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Date: February 1, 2019

General Evaluation and Notes Regarding 2017-18 Program Assessment Reports

Much of what encompasses programmatic assessment at MSU has evolved over the course of the past six months. While the 2016-17 general evaluation of assessment was accurate and comprehensive it was relatively assumptive and not as informed by institutional context as this present review. Consequently, the perspective of that report was decidedly focused on what was sub-optimal about the then present state of academic assessment at MSU. Nonetheless, such a perspective, and its resulting evaluation, was deliberate. The focus was on how to inform action planning in terms of solutions that may have an immediate and progressively judicious impact. It seems, from this year's review, at least some of the action planning has influenced the quality of assessment and this year's reports.

It seems updating the reporting structure (adding column 5) has played a part in communicating assessment efforts and its connection to institutional planning and budgeting. It seems deliberate action planning within and between the assessment committee and assessment liaisons has renewed and refined focus for assessment at MSU. How much this action planning influenced this year's reports is debatable, but given the priority MSU has fixed to assessment since August 2018 it is clear that at least process, if not thinking, has adjusted. Additionally, this year's review included a more in-depth response to academic programs. Specific and detailed comments were made within the submitted report. The reviewed report was sent back to academic chairs and authors (if known) for feedback, review, and dispersion.

Moreover, some 17-18 reports still merely relay activity, many have maintained the quality of their report, and through the continued interaction with basic data have improved it simply by connecting this information with plans relevant to institutional effectiveness. Consequently, the conclusion reached for 17-18 remains similar to last year. Many of last year's issues persist, but at differing rates. It seems this will be the case for some time.

Finally, the general breakdown captured in this overview will become less and less valuable over time, especially as a means of understanding assessment reports in terms of action planning. However, hopefully by that time a more mature assessment culture will exist. A culture in which a basic breakdown is not needed because programs will more clearly understand their own issues of concern and points of praise.



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Issues of Concern – Assessment Proper:

1. Commentary on assessment ranges from general to specific and is often tied to faculty reflection on the process, not substantiation of the process via data.
2. Obviously, data is collected, but it is often relayed by merely mentioning the measure (i.e. evaluation form, survey, Praxis, etc.) or by specifying the base minimum of descriptive data (4 students participated), the methodology of collection and analysis is often lacking.
3. Some reports still merely relay activity, but do not substantiate it as grounded/evaluated by data.
4. Rigor is debatable in some assessments. For instance, it is debatable that if 100% of students are completing a task/outcome, said task/outcome has either A) Run its course and is no longer valuable for continuous improvement; or B) Is a procedural task and not robust enough to contribute to continuous improvement.
5. For 2017-18 language use has improved and many more reports do address program outcomes, but often leave out student learning outcomes or vice-versa. Or, more likely, ***there is no unified nomenclature in distinguishing between program and student learning outcomes***, that is, outcomes that address program specific goals, such as retention or funding, and student learning specific goals, such as demonstrating understanding. Additionally, program improvements are often tacked on to student learning outcome assessment. **(Work in progress for 19-20)**
6. Most assessments say they are using an appropriate suite of assessment metrics; however, some use a limited, may be even singular metric for evaluating success and facilitating improvement. This may or may not be profitable. It depends on how the program justifies and uses the data gained from said metric. Usually you want a set of metrics that measure learning/development from several angles that complement each other.
7. It seems some programs have very few (<10) students they are assessing. While assessment is still helpful to them, especially through standardized tests, it is questionable how much these measures relay actionable data for programs to improve upon. Small sample sizes are notoriously imprecise for evaluating improvement.
8. Even in the best programs the assessment taking place is basic, that is, the measures may be solid, but the reflection/analysis/interpretation of the data in terms of improvement are underdeveloped or merely commonsense. The danger with such recommendations is they tend to be inefficient, ineffectual, and myopic all the while seeming sufficient. Think *Rorschach Test effect*, that is, they are seeing in it what they want to see (often improvement) not using it as a gauge of success/improvement.
9. Programs might begin to think about tying the analysis of student learning to the demographics of the students they are teaching.
10. Trend analysis, especially for programs with sample sizes of <10, could be a useful tool in helping programs understand the subtlety of learning that is taking place.
11. Clarity in wording the student/program goals could be improved. Helping them move from statements like, “understand world events” to “explain the context of world events” clarify the goal to be obtained. It is about moving them from passive statements toward active statements that tightly frame what they intended a student to learn. **(Work in progress for 19-20)**



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Issues of Concern – Document:

1. The document/template is still underdeveloped. It does not contain all the requisite request locations for reporting and thus many elements get squashed together, left out, or artificially disconnected. We may want to develop a hybrid report that is both narrative and table. The addition of a fifth column has helped clarify reporting for budget requests. **(Work in progress for 19-20)**
2. Length of the reports vary, and no length should be prescribed, but as an administrative document that informs internal and external stakeholders some programs will need to be more thorough in reporting their plans, projects, data, and recommendations.
3. It is helpful for review if assessment reports are submitted in Word doc format.
4. We may want to use a different term to reference assessment reports. Report implies a certain understanding that is culturally understood to mean **only reporting**, not planning, analysis, or recommendation cataloging, etc. **(Work in progress for 19-20)**

Points of Praise:

1. All undergraduate programs are completing program assessment, which is a significant “win.”
2. Many programs provide statements implying they are assessing their programs through a diversity of measures.
3. Some programs, even non-secondary accredited programs, are relaying and using data to inform decisions.
4. More programs in 2017-18 have program goals and student learning goals that are measured.
5. More programs in 2017-18 are setting performance targets.
6. More programs in 2017-18 are thinking about how program and student goals tie back to school and university mission and planning.