

Five Fundamental Questions about Assessment

As I noted in my previous message, I recently attended a workshop on the new criteria for accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. The primary topic of the workshop was the relationship between assessment and the new accreditation criteria. Please note that when the HLC uses the term “assessment” they mean student learning assessment; “evaluation” is used to refer to effectiveness measurement and improvement of the non-student learning areas of the institution.

HLC believes that assessment is critical for institutional accountability, distinctiveness, effectiveness and accreditation. All of the regional accrediting associations are concerned about the increased accountability expectations being expressed at the federal level and have taken steps to strengthen the assessment components of their accreditation requirements.

HLC defines assessment as a strategy for understanding and improving student learning. An effective assessment strategy, according to the HLC, is based on meaningful and useful questions related to student learning. Assessment data is only useful if it is analyzed and used to make a difference in student learning. Another key to effective assessment is to have a process that is workable and follows a reasonable schedule.

HLC believes that discussions about assessment, between peer reviewers and institutions, can be framed around the following five fundamental questions:

- 1) How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, and degrees?
- 2) What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?
- 3) In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?
- 4) How do you ensure shared responsibility for assessment of student learning?
- 5) How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of assessment of student learning efforts?

What evidence will HLC be looking for to see if Morningside has an effective assessment strategy?

1. Clarity and relevance in learning goals - clear, publicly articulated learning outcomes at multiple levels appropriate to the organization’s mission, context, educational goals, programs, and degrees.

2. Intentionality and purpose in compilation of assessment results - processes for gathering data on student learning and documentation that the organization has data on student learning that is useful and meaningful to the organization.
3. Systematic analysis and use of student learning evidence - processes that use results to confirm and improve student learning, educational quality, and organizational effectiveness.
4. Achievement of student learning outcomes - evidence that confirms students are achieving the stated learning outcomes of the organization.
5. Shared responsibility for and commitment to effective assessment of student learning - processes for and documentation broad participation in analyzing and using student learning evidence as a means for building commitment to educational improvement.
6. Evaluation and improvement of assessment efforts - processes for and documentation that the organization is making assessment useful and meaningful; i.e., a matter of commitment versus a matter of compliance.

An archive of previous materials is available at:

<http://www.morningside.edu/academics/research/assessment/handbook.htm>

Next time: Curriculum Mapping - A Useful Tool for Assessment.