

Assessment Landscape at Duke University July 2014

Executive Summary

Assessment is becoming an integral and vital part of the academic culture at Duke. As every campus constituency can benefit from regular assessment, an increasing number of offices, departments and committees are dedicating valuable resources to evaluative endeavors. As groups continue to collaborate around themes of assessment, the University will further strengthen its programmatic and curricular offerings.

The goal of this report is to provide a broad overview of the history and current status of assessment efforts academic programs, offices responsible for assessment and their interrelationships and reporting. This report concludes with some future directions for assessment with the goal of improving the delivery of traditional and novel education opportunities and increasing the visibility of our excellent programs to our talented student population.

New Assessment Goals

Looking forward, Duke administrators have delineated the following assessment-themed goals:

- (1) Assist in enhancing coordination of assessment efforts between departments;
- (2) Increase interconnectivity between assessment websites for greater access to assessment info online;
- (3) Continue to promote a positive culture of assessment by demonstrating value;
- (4) Collaborate with the Graduate School and Professional Schools to increase assessment of courses and programs;
- (5) Facilitate the assessment of Duke's innovative projects and programs.

Assessment Landscape at Duke University

Introduction

As “assessment” continues to be a buzzword and hot topic in higher education, the Duke community needs to devote sufficient resources to ensure we can provide evidence of student learning and we can measure the extent to which we are upholding the mission of the institution.

A keyword search for “assessment” on the Duke home page yields approximately 57,300 results. Arts and Sciences (Trinity Office of Assessment) and Student Affairs top the search hits. These search results, however, do not do justice to the differentiated approaches to assessment across our campus. This report outlines why and how Duke benefits from ongoing assessment, the history of assessment at Duke, the key players in the current assessment landscape on campus, and offers guidelines for assessment going forward.

Why Assessment Is Important?

As one of the top universities in the country and the world, Duke enjoys a significant reputation for producing outstanding students. The fast paced, ever-changing world make it necessary for college graduates to be well trained in the latest technology as well as in ways that connect them to issues around the world. For a university, this means understanding what works and what does not to a generation who were born at the advent of the cell phone. Assessment is vital for program evaluation and subsequent improvements to academic programs. Currently, there is a national trend in higher education towards increasing assessment because of economic pressures and social calls for accountability for the value of a degree. Broadly speaking, assessment is a key tool to help us determine if we are meeting our educational (and other) goals. According to Lion Gardiner (1994): “Assessment is essential not only to guide the development of individual students but also to monitor and continuously improve the quality of programs, inform prospective students and their parents, and provide evidence of accountability to those who pay our way.”¹

How Duke Benefits from Assessment

Every constituency in the Duke community benefits from University-wide assessment initiatives. **Faculty members** can use assessment data to engage in productive conversations about student achievement status, to identify directions for future instructional development, and can supplement their course evaluation results with supplemental information.² **Administrators** can use assessment data and analyses to determine whether students are maximizing the resources and tools the University offers to enhance the myriad of educational experiences offered to students.

From a marketing and public relations perspective, assessment data can be used to help recruit new students, staff, and faculty to campus. Assessment analyses can give **prospective parents**

¹ Redesigning Higher Education: Producing Dramatic Gains in Student Learning by Lion F. Gardiner; ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report Volume 23, No. 7, p. 109

² <http://www.academicprograms.calpoly.edu/content/benefits-assessment>

evidence of the value of a Duke education and provides **prospective students** with evidence of why they should participate in various programmatic and curricular offerings at the University.³

History

The 2009 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Compliance Review reported Duke was not sufficiently assessing their academic enterprise, particularly regarding student learning outcomes and other educational measures. At that time, Duke was in the early stages of adopting WEAVE software to assist schools, units and departments in recording and sharing their assessment plans and their measures of student learning outcomes.

In the five years since the last SACS reauthorization, Duke has made a noteworthy institutional commitment to developing a culture of assessment. As a part of the University's ongoing commitment to institutional effectiveness, Duke has continued towards widespread effort to record, to assess, and to share goals, establish student learning outcomes, and measurements of other key priorities. Since the 2009 reaffirmation, there has been a new Vice Provost for Academic Affairs appointed who been charged with growing our assessment efforts. To this end, he has created a Manager of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation position to help coordinate and oversee university-wide implementation of assessment of and for curricular and programmatic improvements. Additionally, two committees were formed – one comprised of faculty members and one of senior staff members who represent schools and units across campus – to discuss assessment and educational programmatic issues that impact various campus constituencies.

Key Players in Assessment at Duke

Assessment at Duke is a team effort. Multiple offices, departments, and committees are charged with assessment. Many others conduct ongoing programmatic assessment without the assistance of a specific assessment-focused staff member.

The hub of assessment activity remains in the Provost Office, namely in the **Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs**.⁴ While this Vice Provost has a staff of three, only the Manager of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation focuses her work on University-wide assessment. A secondary role of this office is to use the assessment data and results to ensure compliance with policies, laws, and regional accreditation requirements.

The **Office of Assessment in Trinity College**⁵ conducts similar work to the Provost Office, but focuses almost exclusively on Trinity College of Arts and Sciences (the largest of the University's Colleges) rather than the University as a whole. These two offices frequently partner so as to not duplicate efforts and resources. The Office of Assessment in Trinity also coordinates the online course evaluation system and the analyses of the results. Representatives from this office are assisting in the expansion of online course evaluations to the Graduate School, the Nicolas School for the Environment, and others.

