Evaluation of Academic Assessment System
Academic Year 2008 - 2009
Submitted by the 2008-2009 Core Team: Jane Hamilton, Chair; Amanda Eichman;
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As per the Assessment Plan, each year the Assessment Core Team undergoes a systematic reflection of the success of the academic assessment program and makes recommendations for improvements. The evaluation consists of both quantified data from a faculty survey and assessment results, as well as the Core Team's review of the participation, direction, and health of the system based on anecdotal evidence and review of minutes.

Faculty Survey
This year, the results of the faculty survey (see appendix A) reflected several important trends.
◆ **Logistics:** In terms of logistics, most faculty seemed to agree that the process was easier to use this year than it was last year. This is probably due in part to the way the general education data was collected, with individuals being allowed to pick the two competencies most natural to their coursework. Also in matters of logistics, faculty reported both that the best way to collect data is electronically and also that the assessment folder is difficult to use. Taken together, these two responses suggest that the correct direction for improvement is to develop a database interface to replace the spreadsheet-based system currently in place. This is reinforced by the fact that the majority of faculty reported finding the general education checklists (which were database-driven this year) useful. The last concern of logistics is that faculty report that the system is not too complicated to understand, and that they have received adequate time to complete assessment activities.
Team's Recommendations:
- Continue to allow choice of two general education competencies.
- Assign 3 hours (for the year) release time to Val Wittman to begin development of a database for the discipline- and area-level data.

◆ **Use of Assessment Results:** With regard to attitude about assessment and the use of results, an interesting trend emerges. First, attitudinally, about 55% of respondents indicated that they found value in the assessment system, with only 3% strongly disagreeing. The team feels that this is a relatively good result, considering the length of time the system has been in place. What was of greater concern, however, was response to the question of whether data collected was used to make changes at various levels in the college structure. At the classroom level, only about 7% indicated that the data was NOT used for changes. At the department level, the number moves up to 13% indicating no changes. When asked if the data is used to make changes or inform decisions in the college, the percent who disagreed climbed to 30%. Although the raw numbers are not alarming, the trend of increasing disagreement as data moves away from individual faculty members could indicate a difficulty with "closing the loop": a major concern in earlier HLC evaluations of the college. The team recognizes that this concern is addressed in the proposed annual review process.
Team's Recommendations:
- Monitor connection of assessment data to strategic planning.

◆ **Professional Development:** Based on adoption of changes to our charge last year, the Core Team has adopted a more practical, resource-based approach to assessment, emphasizing the value of teaching and learning practices rather than raw data collection or system design. This shift is supported by the overwhelming indication (76% agree) that faculty would welcome practical seminars on teaching and learning topics.

Team's Recommendation:
- Continue to recommend and/or design professional development opportunities related to the General Education Cycle. For 2009-2010, these competencies are Technology, and Mathematic and Quantitative Reasoning.

General Education Competencies:

◆ **Data Collection:** The second year of collecting the general education competency data is coming to an end. So far, the start-up problems of last year seem to have been solved. Faculty surveyed (see Appendix A) indicated that the database is easy to use. There is still some confusion, given various conversations with Area Facilitators, about the return to the original practice of allowing faculty to choose which two competencies to assess.

◆ **Discussion of Data:** Discussion in the fall by the areas and later by the full faculty focused on the data collected in 2007-08 for research and ethics. As the result of these discussions, the Research objectives were revised. A proposal to eliminate ethics as a competency was given two full-faculty discussions; ultimately, a formal vote retained the competency.

◆**Gen Ed Projects:**

Based on a change to the system approved by the Assessment Committee last year, the faculty, led by the Core Team, focused on two of the six general education competencies as topics for discussion and professional development:

Communications: The Core Team decided to focus its efforts on the reading objectives. To that end, faculty were offered the opportunity to participate in a special assessment project. The requirements were proposed at the Fall in-service following a brief introduction to the importance of reading by retired Professor Dr. Karen Pinter. As a result, 164 students in 11 sections took both pre- and post-tests in reading. 136 of these students received at least 5 minutes of direct instruction in reading strategies over the course of 12 weeks; the remainder served as a control group by taking the tests without the additional instruction. The analysis of the data will not be available for discussion by faculty until Fall 2009. A much smaller sample will also be available from a group of teachers who repeated the process in the spring semester.

