

A Task Force Based Assessment Model: Creating Advocates for Change

Virginia Assessment Group Conference
November 18, 2005
Virginia Beach, VA

Randy L. Swing
Co-Director & Senior Scholar
Policy Center on the First Year of College

James Rogers, Director SACS. Summer 1999

Assessment was approved as part of the SACS criteria on December 10, 1984 in the Marriott Hotel in New Orleans, it "fundamentally change[d] the way our Commission would evaluate and accredit institutions."

So controversial and even intimidating was the "A" word that new terminology had to be found which gave a broader and more acceptable definition to the concept. That new term was *Institutional Effectiveness*.

"Without question, the concept of institutional effectiveness, with its emphasis on planning, evaluation and use of results, has made a profound difference in many, if not most of our institutions."

A different view...



Five signs your assessment program isn't working:

1. Your president says, "Assessment? What's that?"
2. Faculty members think grades are all the assessment needed.
3. The provost thinks assessment is a nefarious plot of a) accrediting agencies or b) the State.
4. The assessment offices are located next to the steam room.
5. Everyone thinks assessment is your job.

2001 AAHE Assessment Conference

On too many campuses assessment...

efforts are measured by the weight of "shelved research" – unused

proves that "the problem" is not in the institution's control

creates lots of "interesting findings" but nobody is interested

Typology of Assaults on Assessment Efforts

1. Attack the instrument/measurement
(bad survey, doesn't measure the brilliance of my program)
2. Attack the methodology
(response rate, timing, sample, "not a perfect experimental design")
3. Attack the analysis
(“the data was tortured into submission”)
4. Cry, Whine, Pound Fist on Table
(why not give it a try?)
5. Attack the Assessment Officer
(he/she/it isn't qualified to evaluate me!)

Responses.....

Buy more expensive assessment instruments

Hire a consultant

Mandate participation

Change reports (briefer or longer, more or less)

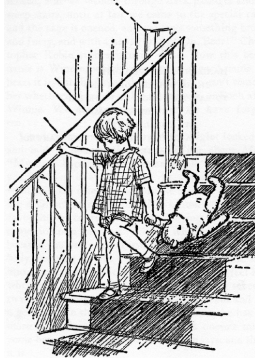
Cry, Whine, Pound Fist on Table

Go to a conference and complain that you "don't get no respect"

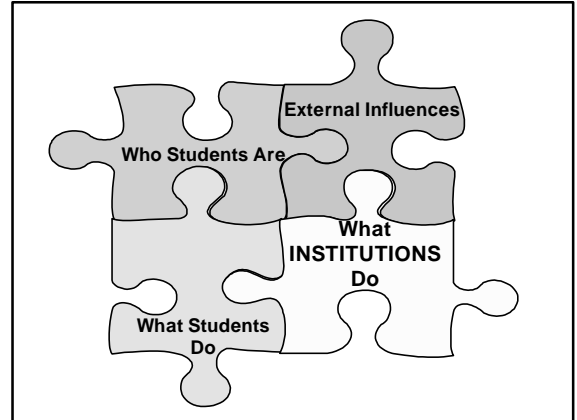
Maybe it IS time for a change....

Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs.

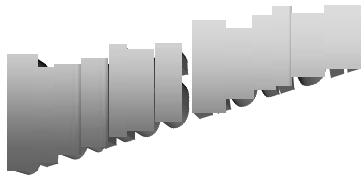
But sometimes he feels that there really must be a better way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it.



AA Milne – Winne-the-Pooh



Successful Assessment....



By....

**Confirming current practices
or
Initiating change (improvement)**

“We have greatly underestimated faculty acceptance of accountability and, consequently, have not tapped their creativity in defining and implementing meaningful systems for it.”

Steve Crowe, Director Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association - testimony before the National Commission in Accountability in Higher Education.

Team-Based Assessment Model

Assessment that...

- uses local knowledge
- honors local professional expertise
- looks holistically at structures (avoids artificially chopping-up the student experience)
- includes professional development
- produces advocates for change
- engages participants in debate, research, analysis, and improvement planning

Debating, questioning, exploring options are the natural strengths of academics.

We all win when we work from our strengths.

Team-Based Assessment Model

Process was developed by the Policy Center on the First Year of College with grant funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies and Lumina Foundation for Education.

Pilot tested in 2003-2004 at 24 4-year institutions (12 private, 12 public)

Currently in pilot with 10 2-year institutions

Steps in the Process...

