Assessment that Makes Sense:
Synthesizing and Measuring Educational Competencies

Direction

• The influences toward developing a culture of assessment
• Assessing institutional competencies
• A model for demonstrating the institutional effectiveness of these competencies

Foundational Assumptions

• Assessment within education is not just a trend or fad. It is here to stay.
• Assessment is proving problematic for most educational institutions, especially the assessment of learning.
• Assessment competency must be developed within our schools.
• Assessment, rightly understood and engaged, can foster important learning and improvement to teaching, learning, and overall institutional effectiveness.
Proposition

- The Institutional Research office is strategically positioned to foster this process.
- Organization
- Methodology
- Record-keeping

Are we aware of . . . ?

- What is Assessment?
- The modern assessment movement
- ATS’s steps to foster schools’ engagement in student outcomes assessment

Assessment Defined

- The systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development.
  --Palomba & Banta, Assessment Essentials, 1999
- Assessment is more than just measurement; it is discernment; not just observation, but interpretation.
  --Thanks to John Harris, Samford University
**SACS Core Requirement 2.5**

- The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement, and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. *(Institutional Effectiveness)*

**SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1**

- The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.

**SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1**

**Undergraduate programs**

- The institution identifies college-level competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those competencies.
SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.6.2

Graduate programs
- The institution ensures that its graduate instruction and resources foster independent learning, enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.

Orientation
Gene Pond
Three-way involvement:
- Institutional Research and Effectiveness
- Enrollment Services
- Teaching

Dallas Theological Seminary
- Graduate-only
- Private
- Accredited by SACS and the Association of Theological Schools

ATS Schools in Texas
Abilene Christian University: Graduate School of Theology
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary
Brite Divinity School at TCU
Dallas Theological Seminary
Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest
George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University
Houston Graduate School of Theology
Logsdon Seminary of Logsdon School of Theology of Hardin-Simmons University
Oblate School of Theology
Perkins School of Theology, SMU
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
University of St. Thomas School of Theology
Central Thesis

- Sustained success in the work of assessment cannot be accomplished by merely fulfilling a set of tasks to satisfy external interests. Rather, sustained success will require the emergence of cultures of learning and assessment fostered by internal interests.

Critical Questions

- How does one go about promoting cultural change?
- How does one go about fostering organizational learning and a culture of assessment?

A Few Resources for Assessment Structures

- Assessment of Faculty Work
- Assessment of Organizational Effectiveness
- Assessment of Student Learning
Assessment of Faculty Work

- Faculty Load Reports
- Peer Review of Classroom Teaching
- IDEA Form Student Evaluation
- Annual Dean’s Review
- Promotion and Tenure Process

Resource: Arreola

Assessment of Organizational Effectiveness

- Entering Student Survey
- Graduating Student Survey
- Alumni Survey
- All-Student Survey
- Faculty and Staff Survey
- Organizational Effectiveness Survey
- Course Evaluations
- Faculty Activity Report

Assessment of Curriculum

- Outcomes by Degree
- Curricular Mapping of Assessment
- Student Learning Portfolio
- Mid-point Assessment
- Assessment Projects

Resources: Bresciani; Bresciani, Zelma, and Anderson
Assessment of Student Learning

- Outcomes by Degree
- Curricular Mapping of Assessment
- Student Learning Portfolio
- Mid-point Assessment
- Assessment Projects

Resources: Suskie; Myers

Characteristics of Academic Assessment

- Goal: understanding and improving student learning
- Explicit and public expectations
- Evidence is systematically
  - Collected
  - Analyzed
  - Interpreted according to those expectations
- Results are used to
  - Document
  - Explain
  - Improve performance

Ref. Thomas Angelo, Classroom Assessment Techniques, 2nd ed.
One helpful resource summary:
http://www.utsystem.edu/aca/initiatives/assessment/FAQ.htm

Academic Assessment: Not Just Grades

- A grade is our traditional way to express what a student accomplishes in class
- Assessment
  - breaks out the student learning component
  - compiles data across a program
  - provides information about the school
Academic Assessment:

Authenticity

**Direct**
- Student performs real-world tasks
- An external assessor evaluates
- Examples:
  - Portfolios
  - Class projects
  - Tests of applicable abilities

**Indirect**
- Student gives opinion about own ability, attitude, or actions
- No relevant evidence for others to assess
- Examples:
  - Surveys
  - Tests of tangential knowledge

Academic Assessment:

Approaches and Timing

**Constructive**
- Uses students' regular classwork
- Helps build student while assessing
- "Embedding":
  - Final research paper
  - Lab project
  - Internship results
- Student incentive?

**Summative**
- Makes a judgment on what has happened
- Learning outcomes become mountains to climb
- "High stakes testing"
  - TAAS, ExCET, GRE
- Fairness?