³ http://www.jmu.edu/assessment/pass/assmntresources/what_is_assessment.htm

⁴ <http://academicaffairs.duke.edu/assessment>

⁵ <http://assessment.aas.duke.edu/>

The Center for Instructional Technology⁶, Institutional Research⁷, and, to a lesser extent, the Social Science Research Institute⁸ all provide assessment assistance to campus constituents, especially faculty members. Additionally, some departments such as Undergraduate Student Affairs⁹ have staff members dedicated exclusively to assessment support.

Currently, there are many cross-campus, interdisciplinary collaborations that center on assessment. The University would benefit greatly to additional collaborative ventures (see attached chart for examples).

Committees

In addition to the administrative resources dedicated to assessment, several faculty and staff committees assist the administrative offices with campus-wide assessment endeavors. These committees include:

*Arts and Sciences Faculty Assessment Committee (ASFAC)*¹⁰ – A committee of faculty within Trinity College that oversees undergraduate departments within Arts and Sciences.

*Committee for Assessment of Educational and Administrative Support (CAEAS)*¹¹ – This committee was formed in 2009 and is responsible for the assessment of educational support (e.g. libraries, information technology, student affairs) and administrative support (e.g. payroll services, facilities management) throughout the university, including those services provided within individual schools. Its responsibilities also include developing and communicating high level expectations for assessment activities appropriate to the varying settings in which it will occur across the institution; reviewing reports that document the assessment cycle for each unit and providing constructive feedback to ensure that all units meet appropriate expectations; and encouraging the integration of assessment activities with strategic and budget planning and with departmental and individual performance reviews. The Committee will provide information and recommendations to the Provost and Executive Vice President. The committee is made up of administrators, faculty and staff from across the institution on a rotating appointment schedule.

Faculty Online Assessment Committee (FOAC) – Formed by the Provost in 2012, this committee is charged with exploring assessment opportunities in Duke's online learning initiatives. From the Provost's letter to join the committee: "As the number of available courses increases, and the number of students "attending" multiplies, we need to take full advantage of this growth to learn more about: how well these courses and elements of them work in delivering quality learning outcomes; how these outcomes compare with those of more traditional modes of teaching; how we can use data from and about the very large numbers of students taking these courses to understand the potential impact, on a global scale, on not-for-credit and for-credit education;

⁶ <http://cit.duke.edu/get-ideas/assessment/>

⁷ <http://ir.provost.duke.edu/assessment.html>

⁸ <https://connect.ssri.duke.edu/education/help-topics>

⁹ <http://studentaffairs.duke.edu/ra/assessment>

¹⁰ <http://assessment.duke.edu/oversight>

¹¹ <http://academiccouncil.duke.edu/members-committees/university-committee/provost-committees/>

how data collected during courses can most effectively inform the instructor about how the course might immediately be improved; and more. I am writing to ask you to serve on an *Online Courses Faculty Assessment Committee* that will be chaired by Vice Provost Keith Whitfield to address these and other questions. This committee will formulate suggestions to the Provost for development of best practices and policies for assessing and learning from online courses offered by Duke faculty and from partner institutions where appropriate.”¹²

Liberal Arts in China Committee (LACC) Subcommittee on Pedagogy, Assessment and Student Learning – Members of this subcommittee review plans for curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment of student learning at Duke Kunshan University.

School Representatives Assessment Group – Formed in January 2012, this group of representatives from each of Duke's schools meets to discuss assessment activities at the university and to decide how to move forward with assessment-related activities.

Role of Assessment in Accreditation

Regional Accreditation (through SACS) for Duke is centered in the office of the Vice Provost of Academic Affairs. Many of the above-mentioned committees, in addition to the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Committee, assist the Academic Affairs Office with regular reporting to the SACS reviewers. Historically, the need for evidence to support our re-affirmation of our accreditation has driven assessment across campus. We endeavor to make assessment a more integral facet of the Duke culture, making regular reflection and program evaluation and tool for continued improvement and sustained excellence rather than an administrative edict.

RecommendationsDuke has made great strides with assessment in recent years. To keep this positive momentum, the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs puts forth the following five charges.

Assist in enhancing coordination of assessment efforts between units with similar missions and overlapping priorities. For example, Duke Kunshan University, the Global Education Office, and Duke Engage can collect and analyze data through joint initiatives that reflect each program individually and assess global opportunities collectively.

Increase interconnectivity between assessment websites for greater access to assessment information online. Using the VPAA website (<http://academicaffairs.duke.edu/>) as a central hub, assessment initiatives across schools, units and departments can all share insights, resources and eliminate duplicated efforts due to streamlined communication and reporting efforts.

Continue to promote a positive culture of assessment by demonstrating value. By championing successful assessment initiatives across campus and by providing resources (human and capital) to support additional assessment ventures, the VPAA can continue to mitigate lingering negativity surrounding assessment.

Collaborate with the Graduate School and Professional Schools to increase assessment of courses and programs. While Trinity has an office dedicated to assessment initiatives, many of

¹² <http://assessment.duke.edu/oversight/foac>

the graduate and professional schools do not. The VPAA Office would like to complement the expansion of online course evaluations with supplemental program evaluations.

Facilitate the assessment of Duke's innovative projects and programs. To ensure Duke's newest educational innovations are effective, the VPAA Office will assist with the assessment of Duke Immerse, Flipped Classrooms, Bass Connections, and others.

To be effective evaluators of our programs we have developed an assessment relevant to each criteria that includes establishing program goals, setting achievement targets, identifying metrics, establishing data capture regimes, communicating findings to decision makers, documenting actions taken for program improvement in cases where such occur, and adapting program metrics to capture the effects of the new initiatives. A fundamental purpose of assessment is to support dialog about institutional improvement that integrates all areas of campus sharing a common institutional mission. The Office of the Vice Provost of Academic Affairs is eager to promote and celebrate this mission.

