Program Level Assessment: What it is, and what it is not

University of Maine
Office of Assessment
Brian Doore
Director of Assessment
Agenda

• Introductions
• Key Programs
• Overview of UMaine’s plan for assessment
• Key elements of program assessment
• Assessment planning protocol
• Sharing plans & initial thoughts
UMaine plan for Assessment

• Background
• Central to teaching mission as a Land Grant
• Required by NEASC
  – 2015 Progress update
  – 2019 Review
• Implementation Plan
  – Pilot Programs (EES, NAS, MBS, MBBS, EDHD, FSN)
  – Phased implementation
UMaine plan for Assessment

• Professional development opportunities
  – Course level assessment
  – Program level assessment

• Website Resources
  [www.umaine.edu/assessment](http://www.umaine.edu/assessment)

• Individual faculty consultation & support
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Notecards

• Use the notecards to jot down
• one specific issue you think your program may face in conducting program-level assessment
• one opportunity that may help your program move this work along in a positive way
What Program Level Assessment is...

• “The systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development.” (Palomba & Banta, 1999)

• It is NOT faculty evaluation, classroom assessment, or program review (however, data collected for these purposes can be used in program level assessment)
Why aren’t grades enough?*

• Grades are (or can be) important indicators of
  – Students’ aggregate performance, often including attendance, participation, and compliance with task completion

• Grades, however, do not provide:
  – Specific information about students’ performance on targeted skills/tasks
  – Reliable data across sections
  – Objective, and equivalent student data which can be used for improvement of student learning or changes to instruction or the curriculum

The Q & A section of this presentation is adapted from Cartwright et. al. (2009)
Common Concerns about Outcomes Assessment

• Does this process affect my academic freedom?
  – No, assessing learning outcomes is about faculty determining what is critical for students to learn, and then measuring that learning. The degree of uniformity across sections is determined by faculty, not the assessment.
Will this be more work for us?

• Probably, yes. However...
  – The design of the assessments used in programs is faculty driven
  – The majority of time required for this process will be spent on
    • Discussing what is critical for students to learn in each discipline
    • Discussing what are areas of strength and what needs improvement
    • Determining what changes should be made to improve students’ learning outcomes
Will assessment information be used to evaluate faculty?

• Absolutely not.
  – These assessment processes will be used to estimate the effectiveness of programs, courses, and other learning opportunities for students, not to determine the effectiveness of an individual faculty.
  – The reporting structure is such that all data reported to the Office of Assessment will be in the aggregate, and not attributable to a single person.
Isn’t the primary purpose of Outcomes Assessment to find fault with things?

• No. The primary purpose of outcomes assessment is for programs to document what they do best, and improve on what they need to improve on.
  – Successes can be used to:
    • Market program to prospective students
    • Demonstrate effectiveness to external accrediting bodies
    • Justify increased resources
    • Attract high-quality faculty candidates
  – Identified needs can be used to make specific and measureable improvements to courses, curriculum, and procedures
Will the results be valid and reliable?

- Yes, for the purpose of program improvement.
  - Results will probably not be reliable enough to assess the effectiveness of a single course or instructor, however...
  - When aggregated, they will provide an accurate picture of the success of a program overall.
Isn’t this just a slippery slope to standardized testing?

• Absolutely, and unequivocally, not!
  – Faculty will determine
    • What is important for students to learn
    • Valid and practical ways to assess that learning
    • Program strengths and needs based on that assessment
    • Specific changes (or the continuance of specific elements of the existing program) based on the assessment results
    • Whether the changes made were effective
Is this just another academic fad that will be gone in a couple of years?

• *Probably not.*
• Assessment at UMaine has been identified as one of two primary areas (along with Finances) for reporting on the 2019 NEASC report (UMaine’s 10 year re-accreditation review).
  – Interim report of progress due in August of 2015
  – Assessment will play a leading role in the 2019 report of campus activities and alignment to NEASC requirements
  – Four universities in the New England and Mid-Atlantic region have been placed on probation because of a failure to implement meaningful learning outcomes assessment
• **More importantly,** students (and their parents) are evaluating colleges and universities on the documented learning, retention and post-graduation successes of their alumni.
What will this look like?

