intellectual context so as to illuminate its importance</td>
<td></td>
<td>- lacks a careful and thorough attempt to situate the problem in its intellectual context</td>
<td>- does not provide or does not put the problem in a clear context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Alumni Survey – Feedback from graduates
• Reveals
  – What department is doing well
  – Where it could use improvement

Informed by experience in job market and employment

Example: Philosophy Department
Program Evaluation

Complete the sentence to best describe your experience:

I felt Fordham's PhD. program could have prepared me better by [select any that apply]...

- [ ] Offering more history of philosophy courses
- [ ] Offering more contemporary philosophy courses
- [ ] Helping me publish my work
- [ ] Offering more training in teaching
- [ ] Offering more opportunities to learn about non-academic careers
- [ ] Helping me build a professional network
- [ ] Preparing me for job interviews
- [ ] Other

Other
Survey Revealed Student Needs

Percent reporting program needs improvement

Areas for Improvement

- Helping me Publish
- Learn Non-Academic Careers
- Professional Networking

Year of Graduation
- Before 2002
- 2002-2007
- 2008-2012
Survey Revealed Success of Changes: Preparing for Interviews

Percent reporting program needs improvement

Year of Graduation

- Before 2002
- 2002-2007
- 2008-2012
Outcomes & Implications

• Most programs choose assessment-for-improvement
  – Not for public consumption
• Sometimes projects are not about (traditional) student learning
• BUT programs that chose assessment-for-improvement sustain commitment to assessment
Make Assessment Matter

• Annual reporting by programs includes assessment reports
• Annual planning documents prompt for assessment results as related to planning
• Deans provide feedback on assessment projects
• Internally-funded projects require assessment plans and reports
Administrative Flexibility is Essential

• Engages faculty in research/scholarship rather than bureaucratic exercise
  – Taps faculty expertise
• Supports diverse foci and methods
• Yields information faculty value and use
• Minimizes obstacles
• Makes assessment sustainable & meaningful
Costs of Flexibility

• More work for administrators
  – Reduces standardization
  – Requires thought and judgment
Engage Critics & Skeptics

• Avoid polarizing positions
  – Establish common ground
    • Values?
    • Concerns and worries?
  – Invite opponents to work toward shared goals
An earlier version of this talk was co-authored by Amy Tuininga, Associate Dean in the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, and John Harrington, Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences.

We would like to thank the following individuals and programs for permission to use their work in this presentation:

- Joe Vukov (graduate student in Philosophy)
- Department of Philosophy
- Department of Theology
Administrative Flexibility: Assessment Reporting Guidelines and Optional Templates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program goal and student-learning objective</th>
<th>How did you measure student performance?</th>
<th>Where, when and from whom did you collect assessment evidence?</th>
<th>What is the result? Provide a summary of the evidence</th>
<th>When &amp; by whom were the results interpreted?</th>
<th>Outcome of analysis, follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Objective wholly satisfied. No follow up required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Objective not wholly satisfied. Follow up planned. Responsible persons, timeline:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Annual Student Outcomes Assessment Report Guidelines

(Fordham University, The Jesuit University of New York)

Your annual assessment report will be a part of the annual planning documents. The report serves two purposes:

(a) To document your program- and course-level assessment activities from the academic year, and
(b) To summarize results that contribute to your planning.

Your assessment report should address each of the fundamental elements below:

- Which program goals and student outcomes were assessed?
- How you measured student performance or outcomes, including:
  - A description of the evidence (e.g., papers, performances, surveys),
  - A description of the student from whom this evidence was obtained (e.g., course and term information, survey administration information).
- Copies of materials, an appropriate (e.g., surveys, rubrics)
- A summary of the evidence (in sufficient detail that the reader can appreciate the basis of any conclusions you reach)
- Summary of any discussion of the findings, including who participated in the discussion and when it took place.
- Decisions arising from the results.
- A plan for follow up, as needed, including the persons who are responsible for follow up and target dates for their work.

Your assessment report SHOULD NOT include:

- Students' names, id numbers or other identifying information.
- Faculty names or other identifying information in connection with courses or student performance, to the extent that it is possible. (Though do include the names of faculty who worked on assessment.)

For your convenience, forms are available for your use in constructing your report. The forms are available by email from the Assessment Officer (primo@fordham.edu). To suit the varying needs and desires of Fordham's programs, two versions of the forms are available, a grid and a narrative. You may use one of those forms or you may organize your report to best represent your assessment as you see fit.

Brief summaries of your assessment results should be incorporated into your planning documents wherever they inform your decision-making and planning. Bear in mind that assessment results may be pertinent to both past decisions (providing evidence about the effect of those decisions) or future decisions (providing information needed to make choices).
Assessment integrated into planning documents.