

D. Assessment of Student Learning and Development

Overview

Assessment of student learning and development at LBC involves gathering information that assists the college in determining whether or not our students and graduates are living according to a biblical worldview and serving through professional Christian ministries. Our mission statement and its accompanying goals are the canon, or measuring rod, by which we assess our students. The ultimate goal of this whole self-study process is the identification of the knowledge and skills the students have acquired and what they are doing with that education. This section of the self-study report will look at LBC's current practices in the area of assessing student learning, especially as they relate to the following MSA and ABHE standards.

Standards

MSA Standard 14

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.

ABHE Standard 12

As indicated in Standard 2, an institution has an overall plan to assess its effectiveness in achieving its mission. Central to this plan is the systematic and specific assessment of student learning and development through a strategy that measures the student's knowledge, skills, and competencies against institutional and programmatic goals.

Compliance Documented

It is the finding of the self-study process that LBC is in compliance with the stated standards and subsequent elements. Data sources demonstrating this compliance include: course syllabi, comprehensive outcomes assessment plans (COAP), SUMMA surveys, and survey of assessment procedures.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this section:

1. To what degree does the assessment of student learning drive the changes in LBC's programs, policies, and procedures?
2. What will the assessment plan be for any new initiatives? How will this new plan incorporate the current, existing plans?

Analysis of Key Issues

Overview

Assessment of student learning at LBC is well established, especially at the micro level of student learning in individual courses. All courses have syllabi with clearly defined learning

objectives and the means by which those objectives will be measured. Almost all courses have some form of formative assessment in the form of homework assignments, quizzes, papers, and mid-term exams. End of course summative assessment of learning includes the traditional final exams, final projects, and research papers. On an annual basis, SUMMA surveys are collected in a class selected by a faculty member. The SUMMA allows students the opportunity to indicate whether or not they felt the course met expectations in helping them to achieve the learning outcomes.

In addition to course level assessment, department and program chairs conduct exit interviews of their students. The professional departments also require intensive field experiences with rigorous assessments of student learning and competencies. Most use a type of rubric to measure and report the level of performance in these field application experiences. (Samples of these assessments are available in the collection of artifacts.) At the institutional level, the college administers a battery of pre- and post-tests of all entering and exiting students including ABHE's Bible major test, LBC's Bible exam, and Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal.

While over the years the college has had many assessment procedures in place, it is acknowledged that, until the year 2000, data from many of these had not been analyzed consistently, nor had there been a concerted effort to coordinate all assessment procedures into an overarching and systematic plan. Since the college's last self-study process, LBC has made a concentrated effort to develop such a plan and to increase the quantity and quality of assessment at the departmental and institutional levels.

As noted in Chapter One, the college established a comprehensive outcomes assessment plan (COAP) in 2000. This plan, as found in [Appendix 1.1](#), is part of the college's overall planning process. In the course of instituting the COAP, specifically in the creation of department and undergraduate program objectives, it became obvious to the academic community that LBC needed to review what were then referred to as "student goals." After a one-year process involving the entire campus, the student goals were revised to what are now referred to as "core knowledge and skills" (CKS). The CKS tie directly to the mission statement while also providing a clean connection for departmental and undergraduate programmatic objectives. This is evidenced by the fact that all departmental and undergraduate programmatic goals are referenced to a specific core knowledge and skill.

As a major ingredient of LBC's COAP, the college adopted a five-column model set forth by Nichols and Nichols in their book *The Department Head's Guide & Record Book for Student Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness*, 3rd edition (Agathon Press, 2000). The first column of the chart delineates the college's mission statement, the core knowledge and skills, and the goals statements for that department or program that flow from the mission statement and CKS, thus connecting departmental and institutional levels of assessment together. The next column lists the intended departmental or programmatic outcomes that will achieve the stated goals. The third column sets forth the means of assessing whether or not the outcomes have been met and the criteria by which to judge success in the meeting of the outcomes. The fourth column records a summary of the data collected to indicate the meeting of the outcomes. The final column summarizes how the results derived from the data are used to improve areas of weakness or to adjust the criteria to excel in meeting the goals.

Many departments and programs are to be commended for the progress they have made in developing their COAP charts. All programs have delineated their goals and intended outcomes and have at least a few data options. Most programs/departments have also collected some data, and several have made adjustments based upon the data collected. The Assessment Documents notebook includes a set of most of the departmental and programmatic COAP charts. Examples of COAP charts from across the campus are included in Appendix 4.D.1. The Church and Ministry Leadership Department and the Degree Completion Program are two examples of well-advanced COAP charts. The Degree Completion Program's COAP even includes a month-by-month and year-by-year assessment schedule. It should be noted that while the Teacher Education Program has drawn up a COAP chart that ties its goal statements and outcomes to LBC's mission statement and core knowledge and skills, due to requirements of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Teacher Education Department uses a matrix system to assess student learning and development.

While progress has been made by some departments and programs, it is acknowledged that others are lacking systematic assessment of student learning. In addition, since many of the instruments currently in place rely heavily upon opinion, more varied instruments and methods of assessment need to be included in the COAPs.

Much still needs to be done at all levels with regards to the goal of making adjustments to the learning process based upon an analysis of the collected data. Likewise, consideration needs to be given to how assessment will be conducted in new non-traditional initiatives.

