

Northwestern Health Sciences University

**Center for Teaching Learning and
Assessment**

University Assessment Committee



Focus Groups on University Assessment Activities

Executive Summary

June 25, 2004

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Northwestern Health Sciences University

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Introduction:

Two focus groups were conducted in the large faculty conference room on June 1 and 3, 2004. Eleven participants represented the Chiropractic; Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine and Massage therapy programs attended the focus group meetings. Prior to the focus group sessions each participant received the Assessment Culture Matrix and the accompanying Analysis Worksheet by e-mail. Participants were expected to have read through and score each of the patterns before coming to the focus group meeting. Scores were as assigned on the Higher Learning Commission document “Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Assessment Culture Matrix (pp 70-80)”, namely, 1-3 for “beginning implementation”, 4-6 for “making progress in implementation” and 7-9 for “maturing stages of implementation”.

The group process commenced with introductions, a review of the ground rules and an explanation of the limits of confidentiality. Participants were happy to be a part of the group and thus assist the committee in determining where the University is with regards to assessment. They were hopeful that the data would inform future planning and assessment activities. Participants were very open and engaging. For the most part, discussions were very interactive and required very little facilitation.

Process:

Prior to discussing rationale behind the individual scores, and to reduce the level of peer influence in how scores were assigned, each participant was invited to indicate their raw scores on each of the categories. There were a few changes based on new information gained during the discussion. Final scores for each pattern have already been inserted in the right position. In 75% of the cases, numbers changed were for lower scores. The individual scores have been turned into group composite scores and computed in percentages.

Results:

Results in the executive summary are presented using the Assessment Matrix. Following the matrix, emerging themes are identified and discussed. The themes can form the basis for discussion and actionable decisions by the University Assessment Committee.

Assessment Culture Matrix and the Patterns of Characteristics Analysis Worksheet

Patterns	Beginning Implementation	Making Progress in Implementation	Maturing Stages of Implementation
I. Institutional Culture	1-3	4-6	7-9
a. Collective/Shared Values	72.7%	27.3%	0
b. Mission	54.5%	45.5%	0
II. Shared Responsibility			
a. Faculty	81.8%	18.2%	0
b. Administration and Board	27.3%	72.7%	0
c. Students	100%	0%	0
III. Institutional Support			
a. Resources	63.6%	36.4%	0
b. Structures	54.5%	45.5%	0
IV. Efficacy of Assessment			
	100%	0%	0

Based on individual scores for the above matrix, average scores for each pattern are as follows: I. Institutional Culture: (a) Collective/shared values – 2.55, (b) Mission – **3.45**, II. Shared Responsibility (a) Faculty – 1.64, (b) Administration/board – **3.64**, (c) Students – 1.91, III. Institutional Support: (a) Resources – **3.45**, (b) Students – **3.36**, and IV. Efficacy of Assessment: – 1.82.

Emerging Themes:

Based on comments by participants, the following themes emerge:

- ❖ Overall scores: Overall scores indicate that for the most part, the university assessment process has accomplished goals in the “beginning implementation” category and is advancing into the “making progress in implementation” category.
- ❖ Committee effort: This was acknowledged as positive but insufficient to get us further along on the assessment continuum.

- ❖ **Communication:** Participants noted that information about assessment activities and expectations were not easily accessible to faculty.
- ❖ **Availability of resources and incentives:** This was seen as inadequate. Administration was particularly referenced as not providing the time and resources to get assessment up and running.
- ❖ **Indifference by some faculty:** This was noted and seen as a hindrance to the process. Historic mistrust between faculty and administration identified as the cause.
- ❖ **Accountability:** Participants believe faculty is not being held responsible for lack of involvement in assessment activities. Some would love to see consequences for not doing assessment. Some participants indicated they would like to know that what they do in class that has direct impact for the university.
- ❖ **Lack of ownership:** Perception is that the assessment initiative is top-bottom and driven mainly by NCA accreditation requirements.
- ❖ **Assessment and student learning:** It was observed that there is an inconsistency in quality of students admitted and quality of graduates. This reflects poorly on assessment strategies.
- ❖ **Next steps:** Concerns were expressed about how previous initiatives have never really led to any improvements. They would love to see strategic decisions and plans come out of this process.
- ❖ **Ownership by administration:** Assessment emphasis on campus was seen as a top-down effort. Feelings were that current level of assessment activity is motivated by NCA accreditation requirements
- ❖ **Continuing education:** This was seen as a great value to the process. However, scheduled development activity times were seen as unsuitable for some faculty members.
- ❖ **Leadership by program deans:** Program deans were credited for the energy behind most of the assessment activities in the individual programs.
- ❖ **Visibility:** CTLA Director, Noni Threinen was identified as the visible face of the University-wide assessment activities. The role of the committee was only minimally referenced.

Summary and conclusion:

The overall indication from the focus group process was that although the University through its Assessment Committee and CTLA Director, Dr. Noni Threinen have done a lot to develop a structure, create awareness, begin implementation of assessment strategies to enhance student learning, more work still needs to be done to truly create a culture of assessment.

A secondary benefit of the process was in giving participants the opportunity to hold a focused discussion on the subject matter. It was clear at the end of each group meeting that participants' knowledge of the importance of assessment to the University and student learning was greatly enhanced.

The process also provided participants the opportunity to have their opinions heard, validated and valued. Participants felt their opinions were valued and their contributions acknowledged.

I recommend that this process be engaged annually to help the committee and University measure the success of its efforts as well as enhance its assessment activities and programs on campus.

Humbly submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Okokon O. Udo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Okokon" being more prominent and the last name "Udo" following in a similar style.

Okokon O. Udo, PhD; CPCC
June 25, 2004