Guidelines to consider in planning, implementing, and/or judging the value of assessment of student learning and development.

Directions:

These Guidelines can be used if you are planning an assessment, implementing an assessment, and/or judging the benefits and contributions of the assessment. Thus these guidelines can be used at any time during the assessment process, even though they are written in the present tense.

If you consider the Guideline to be highly relevant, appropriate and essential to your assessment, indicate a "4." If it is not important at all indicate a "0," and then use the values 0 – 4 to indicate how essential the Guideline is to you and your colleagues. You are strongly encouraged to discuss these Guidelines with your colleagues so that you can increase the return of your investment in the assessment.

These Guidelines are still in draft form and we welcome your comments. Please direct your comments and suggestions to Larry Braskamp, lbraska@luc.edu Thank you.

Having a clear purpose for assessment

1. We have a strong commitment to improve what we are assessing.
2. We assess based on our own commitment, not from some external demand or control.
3. We assess so that we can understand how and why students learn and develop as a result of their education.
4. We advocate that assessment must be valuable and useful to the students.
5. We consider the value of assessment by its catalytic effect as well as its direct impact.
6. We accept the principle that assessment is effective and useful when it can create conversations among the stakeholders about the issues, problems, and challenges
7. We consider assessment to be a part of our strategic planning.
8. We purposefully view assessment as a political endeavor and not one to replace the political process in organizational decision making.
9. While we acknowledge that assessment is often driven by external demands like accreditation, but our primary motivation to assess is based on improving what we do.
10. We stress "So, what's the use?" in our planning and implementation of assessment.
11. We recognize that assessment is very labor intensive
12. We have sufficient fiscal and human resources and stakeholder support and commitment in our assessment.
13. We advocate "High standards but not high standardization" in defining quality.
14. We stress the connections among assessment evidence collected, interpretation of the evidence and action based on the evidence.
15. We have specific sessions in which the assessment plan and its implementation are discussed with the key stakeholders.
16. We know and follow the policies and strategies for assessment that our institution has developed.
17. We recognize that changes may require several years.

Involving stakeholders throughout the assessment process

1. We assess to meet the information needs of our stakeholders and users.
2. We have identified key stakeholders to involve at all times in our assessment process
3. We involve those closest to the action to be highly involved in assessment, i.e. faculty are integral to the entire assessment process.
4. We accept the principle that users who have a need for assessment evidence are more apt to use the evidence.
5. We recognize that different stakeholders have different goals and needs for the use of the assessment evidence.
6. We design our assessment to insure a sense of ownership among the stakeholders.
7. We advocate an culture of openness, trust, and commitment to self-examination among the stakeholders.
8. We ask faculty and other stakeholders what does the evidence mean to them.
9. We have a champion of assessment since assessment does not occur naturally.

What and how to assess is critical

1. We include dimensions of student entry level characteristics, student experiences as well as student learning and development (outcomes) in our assessment
2. We stress that the evidence collected must be aligned with the goals of the program and institution.
3. We stress that the assessment must match the vision of the institution.
4. We include evidence on the program, policies, and practices to enhance student learning and development in our assessment.
5. We consult with experts in measurement and assessment to ensure that we have a technically trustworthy assessment.
6. We have strategies for dealing with potential conflicts and tensions between the stakeholders and those carrying out the assessment.
7. We involve key stakeholders in determine the purposes, issues, and strategies in conducting the assessment.
8. We have made sure that the evidence collection instruments and procedures are understandable and relevant to the stakeholders.
9. We change and adapt the assessment strategies to meet the ongoing needs of those impacted.
10. We gather evidence as much as possible that is a part of the daily life and work of faculty and staff.
11. We collect evidence about student performance as well as level of engagement of students in the learning process.
12. We start small to prevent a too complex and cumbersome assessment process.

Assessment is telling a story that is evidence based and to be shared with the stakeholders

1. We consider assessment as a special type of story – one that includes judgments of quality based on evidence
2. We include all sorts of evidence – quantitative and qualitative – in our story to enhance its credibility and usefulness.
3. We collect evidence from multiple sources, e.g., students, faculty, administrators,
4. records
5. We purposefully link our assessment story to key issues and decisions.
6. We work to make our story clear, focused, simple, and easily understood by the stakeholders
7. We include implications for action in our story
8. When necessary we have experts in measurement and assessment to assist the stakeholders in better understanding the evidence
9. We recognize how the story can be communicated is critical – written, oral, group meetings, etc.
10. We know that telling the story must be combined with conversations and deliberations for action by the relevant stakeholders.
11. Our strategy is having informal and formal meetings with stakeholders including students to discuss and react to the assessment story.
12. We informally communicate major findings when available and appropriate and not wait until a final report is written or communicate.
13. We communicate our story so that differences among students with different demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnic, racial) are respected.

Improvement and follow-up are an integral part of the assessment process

1. We believe that assessment is ultimately about caring, with users expecting and willing to make adjustments based on what they have learned from the assessment.
2. We know who the stakeholders (target audiences) are in the assessment.
3. We know when the decisions about the program are made and acted upon.
4. We know that the evidence and story must get to those who have the power and resources to make changes.
5. We advocate that the communication process in an assessment is more than a one way transmission of the collected evidence; it is dynamic and interactive among the stakeholders.
6. We recognize that stakeholders have difficulty connecting desired student learning with the pathways that may influence the learning.
7. We have plans to follow-up on programmatic changes that are included as part of the assessment process.
8. We have committed financial and human resources for the use of the evidence, not just its collection.
9. At a minimum, we accept the maxim: "Just having the conversation is valuable"
10. We expect users to reject the evidence if the results are not as favorable as they expect or like.
11. We recognize that stakeholders prefer comparisons, wanting to know how well are we doing compared to others.
12. We continually evaluate the usefulness of our assessment efforts and make changes if needed.

Using a survey of student experiences and learning developed by an external organization

1. We acknowledge that survey results are one piece to a larger conversation, not the sole means to answer an issue or challenge.
2. We have determined campus readiness and developed adequate plans for dissemination and use of results, prior to contracting with an external organization.
3. We have spent considerable time developing a comprehensive and overarching assessment plan prior to securing an externally developed survey.
4. We have available staff support for analysis of the survey results if needed
5. We have interpreted the evidence collected using a written narrative of central themes and highlights of results.
6. We have coordinated opportunities for campus users to connect with and learn how other campuses have used survey results.
7. We have examples of how other campuses have utilized survey results to enact programmatic or institutional change.
8. We have determined how results will be communicated and in what format to which audiences.
9. We recognize that comparing results with peers can be useful (as a benchmark) but also can be misleading if the peers are not similar to our program being assessed.
10. We have involved others on campus in opportunities for conversations about the results and to assist with interpretation and meaning making.

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