1. Start with an ASPIRATIONAL model of excellence

not benchmarks of current practices
not easily doable
rather.... reach for the stars

Steps in the Process...

1. Start with a model of excellence

Goals for general education
Definition of an “educated person”
Campus mission
Aspirational model from the literature/peers

*First Year Example:
Foundations of Excellence Dimensions*

Steps in the Process...

2. Create a task force, appoint a chair

Wide involvement – faculty/staff/students
Involve the CAO and CSAO
Mix those directly involved and not
Local knowledge & varied professional skills

What if you “pretended” that the whole campus has a stake in the institution’s success?

Steps in the Process...

3. Conduct a Current Practices Inventory

Current Initiatives
Current Policies
Current Environmental Realities
Current Data/Assessment Sources

Professional Development

*First Year Example:
Current Practices Inventory (CPI)*

Steps in the Process...

- 4a. Explore each goal/aspect of excellence

To what degree has the campus achieved excellence?

Professional Judgment

How do you know? (Multivariate evidence-based)

*First Year Example:
Foundations of Excellence Performance Indicators*

Steps in the Process...

4b. Cite the evidence

How did the task force reach their decision?

State the case, draw on all data sources.

Evidence -based decision making

First Year Example:

Foundations of Excellence Evidence Library

Steps in the Process...

5a. List areas of concern

What should be... continued? improved? monitored?

(broad issues, not specific solutions)

Building advocates for action

First Year Example:

Foundations of Excellence "FoEcus" system

Steps in the Process...

5b. What specific actions might be considered for each area of concern?

Actions must be connected to areas of concern, cited evidence, and original goals

First Step in Action Plan

First Year Example:

Foundations of Excellence Action Plan

Steps in the Process...

6. All actions are ranked and prioritized

Immediate action
Longer planning time
Future consideration

Action Plan Refinement

First Year Example:

Foundations of Excellence Final Action Plan Review

Steps in the Process...

7. Implementation

Solutions directly address problems or continue prior successes

8. Continued monitoring

Lessons Learned from the Pilot

Rich discussions were powerful tools
Expanded the concept of "evidence"
Multiple sources of evidence produce robust views
Participants developed "institutional view" of issues
Advocates developed
Easier transition from "plan" to "implementation"
Large changes were made – minimal "freight"

Part I. Inventory of First-Year Programs/Interventions:

For each program/intervention, identify the following:

- Name: Provide the campus-specific name for the program/intervention.
- Description: Provide a summary description.
- % of 1st-Yr Students: Provide a "best estimate" of the percentage of first-year students that are served annually by this program/intervention.
- Administrative Home: Name the unit that has responsibility for administering the program/intervention.

Name	Description	%1st yr students	Admin Home

Part II. Inventory of Committees and Councils:

Campuses have a variety of committees, councils and other governance structures that set policy, advise, and/or monitor aspects of the first year (e.g., admissions committee, retention committee, first-year council, general education curriculum committee). The task force will identify the committees and councils that have responsibility for aspects of the first year and describe each.

For each committee or council, please identify the following:

- Name: Provide the campus-specific name for the committee/council.
- Responsibility: Describe the committee/council's realm of responsibility for the first year.
- Who Appoints: Name who appoints the committee/council.

Name	Responsibility	Who Appoints

**Example – Performance Indicator
Diversity Dimension**

PI 7.1 Diverse Ideas To what degree does the institution assure that first-year students experience diverse ideas and world views through the following?

Evaluate Each	Very Low/None 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High 5	N/A
Initiatives solely based in the curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Initiatives solely based in the co-curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Initiatives integrated across the curriculum and co-curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Current Situation

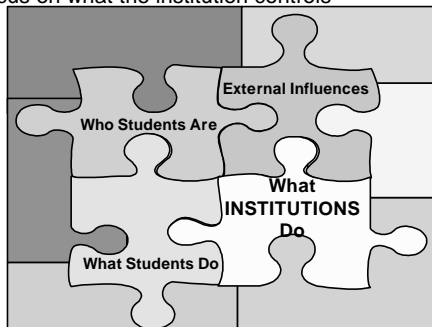
Areas of Concern

Summary Evidence. Please provide the rationale for the task force's judgment and summarize the evidence used.

Evidence Documentation

Take away....

Team-based approach produces advocates for change
Focus on what the institution controls



Contact Information

Randy L. Swing, Ph.D.
Co-Director & Senior Scholar
Policy Center on the First Year of College



swing@fyfoundations.org
(828) 966-5312

<http://www.fyfoundations.org>