LAKE SUPERIOR STATE UNIVERSITY

From the Ground Up: Assessment of Student Learning

PLAN

1 Shared Responsibility

The Academy will help to focus our energy on developing assessment processes that are meaningful to all stakeholders and which will bring significant returns to the university as a whole. In order for our project to be successful, we will need support and participation from students, faculty, administration, trustees and the community at large.

Individual faculty will enter and review their course assessment outcomes, as well as summarize their findings and identify action plans based on those findings. A centralized location for the collection of assessment data will promote reflective use of assessment data for decisions at the school, department and university levels.

Several committees will work with the Academy team including the shared governance assessment committee, school-level assessment committees and the general education committee. The Academy team will provide mentoring, faculty development and training throughout the project.

2   Impact of Academy Participation

 At the end of the project cycle we envision that institutional assessment will be as much a part of our culture as the issuing of final course grades (i.e., a natural and expected part of the institutional culture). We envision an organic, ground-up approach to assessment where faculty will find value in reviewing and reworking their course outcomes once they have a larger vision for how those outcomes support and reinforce other school/program/university outcomes. We envision faculty led curriculum reform to be based on the use of assessment data. By the end of the project, we envision the collection/analysis of specific and useful measures that lead to efficient assessment, meaningful action, and increased student learning. Specific to our use of technology to facilitate and coordinate assessment, we envision that by the end of the project over 80% of academic course and program assessment activities will have been fully migrated to the new software. By the end of the four years we intend to provide ample evidence that assessment data are available to, or acquirable by, the institution. More importantly, that these data are routinely analyzed to inform the planning and execution of academic, administrative, and support programs, as well as other activities that are important to the institution.

CONCEPT

1   Describe this Student Learning Project

The LSSU Academy Project will focus on promoting an institutional culture of assessment concentrated on student learning. The objective is to provide training and tools to assist faculty in the implementation of course and program assessment processes, as these processes are integral to institutional improvement and effectiveness. To reach this outcome we intend to utilize technology in the form of a university-wide system for collecting, disseminating, and

implementing assessment results. We will build faculty participation through a staged faculty & staff development process with a dual focus. We will provide faculty training and feedback on developing and refining learning outcomes at both the course and program level. At the same time, we will work on shifting the ad-hoc and disparate assessment activities, now underway across the university, to a centralized location for the collection, aggregation, and dissemination of assessment data. As faculty and staff work to formalize their existing assessment activities into the now-established university framework (outcomes – measures – targets – results – action planning), we believe that our institutional understanding and use of assessment data will become more refined and more robust. The explicit focus in years one and two will be on the refinement of course-level assessment, in the latter two years we intend to expand to encompass program-level assessment. Assessment data itself is not the end goal, but the data will become a tool for effective decision making and ultimately improved student learning.

2. Desired Results from the Project

Through this project we intend to build a culture of assessment based decision making that positively impacts student learning. We plan to standardize and systematize the collection of assessment data from across the university. Building from the smallest component (and the one most relevant to the individual faculty member) we will begin our efforts on course-level assessment and expand into program-level assessment. We hope to develop a pattern for institutionalizing assessment which is faculty and student focused, positioned in the context of meaningful change (relevant to both the faculty member's own instructional and research framework), and which leads to improved student learning. To determine the success of this project, surveys will be given to the faculty in order to determine their level of satisfaction with the assessment system. We will also obtain measures of use through training records, audits of course and program activity, as well as attendance at meetings and conferences.

3. Challenges and Expectations
Assessment efforts at LSSU have had a couple of false starts over the years. These efforts seemed to begin well enough, but then faded as administration changes, financial pressures, and passing fads made their way through the university. Historical evidence of assessment related to student learning has not been consistently cataloged or archived. However, faculty have been willing to work towards assessment tasks; when those tasks were clearly defined and linked to improving their instructional practice and to strengthening student learning.

We have identified several areas where barriers do exist. For example, there is an ongoing need for faculty professional development and training in translating the existing instructional activities already in use into measureable and reportable assessment data-points. Concerns have been raised about the proposed use of assessment data and its relationship to evaluation and program prioritization. In addition, some may have philosophical objections to what they perceive as quasi-industrial quality control. Finally, many of the program outcome statements submitted to this point reflect faculty driven inputs, rather than student-oriented outcomes.

Faculty are very conscious of the time demands that assessment activities can require. Two subtly distinct time-related challenges have posed barriers to past attempts at implementation. First, inauguration of new assessment activities simply can be very time-consuming. The array of activities associated with refining outcomes developing and/or discovering measures (and subsequent elements of the process) can significantly affect faculty workloads. Second, day to

day academic life is frequently marked by significant schedule fragmentation: frequent (and sometimes spontaneous) movements from one task to another make sustained attention to new and unfamiliar responsibilities difficult. In light of these challenges, it will be key to frame assessment in the context of activities that are relevant and directly beneficial to enhanced student learning and to the faculty member's own instructional practices.

4 Planning and Managing the Student Learning Project

At the end of year-one we intend to have met with, and provided customized training to, every school/department in the development of their assessment systems. We intend to work with faculty at the school level to familiarize them with the software tools and structures, as well as assisting each faculty member in entering one course (outcomes and measures at a minimum) into the system. We will promote/encourage faculty members who teach general education courses to do these courses first, building on the general education assessment data sets already in existence. We will provide faculty with professional development opportunities (as needed) related to writing outcomes statements that lead to actionable steps to improve student learning, and within the context of the year-one outcomes.