School of Business Makes Changes in Assessment Process

Dr. Margaret Hoskins

"Assessment…. maybe if we ignore it, it will go away." For several years, this was the attitude in the School of Business. We, as faculty members, work hard to do a good job teaching our classes and equipping our students with the skills and knowledge they need in the work place and in life. If they make a good grade in the particular course, they should be prepared, right? Isn't that assessment? Wrong! In the fall 2007semester, School of Business faculty became painfully aware that our assessment activities were severely deficient. Our accrediting body, AACSB, placed us on sixth year review partly because of our inadequate assessment activities. Like it or not, we were going to have to adapt to the changing world of business education. We had a whole lot of work to do and not much time to get it done.

The first step was for the entire School of Business faculty to meet and ask ourselves the question, "What are the most important characteristics for our graduates to have?" After much discussion and several meetings, we identified five learning goals:

1. Business Knowledge: Our students will demonstrate knowledge of the core concepts within each business discipline; accounting, information systems, economics, finance, management, and marketing.
2. Technology: Our students will have a working knowledge of Microsoft Excel and Access.
3. Communications: Our students will be able to speak and write effectively.
4. Ethics: Our students will be able to assess ethical situations, choose a course of action, and defend their choice.
5. Global Perspective: Our students will understand & identify cultural differences and the impact of those differences on business practices.
6. Teamwork: Our students will demonstrate the ability to work in teams.

The next step was to identify the specifics of each objective. Exactly what do we mean by "business knowledge?" What constitutes "effective speaking and writing ability?" Since we know we can't "teach" someone to be ethical, what is it exactly that we want students to be able to do? How will we know if students do, indeed, acquire a global perspective and if they will be able to contribute as effective team members? We needed instruments to measure our students' abilities. We had to deal with the "R" word – RUBRICS! For business knowledge, we – all of us together – went through the business core and identified two or three critical knowledge items for each course. We listed exactly what we wanted students to be able to do with Excel and Access. We developed a rubric for writing and speaking ability, ethics, global perspective, and teamwork.

During the spring 2008 semester, we collected and analyzed data. School of Business faculty met on May 15, 2008, to discuss results. We were surprised to learn that we were not meeting many of our objectives. Many of the items of core business knowledge were not met. Of student papers used to assess written communication skills, thirty-two percent contained four or more grammatical errors. Of student presentations observed for oral communication skills, only 59 percent of students spoke clearly, varied tone, avoided fillers, and maintained eye contact with the audience. On the positive side, our students did demonstrate ethical awareness, a global perspective, and an ability to work in teams.

To complete the objectives of our assessment activities, we discussed steps to address deficiencies. We decided that more class time should be spent and more assignments should be given to cover core business topics. We, as a faculty unit, committed to requiring students to use proper grammar in their papers and put a statement in each syllabus to this effect. Papers not adhering to our standards would be rejected and returned to students for correction. Before making presentations to the class, students would be critiqued by team members. Data collected in the fall 2008 semester showed that students' oral communication skills improved, but they still struggle with core business knowledge and writing.

We submitted our report detailing our assessment progress to AACSB in October, 2008, and our School of Business was fully reaccredited in May, 2009. Our collective attitude toward assessment has evolved from avoidance to acceptance. We do understand now that assessment data can disclose deficiencies and strengths that course grades cannot. We are proud of the progress we have made in such a short period of time and will continue to review our assessment goals, measure student performance, and make changes to curriculum as needed.

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Assessment Brief

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Special Points of Interest

- New Academic Assessment Plans must be completed and entered into TracDat by Friday, October 16, 2009.
- New Non-Academic Assessment Plans must be completed and entered into TracDat by Friday, October 16, 2009.
- NSSE survey to be conducted in February 2010. See article on page 3 for more details.
- TracDat training is currently being conducted. Please contact Wrenette Tedder regarding the training schedule.

Inside this issue:

From the Desk of Wrenette Tedder, Director of Assessment

Report on Assessment

I was extremely excited to pass along to Dr. Miles the Assessment Cycle Progress Report for 2008-2009 in early July. The report showed a 92% completion rate on departments entering the data and making recommendations based on the data collected. Last year only 61% of all departments accomplished this requirement. You can find a detailed list by department at :

http://www.hsu.edu/assessment.aspx.

All departments will be required to update their Assessment Plans this fall. Each plan will be reviewed by the Assessment Team during the semester. Please do not delete anything from previous cycles. Call the Director of Assessment to get instructions on how to make the previous items inactive. The team recommendations will be passed to the Department Chair and Assessment Coordinator. Academic departments must have at least three student learning outcomes that show what the students will know, think, and be able to do when completing the degree. ****Please remember to include your entire department when developing your Assessment Plan for 2009-2010. ****

During the past spring semester, the Office of Assessment held training sessions on developing an Assessment Plan. The office will once again be providing those training sessions this semester. The sessions will be divided into:

Session 1: Developing a Mission Statement and Goals

Session 2: Developing Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives

- Measures/Methods
- Criteria
- Schedule
- Who is responsible?
- Goal Relationship

Session 3: Collecting and Analyzing Data

- Implementing Changes

There will also be sessions scheduled for TracDat training throughout the fall semester. If there are additional training needs, please email tedderw@hsu.edu with the topic needing to be addressed and I will be glad to schedule that session.

Thank you for all your hard work in area of assessment!! Please let me know if I can be of any assistance.

