

HOT TOPIC: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND PROGRAM QUALITY

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Participants were asked to assign themselves to one of the four sub-topics that the co-facilitators had identified previous to the session (the handout including several discussion questions under each sub-topic is at the end of this report). Each of the four small groups discussed the sub-topic and then shared with the group at large, accepting questions or comments from others.

DEFINING GRADUATE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Graduate student learning outcomes are typically defined at the program level. Are they being integrated?

What is the benefit of reviewing SLOs across programs? If there are overarching outcomes, their review will allow us to see if there are any pieces missing in a particular program.

Can find commonalities across programs, e.g., professional ethics, and then each program can address it in its own particular way, so that there can be differences across programs.

The difference between SLOs for Master's and for doctoral programs may be in the level, i.e., the same goal with differentiated levels.

Private institutions tend to have well-defined missions and so the definition of SLOs may be driven by the mission. But still the challenge remains of what the indicators are that will provide evidence that an outcome is achieved.

Concern: the only way to get agreement across programs for overarching SLOs is by defining them at a higher, more abstract level, but this also implies being more removed from the operational level.

Student feedback can be useful for assessing SLOs.

MEASURES AND METHODS FOR ASSESSING GRADUATE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Tension between outcomes and competencies

Most programs have summative measures (presentations by graduate students, comprehensive exams, external measures such as licensure, etc.)

Other programs may also include formative measures (early in the program, when there is time to "correct" issues)

Must link data to curricular change

Important to recognize programs that are "closing the loop" (for example, with awards given by the provost

Reinforce that what is important is the response to assessment results, so that a program can be rewarded even if weaknesses are identified, as long as the program develops an action plan

Exit survey of graduating students and alums (required for the former; difficult to get for the latter)

Social networking for students while they are in the program, they then tend to stay in touch after graduation and it is feasible to "find them"

ROLE OF GRADUATE DEANS IN SECURING AND SHARING DATA AND FOSTERING IMPROVEMENT

Leverage resources to “inspire” the assessment process

Key: participation of faculty governance/graduate council... faculty “own” the curriculum, they should “own” assessment

Assessment as part of program review

Do programs know what to do with the data that is collected? Graduate Dean can help with guidance on this

Are programs collecting the right type of data?

Faculty need help with assessment expertise; e.g., how to design a meaningful survey

Faculty Development can play a role helping faculty understand assessment and becoming better at it

Provide tools to faculty/programs so they can effectively address assessment results

How to get faculty buy-in?

- Most faculty want to do better for their students, so they will be excited if they are shown that assessment results can be used to have that effect

- Find ONE faculty who cares in a particular unit or department

- Avoid “busy-work”

- Do campus-wide assessment fairs where faculty/programs share posters with their projects

- Involve faculty governance

- Simplify assessment processes

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ACCREDITATION

Also discussed if there should be a common set of SOLs across graduate programs

Core competencies: each program translates those in a unique way, and that is ok

How can we identify different levels within the goals?

In graduate education rubrics have been abandoned. For example, if we claim clear writing as one of the SLOs, how do we evaluate that? Do we use a rubric when evaluating theses so we can tell, for example, if something is not working well what it is so that we can address it in the future?

Some programs may use the same rubric at different stages in a student’s career so as to assess progress

At the graduate level, “standardized testing” would not work as it is done in undergraduate education because the learning process is more at the individual level

ADDITIONAL QUESTION: Are institutions doing anything to prepare graduate students planning an academic career to be familiar with assessment of student learning outcomes? No institutions responded on the affirmative. A suggestion was made that assessment results should be shared with graduate students so they are “role-modeled” on the use of assessment.

(Handout)

Hot Topic: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes and Program Quality

MAGS 2011 Conference

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Co-Facilitators

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Purpose of the Session:

To share ideas and to learn how different graduate schools are approaching and addressing the topic.

Please join a small discussion group at a table identified with one of these sub-topics and set of questions.

DEFINING GRADUATE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. What have you identified as desired graduate student learning outcomes?
2. Are they well defined in a manner that allows for their achievement to be assessed?
3. Should we have outcomes which are common across all disciplines? Across at least some disciplines? Or should they be discipline-specific?
4. What sets the difference between graduate and undergraduate level outcomes?
5. What should the balance be between assessing content knowledge and assessing professional skills related to career objectives?

MEASURES AND METHODS FOR ASSESSING GRADUATE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. What are the measures and methods used for assessing student achievement of the outcomes?
2. What indicators are used to assess achievement of learning outcomes?
3. What data do you collect?
4. Are there program specific measures of student learning?
5. What process is followed to develop the assessment plan?
6. What process is followed to implement the assessment plan?
7. What is the role of graduate student career placement and career progression in assessing learning outcomes?
8. What is the role of career progression outside of academia in assessing learning outcomes?

ROLE OF GRADUATE DEANS IN SECURING AND SHARING DATA AND FOSTERING IMPROVEMENT

1. How do you share assessment data with faculty and administrators?
2. What are the plans to use assessment results for program improvement?
3. What strategies were developed for improving as a result of the data?
4. What impact has assessment had on program practices?
5. What impact has assessment had on student life, curriculum, mentoring?
6. How do you emphasize the importance of on-going assessment with relevant updates?
7. How do you keep the project going? Keep it from being a report on a shelf?
8. How does assessment fit in with the competing demands of administrative changeovers and other priorities?

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ACCREDITATION

Follow-up to the immediately preceding Plenary Session by Dr. Lynn Priddy, Vice-President of Accreditation for the Higher Learning Commission

1. What types of evidence related to assessment, assessment results, and results compared to desired learning outcomes would be possible to provide to accreditors? What are potential pitfalls and unintended consequences of doing so?
2. What evidence would demonstrate that the student learning outcomes are appropriate to programs, students, degrees?
3. What evidence would demonstrate that the institution analyzes and uses data and information from assessment to improve programs and student learning?
4. As accreditors expand their focus beyond assessment of learning outcomes to include the evaluation of student persistence and completion at an institution, how do you hope accreditors will approach evaluation of these?
5. What are the appropriate and inappropriate roles for accreditation in teaching, student learning and student learning outcomes, and assessment?