Assessment of Student Learning as Motivation for Change

The study group for this section sought to determine to what degree faculty members attempted or accomplished changes in their courses, programs, or procedures based on information learned through assessment. The faculty was surveyed through an informal electronic means, with the study group requesting descriptions of faculty assessment practices and opinions about current assessment practices and collected data. These responses are found in [Appendix 4.D.2](#). An informal survey with two questions was sent electronically to faculty. Twenty-four faculty members and administrators responded to these questions.

Likewise, students were surveyed for their opinions about the current practices in the assessment of student learning. The survey was distributed in a variety of classes that sampled students at every level from freshman courses to graduate courses. The survey generated 226 responses from students. The survey and the collected data are found in [Appendix 4.D.2](#).

The faculty survey offered evidence that the data gathered does indeed drive change, though this occurs mostly at the level of a single course, rather than programs or curriculum. At times, the data from student assessments have driven changes in a program, as in instances reported by both DCP and the Graduate School. Minimal information surfaced from the survey in relation to assessment driving change in policies and/or procedures. The pre- and post-testing done for all students is typically not reported to faculty nor used to stimulate changes in direction or procedures. Student responses to the survey agree that there is a great deal of assessment data being collected and analyzed, but they do not necessarily see any changes actually occurring on the basis of this data.

The data collected from these faculty and student surveys reveal areas that need improvement. It points to a lack of assessment of cross-curricular and cross-divisional learning of the core knowledge and skills. Additionally, it reveals a lack of assessment of the assimilation of the college's mission statement by students. Based on the faculty responding to the survey, exams and quizzes overwhelmingly stood out as the means of assessment. Assessment tended to be of a summative nature, rather than a formative one. For instance, faculty used student input, received toward the end of a class or even after a class concluded, to make adjustments to a course for the next time. There was little evidence formative assessment of a course is being used for mid-course adjustment.

The data further reveals the need for more awareness by the faculty of the nature of assessment of student learning. Many measurements used to assess student learning, such as SUMMA surveys, tend to measure faculty performance rather than student learning. More complex rubrics for assessing student learning should also be used rather than relying mainly upon quizzes and exams. There is a need for intentionally assessing a student's demonstration and expression of a biblical worldview and philosophy of ministry. To help faculty design more effective measures of learning, or assessment instruments, there should be a vehicle for the sharing of assessment designs and implementation among the faculty. Overall, the college's rubrics for assessment should be designed for the student's success in learning the core knowledge and skills. Assessment should be, as one faculty member has noted, "*for learning, rather than of learning.*"

Finally, this study group noted that a great deal of energy is already expended in gathering data for assessing student learning, pre- and post-tests for instance. Perhaps that energy could be channeled into more efficient and effective means of assessing student learning.

Implementing COAP

Patterns evident in the data indicated that the college has yet to fully implement its comprehensive outcomes assessment plan (COAP). While outcomes are being assessed at various levels and across numerous departments, a lack of cross-divisional collaboration in the assessment of student learning seems to indicate that the "comprehensive" aspect of COAP has not yet become a reality. The current concentration on small-scale initiatives has not yet led to the development of the more holistic, integrated assessment of student learning intended by COAP. To further the implementation of COAP, this study group suggests that the college concentrate on three areas: the appointing of an assessment coordinator and committee, the facilitating of faculty in the assessment of student learning, and the perfecting of a more overarching means of assessing the accomplishment of LBC's mission statement.

The appointment of an assessment coordinator and standing assessment committee will serve to coordinate and monitor the progress of the COAP. In so doing, the committee will facilitate cross-divisional collaboration on assessment design and implementation and provide mentoring for faculty members seeking assistance in the development and evaluation of assessment instruments.

The assessment coordinator and committee will be responsible for ensuring that faculty receive instruction and interactive support on assessment of student learning. Faculty should receive assistance in designing more targeted and focused assessment of course and institutional objectives employing a greater variety of assessment techniques, including

discourse rather than solely psychometric methods of assessment. The assessment coordinator and committee would be responsible for working with the faculty and administration in initiating curricular revisions based on student performance outcomes.

The utilization of the Nichols and Nichols five-column model as described earlier in this section has helped to focus all departmental and programmatic goals back to the college's mission statement and its five core knowledge and skills. However, it is the recommendation of this study group that the college design and implement a senior capstone project to determine how well students live out the mission statement and core values of the college.

Key Strengths Noted in This Section

1. The faculty in each division utilize a variety of means to evaluate and measure student learning.
2. Faculty use the data collected from the assessment instruments to make adjustments to course content and methods of instruction.
3. The outcomes assessment process has been in progress and continues to guide faculty and administration for some programmatic changes.

Recommendations for Growth and Improvement

The following recommendations for consideration are being made by this study group:

1. Appoint an assessment coordinator and a standing committee to oversee the college's comprehensive outcomes assessment plan and to serve the faculty in enhancing the assessment of student learning.
2. Facilitate a process for faculty to design more targeted and focused assessment instruments of course objectives, using authentic assessment of student learning and employing a greater variety of assessment techniques.
3. Design and implement a senior capstone project which will assess students' demonstration of the college's mission statement and core values.

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