The University Assessment Council

Minutes
January 22, 2019
210D Reese Phifer

<u>Attendance</u>: Ginger Bishop, Chris Coleman, George Daniels, Sarah Fitzgerald, Holly Hallmann, Robin Lawson, Joyce Meyer, Mary Kay Meyer, Suja Rajan, Cecil Robinson, Liza Wilson

- The group discussed "alternative" SLO assessment strategies for grad programs (see meeting agenda for prompt Q). Suggestions/comments included the following:

  - Use of multiple assessment points and/or multiple rubrics; not all assessment needs to happen at the organic "high-stakes" points
  - External peer review could be beneficial, especially in cases of internal rater disagreement
  - If committee members are misusing assessment rubrics (e.g., using a defense rubric to criticize the student's advisor), the program may have cultural issues that go beyond assessment. If that's the case, are there adverse consequences for students?
  - Some grad programs do annual progress reviews for each student. When aggregated, these can yield avenues for program-level learning improvement initiatives.
  - On comprehensive exam, include one question that (a) asks about (identify, compare, examine) major threads within the field, and (b) has students justify why the threads are part of the canon; can use # of citations, influence on others work, etc. The point is to have at least one comps question that demonstrates ability to identify/compare/examine major threads that is not research-program specific.
  - When the Q was posted to the ASSESS listserv, national expert Linda Suskie suggested a qualitative approach in which advising faculty could learn from each other (see attachment below)

- Chris C. summarized (partial) 2017-18 feedback assessment trends based on reports reviewed last summer/fall:

  - The student support units continue to improve, with most OPO rubric element averages above or approaching Mature (3.0). Half of the reports had an average score >3.0 (including evidence of seeking improvement), while the other half had an average score in the upper half of the Developing range (2.5 – 2.99).

- We saw less dramatic improvement in the feedback scores for 144 degree programs (~60 still to report in spring), with overall averages rising to 2.56 (from 2.47). Similarly, the number of mature reports reached 42 (up from 37), although only 18 of those had a score ≥ 3 on element S13 (action plans to improve student learning).
- The highest scoring Colleges tend to have some things in common: (1) a College-level coordinator; (2) a College-level assessment team; and (3) an internal review of assessment reports before they are submitted to OIE. As OIE meets individually with Deans this semester, we'll strongly encourage those practices.

- Announcements:
  - Mary Anne Connors will be retiring at the end of January. OIE will soon search for an Academic Improvement Coordinator who has experience with teaching, faculty/program development, and assessment.
  - Cecil R.'s FLC (faculty learning community) proposal was one of five selected. This calendar year he will participate in a "train the trainer" FLC, and next year 8-12 faculty/staff can join his FLC on improvement of learning at the program level.
  - The Elon visit is Feb. 14-15; The FRC Faculty Technology Showcase is Feb. 22.

Meeting adjourned
Next meeting: February 26th

(attachment below)

Assessment challenge related to dissertation committees (Nov. 2018)

A concern is that our assessment measures that rely on doctoral student committees to evaluate the quality of student work seem in part to be measuring committee members' evaluation of their own work and the work of their fellow committee members. I'm sure that does not shock you. It would be helpful to think with you about how best to use faculty self-reported assessments of doctoral student work.

<u>Responses from ASSESS listserv</u>

1. You're right that, in theory, dissertations should be an ideal capstone assessment of key program learning outcomes. But I've found two realities can make that hard. One is that some doc programs are relatively small, graduating only a handful of students per year. Another is that dissertations can be highly individualized--the thesis research vary so dramatically that they have little by way of shared learning outcomes (beyond basic things like writing and information literacy, which everyone should be really good at by this point, so there shouldn't be much to learn in terms of things to improve).

Given these realities, a basic question to ask is: Are assessments of the dissertation helpful in understanding and improving doc students' learning? If not, there's no law that says faculty MUST assess them. They can instead look at the other direct and indirect evidence you've mentioned, such as comprehensive exams and dissertation defenses and perhaps a few other key assessments.

If the faculty do see some potential value in assessing dissertations, design a process that makes the information more valid and therefore useful. For example, put in place a process so that assessments of dissertations are kept confidential, with identifying info removed. Then hold the individual assessments that there's a sufficient critical mass to look for patterns. (This may mean looking at accumulated data only once every two or three years.)

Finally, consider a qualitative rather than quantitative approach. I think the fundamental question advisors might consider and discuss with their colleagues is: Did I as an advisor learn anything from this dissertation experience that I'd like to share with my colleagues? Is it leading me to do anything differently with future students, that will help their dissertations be even more successful? That moves the conversation from being judgmental to being collegial.   -Linda Suskie

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2. I saw your post on the Assess list and thought I would reply with a quick comment to hopefully assist your program in getting around the issue of chairs using the rubric to rate the students product. We have a similar system and challenge. So we make our final defenses public and anyone in attendance can offer a rating, anonymously or confidentially. It still has some inflation but does offer more ratings. Even still we find that qualitative rather than quantitative data (along with other elements such as an alumni survey) are better sources of program improvement data.   -Matthew Fuller