Defining and Assessing
Student Competencies

- A process of assisting a faculty in synthesizing institutional and program outcomes
- How outcome levels can be assessed within courses
- How these assessments are planned and presented to demonstrate institutional effectiveness
“Competency” Defined

- A combination of knowledge, abilities, and values needed to accomplish a particular end or goal.
- (A student-focused assessable outcome)

A Process to Synthesize and Use Institutional Outcomes

1. Mission
2. Identify outcome candidates
3. Involve and educate the faculty
4. Establish responsibility to lead
5. Draft competency definitions and levels
6. Refine the definitions and publish
7. Include competencies in your institutional effectiveness plans
8. Map curricula to competency levels
9. Gain agreement on where in the curricula will be the assessment points, and develop scoring rubrics
10. Start carrying out assessments
11. Discuss with faculty: what should we do to improve these results?
12. Report use of assessment results through the I.E. process
A Process to Synthesize and Use Institutional Outcomes

1. Mission

Dallas Theological Seminary’s mission is to glorify God by equipping Godly servant-leaders for the proclamation of His Word and the building up of the body of Christ worldwide.

Expanded Statement of Purpose

- Educational commitment
- Character commitment
- Focus commitment
- Vision commitment

...As both a professional and a graduate-level educational institution, the Seminary is committed to providing the appropriate support services, departments, resources, and facilities to accomplish the mission of the institution.
Dallas Seminary Goals

- The curricula and related seminary experiences are designed to help Dallas Seminary students grow in the following areas of knowledge, ministry skills, and character development. Depending on their vocational goals, Dallas Seminary students should:
  - Know how to study the Bible personally, using proven hermeneutical principles;
  - ...

A Process to Synthesize and Use Institutional Outcomes

1. Mission
2. Identify outcome candidates:
   a. The I.R. Director and an education professor educated and inspired in the area of learning abilities ("competencies").
   b. The I.R. Director, working with our Dean’s Office, proposed eight titles for competencies to be developed by our students.

3. Involve and educate the faculty
   a. At the annual Faculty Workshop, each proposed topic was assigned to a cross-discipline group of faculty.
   b. Besides refining whether their topic was feasible and desired, they learned and discussed the concept of competencies.
A Process to Synthesize and Use Institutional Outcomes

1. Mission
2. Identify outcome candidates
3. Involve and educate the faculty
4. Establish responsibility to lead
   a. We began with three competencies we knew well and assigned each to a division of the faculty.
   b. They were to discuss, define, refine, and propose that competency to the Faculty.

Assignments for Definition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Competency Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Biblical Studies</td>
<td>Biblical Interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theological Studies</td>
<td>Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministries and Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
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</table>

A Process to Synthesize and Use Institutional Outcomes

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5. Draft competency definitions and levels
How I.R. Could Help the Refining Process

Theological Studies

Theology:
- Definition
- Levels of attainment

Faculty survey

Faculty Survey for Each Competency Proposed

- Evaluate the proposed definition
  - Significance: is it a component of our mission?
  - Universality: should every student develop it?
  - (Implication of key terms)
  - Expression: is it clear, concise, directive?
- Evaluate each level of attainment:
  - At matriculation
  - As a benchmark
  - By graduation

Levels of Competency

- Level 6: Majors
- Level 5: Th.M. by graduation
- Level 4: Th.M. about 3/4 completed
- Level 3: All Masters-level students
- Level 2: Students after 1st year
- Level 1: Entering students
A Process to Synthesize and Use Institutional Outcomes

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2. Identify outcome candidates
3. Involve and educate the faculty
4. Establish responsibility to lead
5. Draft competency definitions and levels
6. Refine the definitions and publish

Shepherding the Faculty (Potential Derailings)

- Dismissing the need
- The whisper campaign
- Wordsmith mania
- Questioning their value
- Questioning their measurability
- Questioning the accuracy of the measurements
- Refusing to participate in assessment

Dallas Seminary Competencies

- The curricula and related seminary experiences are designed to help Dallas Seminary students develop competencies of knowledge, abilities and skills, and beliefs and values to help evangelize the world and build the Church. Specific competencies are developed in each professional degree program, but all masters-level Dallas Seminary students are to develop competency in: [ 6 bullets ]
DTS Core Competencies
March 2007

- Biblical Interpretation
- Theology
- Communication
- Christian Spirituality
- Servant Leadership
- Cultural Engagement

A Process to Synthesize and Use Institutional Outcomes
1. Mission
2. Identify outcome candidates
3. Involve and educate the faculty
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5. Draft competency definitions and levels
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7. Include competencies in your institutional effectiveness plans

An I.E. Unit Plan

Every academic program
Every department is involved
A Process to Synthesize and Use Institutional Outcomes

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9. Gain agreement on where in the curricula will be the assessment points, and develop scoring rubrics
10. Start carrying out assessments
11. Discuss with faculty: what should we do to improve these results?
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The Process of Developing Competencies
- Who are we?
- What do we want to turn out?
- What does that look like?
- What are we doing now?
- How can we work together?
- How is that measured?
- How can we pay for it?
- What do the results tell us?
### Competencies in the I.E. Process

**Definition of competency**

<table>
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<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Closing the Loop</th>
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<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
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### Why Assess our Educational Systems?

- Because we believe in accountability
- Because we want to strive for excellence in all that we do
- Because it’s done by effective organizations
- Because it increases the value of our education
- And because we want to keep accreditation