Pre-Conference Workshop Session 1
Sunday, 19 February 2012, 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
WS-1.1.
Assessment for Beginners.
Bob Smallwood
Assistant to the Provost for Assessment, University of Alabama

Published Program Abstract (page 12):
Designed for the newcomer to the outcomes assessment process, this workshop will introduce and clarify terms, concepts, principles and processes central to the assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness. Handouts identifying useful assessment resources and websites will be shared to help inform such fundamental assessment activities as the preparation of student learning outcomes, the identification of various direct and indirect assessment measures to monitor achievement of those outcomes, and the use of assessment results to prompt improvement initiatives. Seven steps typically employed in the development of an assessment plan will be reviewed to clarify how assessment fundamentals become integrated to guide accountability and improvement initiatives.
etc.

The speaker spent the first half of the presentation on terminology and philosophies of assessment.

- Learning—the acquiring of knowledge or skills; a change in knowledge, skills, or attititudes; change needs to be long-lasting; mechanism for change needs to be specified.
- Learning must involve practice—this could be some experience, performance, behavior, etc.
- Learning is a process, not a static phenomenon
- Learning is not directly observed but is inferred from some observed or measurable change. Learning is an inference. Use multiple measuring means to gauge learning.
- Student Learning—the process inferred from relatively permanent change in knowledge, skills, or attitudes that come about as a result of educational experiences.
- Must have an observable, quantifiable event for Student Learning Outcome (SLO)—SACS requires this. Multiple measures (in order to triangulate) should be used.
- Emphasize the use of direct rather than indirect methods of assessment.
- Student Learning Outcome (SLO)—what do we want students to be able to do after graduation
- These terms are different: outcome versus goal versus objective
- Goal—a statement of what we aim to achieve.
- Objective—a task to be accomplished to achieve a goal.
- Outcome—what we observe as a result of an experience we have provided to students.
- SACS Institutional Effectiveness Comprehension Standard 3.3.1.

- Blended programs, electronic programs, programs conducted at several sites—there may an increased difficulty in measuring achievement in such circumstances.

The speaker then passed out a handout with lists of resources. He made comments about many of these.
Before starting on the handout, he mentioned that the ETS has a proficiency profile instrument in General Education. Many larger universities use this to assess their General Education programs. A downside of using this test is that it is difficult to diagnose student problems or weaknesses because the nature of the questions on the test may not match what it is being delivered at a university. He said a core curriculum committee could evaluate a General Education curriculum, and made reference to the book by Suskie (below).

Assessment Books:
(These were on a handout. The speaker made comments about some of these resources.)

1. Suskie, L. *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*. (2nd ed.), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009. This has a good discussion on the topic; it also discussed strategies on assessment.
2. Walvoord, B. E. *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. (2nd ed.), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010. This author provides suggestions on how to construct a coherent institution-wide assessment program. The author also discusses how to assign responsibility for the assessment of a General Education curriculum.
3. Allen, M. J. *Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education,* Bolton: Anker, 2004. This provides a balanced review of the full array of assessment strategies. It does not matter what the professor teaches, but it does matter what the student learns.
4. Kuh, G. D. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008. This discusses high-impact practices. Collaboration between the academic and the student results. Co-curricular experiences complement the academic program.
5. Carriveau, R. S. *Connecting the Dots: Developing Student Learning Outcomes & Outcome Based Assessment*, Denton: Fancy Fox, 2010. This provides guidelines for writing measurable learning outcomes. It gives suggestions on how to write multiple choice questions that address higher order thinking skills. This is important for faculty who want to embed such questions in tests as part of assessment.

Assessment Manuals and Handbooks:

1. Program Assessment Handbook, University of Central Florida http://oeas.ucf.edu/doc/acad_assess_handbook.pdf

2. Assessment Workbook, Ball State University http://web.bsu.edu/IRAA/AA/WB/contents/htm (This is now about ten years old.)
3. Assessment Guidebook for Departments, Bridgewater State College http://www.bridgew.edu/AssessmentGuidebook/
4. Assessment and Quality Enhancement for Institutional Effectiveness, Texas Christian University http://www.assessment.tcu.edu/documents/assessmentmanual-TCU.pdf
5. Assessment Primer, University of Connecticut http://assessment.uconn.edu/index.html

