Spring 2023 Assessment Focus Groups Feedback

Spring 2023 Assessment Focus Group Series

Fall 2023 PD Week

Office of Assessment and Evaluation

Background

- 11 focus groups conducted by the Director of Assessment, Assessment and Evaluation Coordinator, and volunteer moderators from the CATF

- Invited feedback from the campus community about assessment

- Research questions:
  - How does the College ensure that assessment leads to improvements in teaching and learning or unit outcomes, i.e., how do we systematically ensure that loops are closed?
  - How can we ensure that assessment is relevant to students, faculty and staff?
  - What technology tool(s) will best serve the current and future assessment needs at the College?

Segment	# of participants*
Administrative/Non-Teaching Faculty and Staff	14
Business and Technology Division Full-Time Faculty	2
Department Heads and Program Coordinators	11
Liberal Studies Division Full-Time Faculty	16
Math, Science, and Health Careers Division Full-Time Faculty	4
Part-Time Faculty	10

*Some participants hold more than one role at the College; they are recorded here based on the focus group segment they attended, i.e., this count is non-duplicative.

Thematic Analysis

Overall Themes

- *Diversity*
    - Participants tended to differ just as much within segments as between them
    - There will not be a single solution to nearly any assessment problem
    - Most challenges in assessment at the College will need multiple simultaneous solutions in order to be successfully resolved.

- *Value and Transparency*
    - Unclear to many what the purpose of specific assessment activities is, and how they relate to each other.
    - Communication does not consistently reach all intended audiences.
    - Participants understood the value of assessment in theory, but did not see evidence of assessment efforts being valued, either by supervisors or by the College culture overall.
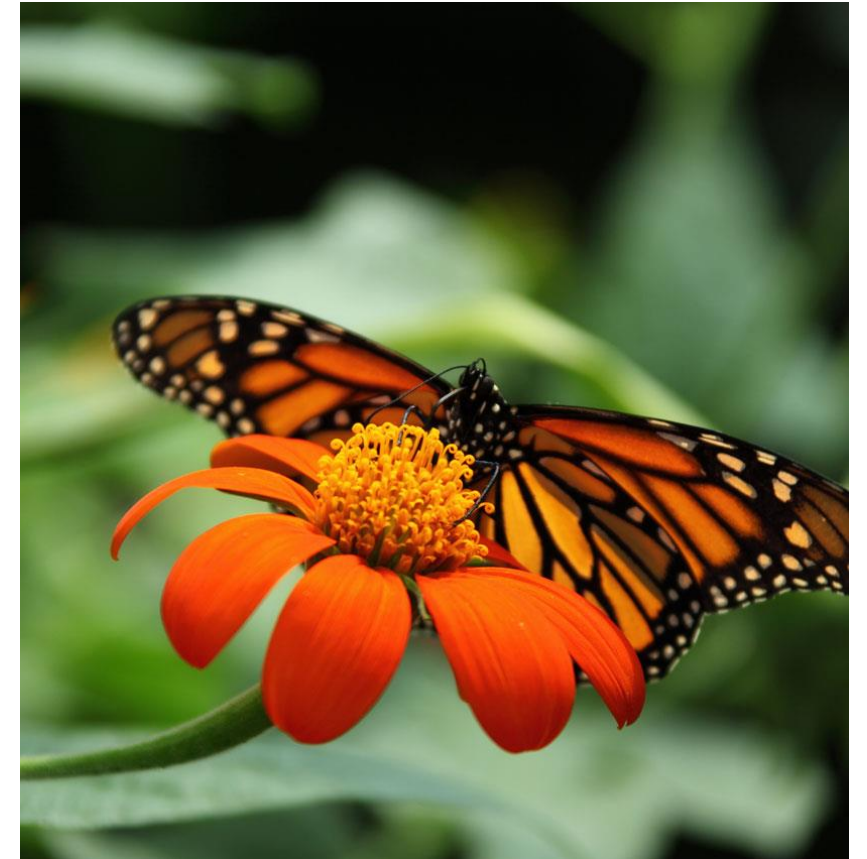
Overall Themes

- *Mission-Driven*
  - Many frustrations were based on perceived barriers to delivering the best possible education to students.