From the Chair

Dr. Phillip Schroeder

During my first few months as chair the HSU Assessment Team it became clear that most members of the faculty, administration, and staff were unfamiliar with the entire process of assessment. Although most had been involved with forms of assessment, few were comfortable with the cyclic and thorough nature of the process. The Assessment Team soon realized that a document outlining the main features of the assessment cycle was needed, a resource that enabled individuals to reference significant features of the process without confronting the considerable details contained in the HSU Assessment Handbook and other sources.

Pam Ligon, Bob Yehl, and I began the task of creating an Assessment Quick Reference Guide (AQRG), a short 3-page document outlining the definitions, processes, and procedures for assessment. As a source, we drew our information from a powerpoint presentation created by Wrenette Tedder, HSU Director of Assessment, which she successfully uses during workshop presentations. Designed as a guide, the AQRG is not intended as a substitute for a complete working knowledge of the materials contained in the Assessment Handbook.

The AQRG will be available on the homepage for the Office of Assessment on the HSU website. The document may be used on screen or printed in an 8.5x11 format. In addition, I heartily recommend that everyone spend some time on the Office of Assessment homepage. The site contains valuable information, recommendations, and examples on this complex topic and will allow for greater comfort and familiarity with assessment related issues.

Finally, please allow me to mention again that assistance from any member of the HSU Assessment Team is available to all members of the faculty, staff, and administration. Among our many responsibilities perhaps the most important function is to assist you during all stages of the assessment process.

Thank you!

Assessment in Student Services

Pam Ligon

How many of you cringe at the mention of the words "assessment, TracDat and closing the loop?" Yes, I am talking to you. You know who you are. Assessing what you already do should not be a dreaded ordeal. I realize that the initial set up may take a little time but the end results should be and can be very rewarding. Assessment provides evidence of program quality, student learning and student development. One should look at assessment as a type of checks and balances. It is a means of discovering both inside and outside of the classroom. What, how, when, and which students learn and develop is what proper assessment determines. Learning is multidimensional; therefore, assessment practices must provide an equal opportunity for students of varied backgrounds and learning styles.

It has become clear that a student's college experience is no longer defined solely by time spent in the classroom. Their experience starts the moment they apply for enrollment, further enhanced by their interaction with residence life, financial aid, health services, the business office, housekeeping, university police, and others - all before they even start their first day of class. They will continue to interact with and rely on these services to continue their study. These interactions therefore influence their learning outcome. For example, before they obtain academic advising, they must receive appropriate orientation so that they know where to go for help. If they do not receive quality advising, they may end up taking the wrong classes and possibly prolong their time-to-degree. If they are placed in the wrong class, they may be wasting their time for the whole term. There will be no quality instructional outcomes if a student is not well informed and adequately serviced.

When learners demand quality education, they are talking about both learning that takes place inside a classroom as well as the process with which they obtain learning. It is not uncommon to receive many statements from students concerning non-classroom related inconveniences and problems that affect their learning. One cannot separate the non-academic variables from the academic variables. Student services and other non-academic entities is an integral part of student learning; that as teaching is to learning, student services is to the learning experience.

Successful assessment of student services or other non-academic entities begins at the individual component level, i.e., financial aid, the business office, and student activities. It is the sum of those individual components that collectively determines the institutional effectiveness. The entire suite of diverse components influences the student learning experience.

Before we began the assessment process in the Center for Career Development, we had to ask ourselves several questions. *Who are we?* This was an information gathering step. It included our history, personnel (full-time, part-time and student-based), summary of duties and equipment. *What do we do?* This included thinking about our mission, our specific goals and objectives and the relationships with have with our students and other stakeholders. *How have we done?* This step was broken into two parts: Process and Outcome. "Have we done what we planned to do?" That was followed by quantitative and measurable data, which helped to answer the question, "How have we done it?" "Are students satisfied?" "What areas have been rated high or low?" *Can we do better?* This is the last step to close the loop of planning, implementation and evaluation. It materializes in the form of a report. However, your report can only be meaningful if the previous steps are done well. The report should contain the following:

- Candid evaluation of service delivery both process and outcome
- Future needs
- Recommendations/ new goals
- Resources needed (e.g. dollars, materials, personnel, facilities, etc.)
- Timetables and persons responsible

We thought we were doing a good job and we wanted to show it. Through our assessment efforts we realized that no single assessment strategy was perfect. It is ongoing, regular, and continuous. We used our assessment results to promote positive organizational and programmatic change if and when we deemed it necessary. Our evaluation answered the question of whether a particular goal had been achieved.

The completed process was very helpful for me as a manager and informative to my staff. It is embedded in our job duties, it is logical with clearly laid out steps, and it builds a connection between our jobs and students' learning experience as well as the connection between our day-to-day work and the statistics.

NSSE Survey Coming!

Wrenette Tedder

In February, the Office of Assessment will begin the administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE is a college student survey that assesses the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development. The NSSE was piloted in 1999 with 70 institutions taking part and last year 643 institutions administered the NSSE 2009. Henderson State University has taken part in this survey every other year since 2002.

All students classified as a freshman or senior will be asked to participate. The data collected will show undergraduate experiences, Henderson's strengths and weaknesses, identify areas of improvement, and pinpoint aspects not in line with our mission.

Results from the NSSE 2010 will be compared to NSSE 2008 and NSSE 2006 in order to measure the effectiveness of Henderson State University and to identify challenges. An action plan will be developed to address each of the challenges.