Assessment Websites

1. Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcomes Assessment http://www2acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm (This is a good resource.)
2. Assessment Resources—Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) http://www.aacu.org/resources/assessment/index.cfm (This is a good resource.)
3. The Assessment CyberGuide of Learning Goals and Outcomes—American Psychological Assoc. http://www.apa.org/ed/governance/bea/assessment-cyberguide-v2.pdf (The APA is one of the few professional organizations that clearly specifies what an undergraduate student ought to know and be able to draw upon on completion of the degree program.)
4. Assessment Toolkit—Central Michigan University https://academicaffairs.cmich.edu/caa/assessment/resources/toolkit.shtml
5. Office of Institutional Assessment—Texas A & M University http://assessment.tamu.edu/

Annual Assessment Conferences

1. Texas A & M Annual Assessment Conference, College Station, Texas, February.
2. IUPUI Assessment Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana, October.
3. SACS Commission on Colleges Annual Meeting, Varying Locations, December.
4. Assoc of American Colleges and Universities Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., January.
5. Association for Institutional Research Annual Meeting (AIR Forum), Varying Locations, June.

Assessment Summer Institutes

1. Institute on Quality Enhancement and Accreditation, SACS Commission on Colleges, Atlanta, July
2. Institute on General Education and Assessment, AAC&U, Ellicott City, Maryland, June
3. Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success, AAC&U, Portland, OR, June
4. Institute on Integrative Learning and the Departments, AAC&U, Burlington, VT, July
5. PKAL Summer Leadership Institute for STEM Faculty, AAC&U, Crestone, CO, July

The speaker passed out a handout, "Seven Typical Steps in Developing a Department Assessment Plan"

He first said there is a difference between assessment and evaluation. Evaluation is the process by which you examine the data/evidence gathered in assessment. He referred us to a website http://www.tamuevaluation.com (copied down wrong?)

Step #1: Identify someone in the department or office to lead the process.

- Should this be the department chair? It is in the best interest of the chair to appoint someone.
- It should be a member of the faculty rather than an administrator.
- It should be a veteran faculty member, not an assistant professor, especially while that faculty member is trying to become tenured.
- This would be a good service project for an associate professor, especially if that faculty member is trying to build a case for promotion to professor.
- If it's a big department, there may be multiple assessments going on.
- Assessment differs from undergraduate to graduate levels.
- The person doing the assessment may need a reduction in teaching responsibilities or additional compensation.
- Clearly define the duties and responsibilities of the person doing the assessment.
- Give guidance and resources.
- At the University of Alabama, 7.5% of the faculty member's salary was paid to the faculty member as additional compensation for working on the assessment plan. (He admitted this may have caused inequity in that some faculty had higher salary than others.)
- At larger institutions, assistant and/or associate deans can facilitate the process.

Step #2: Agree on a department mission statement.

- What do we do? For whom? For what purpose? In what ways? With what intended results?
- The mission of_____ is to _____ by providing _____ with _____. (I may have missed one, I think.)
- He gave an example with a statement for a Biology Department: The mission of the Biology B.S. degree program is to prepare students for employment in various biology-related areas and/or for the pursuit of advanced degrees in biology or health-related professional schools by educating them in the fundamental concepts, knowledge and laboratory/field techniques and skills…. (I missed the rest.)
- The statement must be in alignment with the institutional mission.
- SACS expects a review of the mission statement every ten years—you may not revise it, but you should show that you are thinking about it.

Step #3: Identify goals, program outcomes and student learning outcomes for each degree program.

- The program should identify areas in which the student will show mastery of some knowledge as well as skills.
- He then divided the discussion into five areas—goals, skills, attitudes and values, program outcomes, and student learning outcomes.
- I.—Goals: What is the discipline-specific content knowledge needed by the student?
- II.—Skills: Three areas—a.) methodological skills, b.) communication skills—every accrediting agency also places emphasis on communication skills, and c.) higher-order thinking skills. He did note that it was a "slap" on a university when students report that there is too much emphasis on rote learning and too little emphasis on higher order thinking.
- III.—Attitudes and Values: Increases in class size make it difficult to infuse small-class collaborative activities into course programs. Elizabeth Barkley has given many recommendations on how to do small-class activities in large class settings. Virginia Tech has adopted a Portfolio requirement for all students—this will demonstrate a student's ability to be collaborative. SACS Institutional Effectiveness Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 notes that "…the institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes…."
- IV.—Program Outcomes: Three objectives here—i.) The program will improve and sustain a high level of recognized quality; —ii.) The program will build and sustain an optimal (he asked, what does "optimal" mean?) level of annual enrollments and degree completions. (At Alabama, they have admissions requirements even to get in to the majors so that they can have the "right" number of students who can be serviced. —iii.) The program will be highly valued by its program graduates and other key constituencies that it serves. [All three of these objectives were accepted by SACS for the University of Alabama program reviews.]
- If a program was following the guidelines of a national accrediting agency, one dean at the University of Alabama felt that that program should use those guidelines as the means to evaluate/assess the program. He believes that the best assessment comes in departments that do NOT have an outside accrediting agency because those departments then have to give thought on how to assess themselves.
- V.—Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): SLO is based on discipline-specific content knowledge. [He mentioned several other standards too.] By legislation, Florida now has "Florida Academic Learning Compacts" which specify what a student will learn; this can be found on the internet. Every department at the University of Alabama has to come up with an assessment plan every year. SACS now requires that universities show that students are gaining technological skills.

Step #4: Identify direct and indirect assessment measures to monitor attainment of each student learning outcome.

Refer to http://assessment.tamu.edu (Texas A & M University) and http://www.provost.wisc.edu/assessment/manual/manual2.html (University of Wisconsin)

Step #5: Develop a coordinated plan to collect data.

- Don't try to assess all the program level student learning outcomes at once.
- At the University of Alabama, they have a two-year assessment cycle.
- Consider preparing an Implementation Plan Matrix
- Use a curriculum map—helps one stay on task.

Course→ 1 2 3

Student Learning Outcome ↓			
1			
2			
3			

Etc.

- Curriculum maps are valuable because they help in diagnosing problems and suggest ways to work on improvements.
- For each SLO, who will take the lead role in evaluating it, and when will the assessment be done?
- Who will take the lead role in conducting the assessment?
- Where in the curriculum is the SLO addressed?
- When will the assessment be conducted?
- For each SLO, ask What—Who—Where—When—How (direct measure)—How (indirect measure).

What	Who	Where	When	How (Direct)	How (Indirect)
SLO 1	Dr. Harriet	Course X	Fall, 8th week		
SLO 2					
SLO 3					

etc.

Step #6: Summarize, analyze, interpret and share results.

- Timing: October-November and March-April—Collect data; January-February and August-September—Discuss results.

- Spend as much time sharing data as collecting data.
- Process suggestions:
    1. Form small focus groups of majors; discuss and interpret the meaningfulness of assessment results; share interpretations with faculty to kick off faculty discussions. Work on constructive changes—don't describe these situations as things that need improvement. The chair should gather the majors in and just discuss what is going on.
    2. Generate and share at least two meaningful research questions prompted by findings that could serve as a senior research project or independent study project.
    3. Once a year (October), it is good practice to send a summary of assessment findings to all currently enrolled majors in the discipline. The faculty could also give talks to students on what they can do in that career.

Step #7: Use assessment findings to prompt improvement initiatives and then monitor impact.

- Some departments have decreased numbers of SLOs and increased numbers of assessment measures.
- Dr. Smallwood feels that one day SACS may want to see what we are doing in the class to achieve the SLOs.
- Re-read SACS 3.3.1.
- Provide evidence of improvement.
- It will take two years to assess the impact of changes designed to improve outcomes.
- Changes to the assessment plan: Revise SLOs, revise measurements, collect additional data.
- Changes to the curriculum: Change pedagogical practices, revise (or enforce) prerequisites, revise course sequence.

Assessment for Beginners Workshop

Bob Smallwood
12th Annual Texas A&M Assessment Conference
February, 2012

Seven Typical Steps in Developing a Department Assessment Plan

Step #1: Identify someone in the department or office to lead the process.

Step #2: Agree on a department mission statement

Step #3: Identify goals, program outcomes and student learning outcomes for each degree program

Step #4: Identify direct and indirect assessment measures to monitor attainment of each student learning outcome

Step #5: Develop a coordinated plan to collect data.

Step #6: Summarize, analyze, interpret and share results.

Step #7: Use assessment findings to prompt improvement initiatives and then monitor impact