Problem Solving: The Core Team focused on problem solving for professional development. To that end, the college enrolled in an e-workshop sponsored by the Society for the Teaching of Psychology. A group of 20 faculty and staff gathered for the conference. One short presentation was repeated at the Technology Fair at the spring workshop, demonstrating the accessibility and reusability of the e-conference material.

Team's Recommendations:
- Continue the three-year cycle for purposes of discussion of accumulated data and professional development.
- Establish a regular pattern of assessment activities for Wednesday meetings (e.g. 2nd Wednesday is full faculty session).
- Administer CAAP in 2009-2010 academic year as scheduled.

Discipline and Program Data

Although a review of the Assessment Folder data shows that in most cases, the Area Facilitators are successfully encouraging area faculty to provide data and to lead discussions in multiple-instructor settings, deterioration is evident, especially in some of the single-instructor disciplines and in all of the adjunct-only disciplines. In addition, the change in OPIC's charge combined with the delay in starting up the annual review process resulted in there being no area report of curricular and budget suggestions coming out of assessment discussions. Anecdotal evidence and the faculty survey results (see Appendix A) indicate that the classroom level has probably not suffered; the practice of gathering and using data for improvement of teaching and learning is entrenched among most full-time faculty. However, because HLC expectations are that the system is able to "close the loop," between classroom data and strategic planning, the holes in the system are a concern. Core Team's evaluation of the situation identifies two areas of concern: the difficulties of using and maintaining the documentation in the spreadsheet system and a gap between area facilitators' need to encouragedata collection and discussion and their actual access to that information.

Team's Recommendations:
- Improve Area Facilitator access to data Jane Hamilton to do a "gap analysis" over the summer (under her existing release time arrangement of 3 hours per year as data manager) so that the Core Team can propose changes in the fall in time for these to be put in place before the next accreditation visit.

System Change

The last item of importance relates to the direction of assessment support and the continuing role of the Core Team in the assessment process. Having been convened as a temporary subgroup of the Assessment Committee at a time of intense planning, the role of the Core Team has changed significantly now that most systems are in place and running smoothly. We have adopted a more practical, resource-based approach to assessment, emphasizing the value of teaching and learning practices rather than raw data collection or system design. In addition, the area facilitators have taken over the responsibility for keeping the assessment process going with their area faculty. It is from these two facts that the final recommendation of the team is drawn: that we disband the current membership in favor of having area facilitators assume the workings of the core team. The idea is to eliminate the disconnect between those who are powering the system and those who are driving the system, a disconnect which is evident in several of the team's recommendations. The area facilitators are poised to have more direction and control over the programs they would like in place, and ultimately, it should be they who decide what direction the faculty would like for the continuation of the assessment process. Since some of the facilitators sit on the OPIC committee, it would be sensible to have the others involved in the design of the system, perhaps strengthening the connection between what is assessed and how the data is used.

Team's Recommendation:
- Amend the Assessment Committee Charge (See Appendix B) so that the faculty membership consists of those area facilitators not serving on OPIC. (Some rotation of membership is advisable.)
- Continue the participation of an IT representative. (Chris Shelly has been such a vital member of the Core Team this year, we don't know how we managed without her.)

- At least for a transition year, keep the "data managers" on the committee: Jane Hamilton and Val Wittman (in at least an *ex-officio* status) are vital to maintaining the data systems.

Recap of Recommendations:

- Continue to allow choice of two general education competencies.
- Assign 3 hours (for the year) release time to Val Wittman to begin development of a database for the discipline- and area-level data.
- Monitor connection of assessment data to strategic planning.
- Continue to recommend and/or design professional development opportunities related to the General Education Cycle. For 2009-2010, these competencies are Technology, and Mathematic and Quantitative Reasoning.
- Continue the three-year cycle for purposes of discussion of accumulated data and professional development.
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