- *Roles Are Not Well Defined*
  - Different roles, such as the DCAF, OAE, academic deans, and department chairs, were frequently conflated, and the origination points of specific processes and policies were unclear to many participants outside of these structures.
  - May indicate:
    - Need to more clearly define these roles for an outside audience
    - Need to better coordinate between the various positions involved in assessment, since inconsistencies and redundancies may often be attributed to the same source, contributing to participants' frustrations and confusion.

Experiences with Assessment

- *Position Matters*
  - The purpose of assessment is:
    - Department heads and program coordinators: determining the cohesion and effectiveness of program curricula and pedagogical choices
    - Full-time faculty: improving individual teaching practices.
    - Adjunct faculty: only to report specific quantitative data or not relevant to me at all.
    - Administrators: unit performance improvement, but also a potential opportunity to communicate value to outside stakeholders and to justify resource allocation requests.
- *Desire for Cross-Pollination*
  - While assessment for improving ones' own teaching or unit performance is important, the more valuable learning opportunities presented by assessment processes lay in the act of discussion with colleagues, both within their immediate area and across departments, divisions, and even roles at the college.

Experiences with Assessment

- *Desire for Depth*
  - Inconsistencies in the assessment cycle schedules and conflicting reporting schedules contributed to the feeling that, though many participants would like to derive more insight from assessment processes and data, they did not feel that they have the time or support needed to reflect deeply, leading to repeated cycles of superficial reporting.

Desires and Plans for Assessment

- *Seeing the Bigger Picture*
  - Widespread interest in understanding how their work, assessment data, and reporting fit into a "bigger picture" of the College as a whole.
  - Faculty from several different disciplines wished for more space for qualitative data discussions and adding context to quantitative assessment data.

- *Improving Teaching and Unit Performance*
  - A primary purpose of assessment is professional improvement.
  - Assessment is seen as a method for determining the strengths and weaknesses of both individuals and groups, and the effectiveness of coordination between them.
  - Strong desire to hear more often about other colleagues' successes with assessment, both within and across disciplines, and to learn from peers.

Desires and Plans for Assessment

- *Support Is Needed and Appreciated*
    - Faculty across all academic divisions were effusive in their appreciation for the DCAF team
    - Nearly every participant expressed that greater support is needed for assessment activities, e.g.:
        - Direct monetary or release/extended time compensation for completing assessment activities
        - Facilitated meetings with colleagues about assessment data and practices
        - Upgrading College equipment such as Scantron machines used in assessment data collection
        - More readily available resource materials
        - Professional development in areas of assessment
        - Assistance from assessment "experts," or colleagues with more experience in assessment.
    - Good assessment takes a significant amount of time and effort in order to reflect on data thoroughly and implement related improvements
    - Participants are frustrated about difficulty justifying an appropriate amount of time to do so given the demands of their workloads.

Assessment Technology and Processes

- *Frustration with Frequent Change, Perceived Inconsistency*
  - Cynicism about the actual value of assessment to their supervisors and to the College overall, citing as evidence the frequency of changes to assessment systems and processes.
  - Indicated a lack of overarching meaning or coordination of assessment efforts, or a lack of seriousness on this topic
  - The selection and implementation of AEFIS was cited as another area of inconsistency –criteria and process were perceived as opaque
  - While assessment processes should themselves be assessed and updated in keeping with College needs and best practices, the reasons for these changes should be broadly communicated to all constituents affected by them in the interest of transparency and professionalism.

Assessment Technology and Processes

- *Desire for Clear, Regular, Consistent, and Positive Communication About Assessment*
  - Communication preferences elicited the widest range of responses of the entire series.
    - Email is the preference for many
      - Several specified a preference for personalized emails from individuals that they know over CNEWS.
    - A few faculty members emphatically rejected email about assessment, preferring conversations held in person.
    - Possibility for a College-wide 'hub' for assessment-related resources and support, including calendars and reminders to complete reporting activities.
  - Call across all groups for communication that is clear, consistent and timely.
  - Assessment is often discussed in a negative or punitive tone, focusing largely on problems, challenges, and failures to meet benchmarks.

Assessment Technology and Processes

- *The Best Assessment Technology Is One That Works*
  - Frustration with and cynicism around AEFIS was widespread but not universal.
  - Some faculty expressed satisfaction with AEFIS and appreciated the opportunity to critically reflect on the connections between CLOs and PLOs.
  - Wide range of negative experiences with AEFIS:
    - Confusing user interface
    - Lack of technical support (apart from DCAF team)
    - Inaccurate and at times misleading data analysis
    - Time spent repeating the process of linking every semester
    - Necessity for alterations to course design and assessment methods to suit the limited range of data that the software can use for analysis
  - Frustrations seem to have either heightened or become conflated with the concept of assessment itself, amplifying cynicism about the genuine importance of assessment
  - Strong desire for assessment reporting software that **works well** without requiring significant user interventions or departure from their other workflows.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Shared Definition of Assessment

Assessment is a constant, iterative process of measurably defining, recording observations and data on, and analyzing the outcomes of activities across every area of the College for the purpose of continuous improvement, on both the individual and systematic levels. It is reported at the initiative, course, program, department, administrative unit, division, and institutional levels on a repeated, cyclical basis.

Overall Recommendation: Culture Shift

- Need for value of assessment to be clearly communicated, in both words and actions, by college leadership at all levels
- If the College values assessment:
  - that should be more clearly felt by those asked to complete assessment tasks
  - support and resources should follow
- Clarity and consistency between words and actions are essential to improving the assessment atmosphere

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How does the College ensure that assessment leads to improvements in teaching and learning or unit outcomes, i.e., how do we systematically ensure that loops are closed?

- *College Assessment Handbook*
  - OAE is coordinating the production of an assessment handbook, with major portions to be completed by members of the DCAF team and others from the College Assessment Task Force
    - Overviews of all assessment activities and their relationships to one another
    - Specific purpose and value of each assessment activity or stage in a larger assessment cycle
    - A college-wide assessment timeline
    - An "assessment yearbook" indicating what roles at the College are most closely tied to each assessment activity and how to contact those people.
    - Examples of best practices and acceptable submissions for all assessment reporting activities.

- *Assessment Resource Hub*
  - One easily accessible and centrally located digital location for faculty and staff to access assessment information

How can we ensure that assessment is relevant to students, faculty, and staff?

- *Multi-point Communication Strategy*
  - Assessment information must be communicated in multiple ways to meet the needs of diverse audiences
  - Should include, but not be limited to:
    - CNEWS
    - personal/personalized emails
    - assessment handbook and resource hub
    - presentations during PD week
    - visits to department and division meetings by assessment coordinators
    - physical media
  - Should always highlight the purpose of assessment activities
  - Any time data are requested or aggregated, the results of that aggregation and analysis should be shared with all of the people who contributed to the aggregation

What technology tool(s) will best serve the current and future assessment needs at the College?

- *Platform Review*
  - CATF's Platform Review Team will prioritize the qualities that have consistently emerged as most important, based on data from this focus group series, the Fall 2022 Assessment Survey, and the January 2023 Assessment Technology Luncheon
    - Ease of use
    - Smooth integration with existing practices and methods
    - Flexibility
    - Accuracy
  - Platform Review Team will be timely, communicative, and transparent

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Use the QR code to access the full text of the Draft Focus Groups Report and a form for feedback collection.

Check please!