- Faculty driven
- Cyclical
- Iterative
- Action-oriented
- Reflective
Assessment Cycle

1. Set Learning Outcomes
2. Create Learning Opportunities
3. Conduct Assessment
4. Analyze Assessment Results
5. Enact Action Plan for Improvement
6. Evaluate Impacts
1. Set Goals and Outcomes

• Program Learning Outcomes: e.g., “students will communicate research findings to colleagues”
• Program Goals: e.g., “students will have a sufficient foundation to enter graduate school or related profession”
• Embedded and/or targeted measures
  – “Students will write a technically accurate report of research findings and present those findings to classmates.”
1. Set Goals and Outcomes

• Describe what students learn, rather than what faculty will do or “cover”
• Important to your program or discipline:
  – What does a professional in your field know and what do you expect them to be able to do?
• Observable
  – “Students will appreciate the differences in the perspectives of learning theorists” (Not observable)
  – “Students will identify the strengths and weaknesses of major learning theorists through applied problems” (Observable)
• Rely on verbs
• 5-7 Outcomes (depending on scope of program)
2. Create Learning Opportunities

• Students have multiple opportunities to learn
• Learning cycle is mapped out
  – Table showing: outcomes in columns across the top and requirements down the side
  – Indicates “Introduced,” “Reinforced,” and demonstrates “Mastery”
• Curriculum map includes experiences and demonstrations of mastery outside coursework: e.g., research/internship experiences, exit interviews, post graduation outcomes
## 2. Create Learning Opportunities

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3. Assessment Process

- Steps in the process:
  1. Ask a meaningful question
  2. Collect useful data
  3. Analyze data
  4. Interpret results; report; discuss

- Meaningful, useful, feasible
- Data collected in a methodologically sound way
3. Assessment Process

- Start where you are
- Consider the size/complexity of the program and required reporting
- Decide in advance criteria for success and how data may be used (or misused)
4. Analyze Results

• After collecting data/evidence
  – Consider possible ways results could be used (or misused)
  – Discuss the “criteria for success”

• Involve the department
  – Assessment is faculty driven, faculty supervised
  – Faculty members are in the best position to identify good assessment opportunities and to use the results
4. Analyze Results

• Celebrate and share good news
• Tailor the results to the audience
• Discuss and reflect on
  – Positive results
  – Disappointing results
• Ask how/where improvements can be made
5. Action Plan for Improvement

• Document successes
• Improve when needed
• Create an action plan to improve—or maintain—outcomes

• Potential areas where actions may be needed:
  – How a course is taught; what is taught; or when it’s taught
  – Prerequisites; frequency of course offerings
  – Benchmarks/standards (students may not be aware of)
  – Goals, outcomes, or the assessment process
5. Action Plan for Improvement

- Consensus on areas for improvement
- Document your action plan
- Share your action plan
- Put your action plan in motion
  - Specific “doable” but meaningful tasks (e.g., LinkedIn)
  - Timelines and persons responsible
6. Evaluate impacts

• What are the impacts of your plan?
  – On student learning outcomes
  – On program goals
  – On other indicators of student success e.g.,
    • Students:
      – Post graduation outcomes
      – Time to degree
      – Dropout rates
      – Switching rates
    • Faculty
      – Productivity
      – Retention & other measures of success
Program Assessment Readiness Protocol

• Individually, or in your department/program groups
  – Complete the “program assessment readiness protocol”
  – Identify at least one program learning outcome that you will examine
  – Identify the learning opportunities for this outcome in your program
  – Identify the assessment procedures in place (beyond course grades)
For next time...

• Complete the departmental assessment readiness protocol

• Identify at least three (but no more than seven) learning outcomes that are **critical** for your program. Plot these on a shared Google Doc (I can help you set this up if needed)

• Be ready to discuss those learning outcomes and how you currently assess them

• See you October 9, 2014 from 2:00 – 4:00 in the CETA Classroom (Fogler Library)
References
