



Is Assessment a Distraction?

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Some may say that doing assessment is a distraction which competes with the key and vital functions which define our jobs: teaching classes, leading research projects, running the steam plant, or coordinating the varied activities of Student Life. However, perpetuating any activity without meaningful assessment of the effectiveness of that activity is inherently bad. Accountability has come to higher education and student, parents and legislators are looking for evidence that their educational investments are warranted, productive, and lead to the outcomes we advertise.

As a university, we must demonstrate that we have:

- a) Clearly stated goals (outcomes) and effective processes (means) for assessment of that learning
- b) Assessed the achievement of our goals (findings) for both our curricular and co-curricular activities
- c) Used the information we collected to improve achievement of our goals (action),
- d) Used processes and methodologies that reflect good practice and in which faculty and staff have participated substantially through the process.

Assessing goals that are artificial, unmeasurable, unrealistic or useless is a distraction. Creating reams, or gigabytes, of documentation that no one reads or uses is a distraction. Collecting data that we can't or won't use is a distraction. If those things are happening in your department, just stop it. Meaningful assessment must focus on improving student learning, achievement and institutional effectiveness. Meaningful assessment won't be oppressive, externally driven or useless – it will be based on looking reflectively at the things you care about and acting to improve those things.

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The Shared Governance Assessment Committee

Supporting student learning and institutional effectiveness

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