COMMONLY USED ASSESSMENT METHODS AND TOOLS

Brooklyn College Assessment Day

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Derived from Goals and Outcomes

- Many factors dictate what kind of evidence will be gathered in an assessment effort: time constraints, budgets, sampling limitations, best practices, etc.

- But the primary factor should always be the outcomes to be investigated themselves.

- Evidence is only as good as the questions that generate it, and questions should flow from goals and outcomes.

Academic vs Administrative

- While there will often be overlap in the tools used in academic and administrative departments, the latter often have less obvious choices for what data to collect.

- Most obviously, academic departments already regularly collect student artifacts and assign them grades, an advantage administrative units don't have.

Direct vs Indirect - What's the difference?

- Direct assessment attempts to measure progress by examining evidence of success directly, such as through counting metrics or percentages

- Common types of direct assessment include counting number of constituents helped or services performed, adjudicating whether performance goals have been met, and

- Indirect assessment attempts to better understand the attitudes and observations of people involved in the educational process by soliciting their feedback in a variety of forms

- Common types of indirect assessment include focus groups, surveys, and testimonials

We Should Gather As Many Types of Evidence as We Reasonably Can

- Colleges and universities have a variety of functions, and we should use various means to assess them

- Student learning and growth occur in many different facets, and not all of them are easily investigated with direct measures

- The more that we rely on individual assessment metrics, the more that we are vulnerable to their various limitations and biases

Direct and Indirect Assessments Can Work in Concert With Each Other

- Direct assessments provide evidence for whether grades and graduation rates are reflections of actual student growth

- Direct assessments can guide pedagogical and administrative decisions by identifying areas of strength and areas of need

- Drawback: direct assessment can be reductive and prompt "teaching to the test"

- Indirect assessments help to make our institutions more ethical, more fair, and more humane by treating student and instructor attitudes as an essential guide to our practices

- Indirect assessments can "fill in the gaps," helping us to see important dynamics that might otherwise get lost in the data

- Drawback: can contribute to a service philosophy, where students are customers to be placated

Academic Institutional Level – Direct vs Indirect

The Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus

- A standardized test of student learning, developed by the Council for Aid to Education

- Includes a written Performance Task designed to assess various academic strengths, such as quantitative reasoning and critical reading, in concert, and a multiple choice section

- Provides individual student scores, institutional averages, and scores for student growth over time

The Gallup-Purdue Index

- A large-scale survey that solicits self-reported information from college graduates at regular intervals after their graduation

- Survey questions ask about economic outcomes like employment and income, but also about life satisfaction and satisfaction with the college experience

Administrative Institutional Level – Direct vs Indirect

Evaluating the Strategic Plan

■ Specific evidence-based benchmarks are developed to ascertain how well the Strategic Plan is being implemented

■ Data is presented in such a way that progress can be measured in subsequent evaluations

Constituent Satisfaction Survey

■ A large-scale survey that solicits self-reported information from college stakeholders such as students, faculty, administrators, and staff.

■ Survey questions ask about quality of service, accessibility of service, timeliness of service, etc.

Academic Departmental Level – Direct & Indirect

Document Review

- Key documents used in the ordinary workflow of a given unit are analyzed for efficiency and

- Analysis can be highly structured, semi-structured, or freeform

- Potential conflicts between intended uses of documents and their actual use in day-to-day operations can be identified

Constiuent Focus Groups

- A convenience sample of t willing to participate in a focus group is gathered

- An assessment coordinator guides constituents through a semi-structured focus group designed to solicit information about issues such as clarity of quality of service, accessibility of resources, and ease of scheduling appointments

- Representative quotes from constituents can help deepen understanding of real-world attitudes

Administrative Departmental Level – Direct & Indirect

Rating of Student Essays

- A representative sample of students in a given major produce essays at the beginning and end of the semester

- Essays are rated by a faculty committee based on faculty-defined standards of success

- Comparisons between pre- and post-essay ratings can help establish whether students are learning essential course material

Student Focus Groups

- A convenience sample of students willing to participate in focus groups is gathered

- An assessment coordinator guides students through a semi-structured focus group designed to solicit information about issues such as clarity of learning goals, accessibility of resources, and student satisfaction with technology

- Representative quotes from students can help deepen understanding of real-world student attitudes

Counting

Simply tracking numbers (of constituents served, of reports filed, of hours worked, of goals achieved, etc) can function as an important form of assessment

- Pros: numbers are often the coin of the realm in administrative contexts, counting is usually low-resource or no-resource and merely involves pulling numbers generated in ordinary operations

- Cons: raw numbers can rarely convey necessary details and complications such as the context of a given service, quantitative data can create a false sense of objectivity or certainty

Surveys – Externally Developed

Survey instruments developed externally to the institution. Can be one-size-fits-all or commissioned specifically for one institution.

- Pros: much of the hard work is farmed out, survey instruments have (presumably) been validated, offer rare breadth of information

- Cons: external surveys can be expensive, can lack the kind of fine-grained and contextual questions of internally developed surveys, getting an adequate response rate can be difficult

Surveys – Internally Developed

Survey instruments developed within the institution, often using software like SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics. Can address specific .

- Pros: questions can be targeted to find out specific information of interest, highly flexible in their format and administration, can provide more generalizable data than most assessment tools

- Cons: developing a high-quality survey instrument is a major undertaking, institutions typically lack the means to validate such surveys, sample sizes are frequently disappointing

Focus Groups

"a group of people whose reactions are studied in guided or open discussions to determine the reactions that can be expected from a larger population"

Can be highly structured, semi-structured, or freeform

- Pros: inexpensive, easy to interpret, provides deep insight into a given unit's performance

- Cons: inability to generalize responsibly, can be dominated by strong personalities/extreme opinions

Observations – internal

A stakeholder in the institution, whether in the given unit or not, observes parts of normal operations in that unit and provides feedback. The observation can be highly structured, proceeding according to prewritten questions, or freeform.

- Pros: inexpensive or free to implement, can provide deeper insight than possible through other means, highly adaptable to different contexts and purposes

- Cons: often appears invasive to those observed, observed subjects may change their behavior due to observation, may not be generalizable

Observations – external

An expert in a given unit's area or subject is invited to campus, observes parts of normal operations in that unit, and provides feedback. The observation can be highly structured, proceeding according to prewritten questions, or freeform.

- Pros: can provide deep insight into a given unit's operations, provides a fresh set of eyes that can see dynamics those internal to the institution might miss

- Cons: often considered even more invasive than internal observation, may prompt observed subjects to change their behavior while observed, observer will typically require travel funds and/or lodging

Time Use Diaries

Personnel in a given unit are tasked with keeping a diary of how they spend their time at work for a given period, typically ranging from one day to one week

- Pros: deliberately tracking how time is used often shows surprising patterns, can prompt more efficient and effective use of time by constituents, free to implement

- Cons: participants must be willing to track how they use their time, the time period covered by the diary may not necessarily reflect a given subject's typical use of time

Interviews

One-on-one interviews of different stakeholders in a given unit, whether those that work in that unit or the constituents that the unit serves. May be highly structured, semi-structured, or freeform.

- ■ Pros: rich qualitative data can be generated about a unit's practices, requires little time or resources

- ■ Cons: participants may not be representative of unit as a whole

Acknowledge and Accept Real-World Constraints

- We'll always face pragmatic limitations in what we can do, so use the tools that are most practically useful and realistic for your context

- Assess what you can where you are with what you have

Thanks! Questions?

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