

Integrating Discipline-specific and Regional Accreditation: Assessment as the Uniting Element

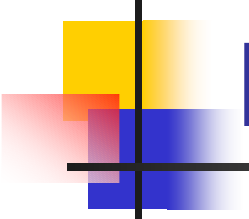


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Outcomes for the session:

Participants will be able to:

- Explain differences in external program accreditation, regional accreditation and institutional program review
- Identify barriers they have at their institution
- List ways to overcome barriers
- Identify methods to involve faculty, administration, and assessment professionals to grow assessment activities at the institution



Discipline-specific v. Regional

- Discipline-specific:

- ✓ Outcomes more likely to be set by accreditor
- ✓ More likely to look for direct evidence of student achievement

- Regional:

- ✓ Complete (or nearly so) institutional discretion
- ✓ Looks for “quality assurance **processes**” that generate evidence



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- The two accreditation processes are different and have different purposes
- The uniting element is assessment
 - Regional asks more about the assessment process (including results)
 - Discipline-specific is more likely to look for direct evidence of student achievement at the program level (assessment results)



Common Elements

- Focus on improvement
- Both want to see that the programs have program level outcomes, assess the achievement of these outcomes, and analyze the results
- Neither want to see “raw data” but want evidence to show that faculty have used the assessment results to make decisions



Do These Differences Matter?

- YES – often, faculty members view these processes differently
- Higher “comfort level” with discipline or program accreditation
- Regional accreditation is viewed as “administrative”



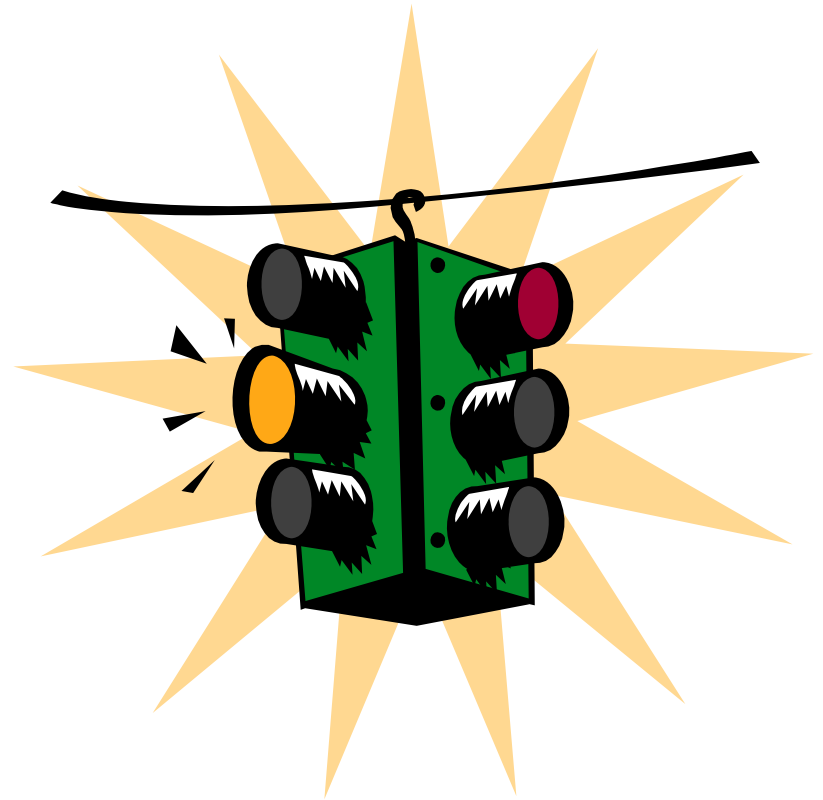
Barriers

- Are there barriers to faculty “buy in”?
- Most institutions at least go through the motions, but it is not clear whether “authentic assessment” is taking place
- The fact that you are here for this presentation is an indication that there are barriers of some sort



Exercise 1:

- What are the most significant barriers to conducting assessment, whether for program accreditation, regional accreditation or institutional use?





Barriers

- Assessment is not worth the time and effort – “prove to me that it works”
- “Unfunded mandate” – administrators require this but provide no additional resources
- Lack of time, lack of assistance for data analyses and documentation



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- Some faculty members have difficulty with the “lack of rigor” in assessment methods (“sloppy” experimental design)
- If you are only doing it for accreditation then it is seen as “checking boxes” – no true “buy in” by faculty



Exercise 2:

- How can we overcome these barriers?



