

Academic Assessment Task Force
College of Health

Report to the Dean
August 26, 2013

Task Force Members:

- Allan R. Barnes, Coordinator
- Stephanie Olson, Dental Assisting
- Marny Rivera, Justice
- Beth Sirles, Social Work
- Catherine Sullivan, Nursing

Charge to the Task Force:

The Task Force was to review the status of academic assessment in the College of Health and to provide the Dean with its general impressions and recommendations for improving academic assessment in the College. Of special interest to the Task Force were the data and the data collection efforts by which the programs evaluated their respective Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs).

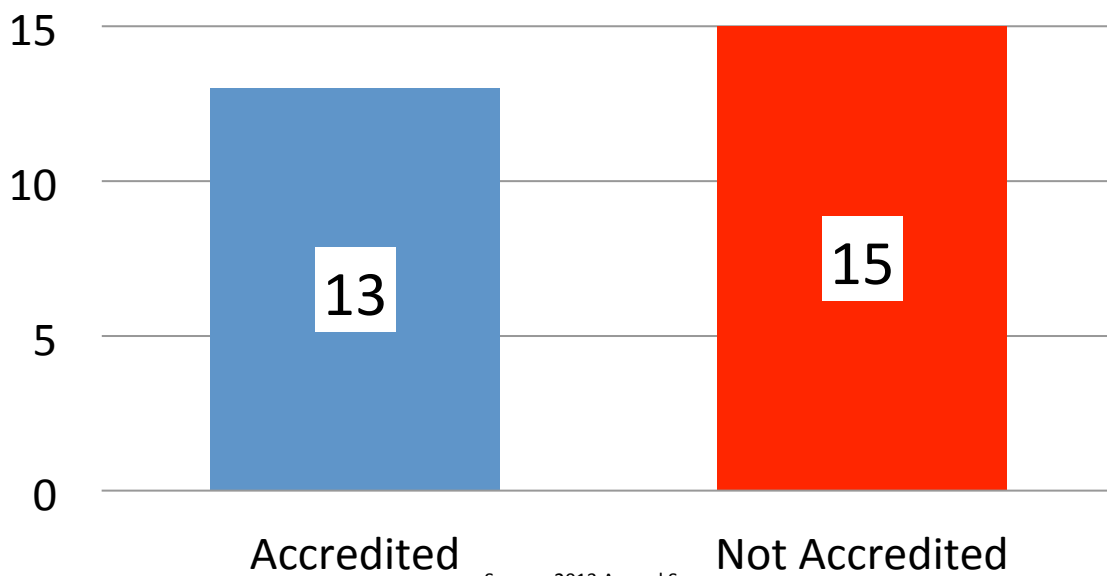
Task Force Activities:

- Task Force members were provided copies of all of the College of Health online Annual Surveys submitted in June 2013 and a link to each of the Assessment Plans on file with the Office of Academic Affairs. These elements were reviewed prior to meeting face to face with individual departments. Individual Task Force members were also assigned programs to review outside of the face to face program meetings, such that almost all programs in the college were contacted.
- The Task Force had three Face to Face Program Meetings in the various units:
August 2: Allied Health programs – represented by Robin Wahto
August 6: Social Work programs – represented by Beth Sirles
August 7: Nursing programs – represented by Catherine Sullivan (with Jill Janke)
- A portion of each meeting was spent discussing general findings, potential conclusions and recommendations. Members reviewed the draft program meeting notes from the above meetings, contacted the additional programs, and provided additional programmatic feedback by August 9. They reviewed and commented upon the final Task Force notes by close of business on August 12. They also reviewed this report prior to forwarding to the Dean. Marny Rivera prepared the extensive and well written Program Meeting notes and added the additional comments from each member. Allan R. Barnes prepared this final report.

Major Findings:

- All programs were engaged in academic assessment. We found that the college's programs were actively engaged in academic assessment. However, the degree of rigor and resource investment generally varied with the number of students receiving the degree/certificate and the degree's importance to the program's central mission. Accredited programs appear to collect a great deal more assessment information than non-accredited programs.
- