NCA’s Monthly Teleconference Series
CARD Calls: Communicating About Research and Professional Development

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment
Wednesday, April 18, 2012

Featured Speakers:

Dr. Phil Backlund - Professor, Central Washington University

Dr. Sean McKitrick - Vice President, Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Moderator:
Dan Fogarty, Academic and Professional Affairs Associate
National Communication Association

Wednesday, April 18, 2012
1:00 p.m. Eastern time
NCA Assessment Resources

- You can find Assessment resources on the NCA website.
- Found in the “Teaching & Learning” Section and the “Chairs’ Corner”
Student Learning Outcomes Assessment:

Perspective from a Regional Accréditor

National Communication Association

Sean A. McKitrick, Ph.D.
Vice President
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

April 18, 2012
1:00pm
Student Learning Program Assessment: What is Expected?

• Approvals (often)
• Clear, aligned student learning outcomes
• Meaningful student learning assessments (direct assessment + legitimacy), well-aligned with student learning outcomes and courses
• Periodic (not episodic) review/discussions of quality of student learning, with recommendations
• Demonstration that recommendations have been acted upon and that this process is systematic
• Hope or horror? Demonstration of enhancements in student learning
## Why Assessment and Accreditation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Accountability</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Peer Review</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• $150 billion +</td>
<td>• Explicitly knowing what we want our students to learn, both in breadth and depth</td>
<td>• Recognizing and acting upon our own role as experts in our fields</td>
<td>• Ensuring that faculty play a central role in evaluating student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scandals</td>
<td>• Acting as agents in the student learning process</td>
<td>• Meaningfully evaluating our own and other institutions’ quality, all the while offering meaningful suggestions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• International competition</td>
<td>• Answering our skeptics</td>
<td>• Answering our critics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four Question Areas to Answer…

1. **What** do we want our students to learn (stated in formal student learning objectives) and **how** is this learning systematically planned by the faculty?

2. How is what we want them to learn **assessed** using **observations** of student performance (capstone papers, student performances, final works of art, etc.)

3. **When do faculty get together to discuss assessment results**, what are the **strengths and weaknesses** on students achieving the stated student learning outcomes, and what **recommendations** have they made to enhance student learning?

4. What is the **record of implementing these recommendations**, and what have been the results?
## Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Assessment Results</th>
<th>Recommendations Stemming from Faculty Discussions</th>
<th>Record of Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will organize their written work through effective paragraphing</td>
<td>A review of student papers using a rubric developed by the AACU demonstrated that students are good at writing effective topic sentences, but could improve with regard to the use of evidence to demonstrate the validity of their assertions</td>
<td>In our annual faculty meeting on student learning, faculty recommended: (1) Library staff be invited to WRIT100 and WRIT200 courses to discuss appropriate use of database resources; and, (2) WRIT100 and WRIT200 instructors use new textbook, <em>Writing as an Action Verb</em>.</td>
<td>1. Dean of the Libraries allocated library staff time to research librarians’ presenting on use of database resources in WRIT100 and WRIT200 courses;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What We Really Want…Is Probably What You Want…Really

• Institutions and programs that can clearly and empirically demonstrate, within their institutional context, that students are learning what we (faculty and the higher education community) say we want them to learn

• Institutions and programs that demonstrate that they are achieving their individually-defined missions

• Institutions and programs that use this process for their own purposes and not for the satisfaction of accrediting organizations
Things to Be Wary Of....

• If done for the purposes of pure accountability, then the underlying premise for assessment—that faculty’s periodically reviewing student learning empirically—is usually undercut. It is likely not to be done in the first place.

• Believe it or not, a big pitfall lately has been faculty (1) do not know what they want their students to learn; (2) do not gather to discuss how to enhance student learning, even on occasion; or, (3)simply argue that “grades are enough” when there are few valid explanations for how a grade relates to a specific learning outcome.
Things to Look Forward To…

• Telling students what we want them to learn and aligning our curriculum accordingly appears to enhance student learning
• Assessment is a word that should be associated with a mixture of faculty autonomy and accountability
• It is about empirically-based conversations and the actions after those conversations—if faculty are able to use information about student learning that is meaningful to them, then it can be meaningful to them
• When managed successfully, assessment allows programs to answer their skeptics as well as to use information that helps them educate students more effectively
For those of us working in assessment, what is keeping us up at night…?

- The increasing tendency on the part of policy makers to believe that placement rates are directly associated with student learning…
- A growing belief that the higher the starting salary, the more successful we have been at educating students, on an absolute scale…
- The idea that non-accredited disciplines (read: liberal arts/general education) are of little value
- That faculty’s role in assessing student learning is less effective than standardized instruments when there is little agreement that such instruments say anything valid or reliable…
Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

Wednesday, April 18, 2012

Dr. Phil Backlund - Professor, Central Washington University
Learning Outcomes and Assessment--Introduction

- Background and Context
- Assessment and education
- It is all about what kind of education we deliver to students
Main Point: The most important thing we do as teachers of communication is to give students the belief they can use language to influence their world.

- Types of knowledge (social, self, and content)
- Types of learning (cognitive, affective, skills)
- Types of outcomes and assessment
Types of knowledge--Social

- Reticence and Confidence
- Violence and restricted codes
- Education
- Professional
Types of Knowledge -- Self

- Efficacy
- Self rises in resistance
- Intentionality
Type of Knowledge--Content

- If you can't communicate it, you don't know it
- Verbalizing and learning
- Form of the content
Types of learning

- Cognitive
- Skill
- Affective
Cognitive Learning: Knowledge Acquisition

- The cognitive domain is concerned with knowledge and understanding on content.
- At the lowest level, this domain focuses on specific facts
- At the middle, on principles and generalizations
- At the highest on synthesis and evaluation based on learning
Assessing Cognitive Learning

- Traditional written classroom testing
- Oral interview
- Content classroom presentation
- Standardized testing
Behavioral Learning: Skills Acquisition

- The behavioral domain of learning is concerned with skills and the ability to perform certain behaviors.
- Skills can be learned by the learner and demonstrated through performance as observable behaviors.
- The behaviors are based on cognitive learning.
Assessing Behavioral Learning

- Performance assessment (public speech, group presentation)
- Unobtrusive observation and assessment
- Product development (videotape, play, role play)
Affective Learning: Attitudinal Development (The forgotten one)

- Concerned with learner attitudes and feelings (motivation, valuing, confidence, power) in regard to acquired knowledge and behaviors
- In most learning environments, affective learning is incidental to both cognitive and behavioral learning
- This view is wrong
Assessing Affective Learning

- Self-report instruments and surveys
- Unobtrusive checks
- Feedback from other students
- Exit surveys
Student learning outcomes

- Where do they fit?
- What do they look like?
Learning Outcomes: Where do they fit?

- Department has written curriculum goals and objectives linked to institutional mission.
- Goals and objectives have been operationalized; terms and concepts have been defined.
- Goals and objectives are teachable and measurable.
- Appropriate learning activities have been developed for each goal.
Learning Outcomes: Where do they fit?

- Assessment methods for goals and objectives are appropriate to the objective
- Data is gathered in a manner to ensure reliability and validity.
- Data and assessment results are used to improve the educational experience of the student through revisions of curriculum goals objectives, and methods.
What do they look like? Writing Student Learning Outcomes

- **Definition:** Outcomes are statements of what a learner should be able to know, do, or value after the successful completion of a program and/or course.

- **Key Feature:** The learning activities that indicate these outcomes must be observable and measurable. How will you know that the student has accomplished the outcome?
Example of learning outcomes

- The student will be able to present a speech with a clearly developed purpose with established relationships among the subpoints. Ideas are clearly related to a well identified audience.

- The speech is delivered with accurate pronunciation, clear articulation, good control of voice, and emotional control. Nonverbal cues are appropriate to topic, occasion, and audience.
Assessment of Outcomes

- Method matches objective
- Rubric describes the range from poor to excellent
- Inter-rater reliability is addressed
- Data tracks progress and change
- Feedback is provided
Issues

- Teaching to the test
- Is there an outcome for everything?
- Just leave me alone and let me teach
Summary

- What do students now believe about their communication behavior?
- Consider knowledge
- Consider learning
- Consider (but don’t be controlled by) outcomes
- Defining education
Education is . . .

- . . . the movement from cocksure ignorance to thoughtful uncertainty

- . . . the progressive acquisition of autonomy
Thank you for your participation today.

If you have any remaining questions please email Dan Fogarty
dfogarty@natcom.org
Conference Call: Dial-In Information

- Dial the Access Number: 1.800.920.7487
- When prompted, enter the Participant Code followed by #
- Your Participant Code is 66623635#

Participant Star Commands

- *4- Volume: Pressing *4 will increase/decrease the volume
- Q &A Session: Participants press *1 to ask a question, and the moderator will take your questions in the order that they arrive
- For technical assistance during the teleconference, contact Customer Service at 1.800.989.9239