Overcoming Barriers

1. Start small – working with departments or programs that have discipline-specific accreditors
2. Shared Vision/understanding of assessment
3. Involve faculty; divide up the responsibilities; build teams; meetings should have clear, specific objectives



1. Start small

- Use of pilot projects
- Spread assessment over time - make it sustainable
 - Example:
 - “even numbered objectives – even years” “odd numbered objectives – odd years”
 - “Focus on one that we are sure to meet and one that we are concerned about”



2. Shared Vision

- Develop a vision of ASSESSMENT - what do you envision assessment to be for your program?
- Examples:
 - “The assessment of student learning plays a pivotal role in understanding the successes of students, courses, and programs.”
 - “Meaningful assessment promotes the improvement of teaching and learning.”
 - “For faculty, assessment information guides course sequencing,... encourages dialogue about excellent teaching, and provides a continuous source of the knowledge essential for improvement of instruction and academic programs.”



2. Shared Vision

- Consider a “Common Language” document (to standardize terms and usages across the institution)
- Minimize references to accreditors – emphasize the goal of improving student learning



3. Involve Faculty

- Form a “steering committee” or “faculty team” that includes faculty members from departments with and departments without disciplinary accreditation
- Use the success stories from the disciplinary accreditation processes to help alleviate faculty concerns



Ripple Effect: Faculty Teams

- Form faculty teams at institutional level to discuss assessment issues – from “defining what is an outcome” to “best ways to assess specific outcomes”
- Representation from every program – responsible for ensuring process
- Discusses assessment issues and **share examples regularly**



Faculty Concerns

- “This year, the students are a “low-ability” group of students and I don’t want to base my assessment of the program on this group of students who have limited ability.”
 - **Look at trends and aggregate data**
- “Do I need to obtain student work from every student in the course?”
 - **(sample size calculator:
<http://www.researchinfo.com/docs/calculators/samplesize.cfm>)**



Faculty Concerns

- “How many different assignments, homework, reports and tests from the course do I need to collect?”
 - ***Principle of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning:*** “Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.”



3. Involve faculty

- Within the program, one or two meetings a year to discuss results and improvements to be made to program
- Don't meet too often!



Overcoming Barriers continued . . .

4. Start by explicating outcomes
5. Start conversation about alignment of curriculum with outcomes
6. Provide training and support
7. Communication and Trust are key elements – always speak the truth



4. Explicating outcomes

- Ensure each program's educational objectives and outcomes are:
 - comprehensive and measurable;
 - clearly tied to mission;
 - responsive to constituent needs;
 - systematically reviewed and updated.



5. Curriculum alignment

- Assessment is a **collaborative** effort:
Review of the curriculum as it relates to program outcomes (what students should know and be able to do)
engages faculty in discussions of assessment and how courses relate to each outcome

How Would You Relate the Courses to the Outcome? What Criteria?

	MAT 201	MAT 225	MAT 245	MAT 301	MAT 345	MAT 395	MAT 442	MAT 495
Outcome 2a	I				I		A	
Outcome 2b	X			X				
Outcome 2c		X						
Outcome 2d	Basic					Major		



6. Support and training

- Provide support wherever possible – gathering institution level data, suggesting strategies, sharing success stories, etc.
- Communicate that the purpose is to improve student learning (minimize references to accreditation)

Support/Training

- Workshops and training modules help faculty discuss these ideas openly and come to consensus on method
- Time efficient: get the issues out in the open and ensure that everyone knows “how-to” by end of training





Support – Exercise 3

- What is the role of the Assessment Professional?



Support

- How will the support for assessment be structured? Centralized implies an institutional assessment office/staff; decentralized may mean that each college or department has an assessment expert



Support

- Decentralized is more expensive but allows
 - more specific expertise to be developed (still must have some university oversight/coordination)
 - Assessment tends to be more about the questions of concern of that unit
- Centralized is probably more efficient, but may be less flexible
 - Depending on staff size, it may be difficult to “tailor” support to each program



7. Communication/trust

- Communication is key – repeat often that the assessment office (and the regional accreditor) are not evaluating program quality
- Build trust – acknowledge faculty expertise in the discipline
- Setting up an assessment process is hard work and time intensive – but “working the process” is more routine



Issues

- The institution level requirements must be flexible enough to accommodate the various discipline-specific accreditation processes, but uniform enough to allow the institution to “roll up” results (to some extent)
- Be clear about the institutional “minimum acceptable” threshold



Momentum

- Celebrate successes
- Encourage publication, presentations at conferences (where appropriate)
- Tie assessment to a revenue stream
- At a minimum, provide mechanism for senior administrators to respond to assessment results



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- Reward faculty – consider assessment work in reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions, for instance
- Remember that culture change is a long term process – persistence pays



Resources

- allen_dupont@ncsu.edu
- <http://www.ncsu.edu/assessment/assess.htm>
- Joni_spurlin@ncsu.edu
- <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/index.html>
- **Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcomes Assessment by Ephraim Schechter:**
<http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm>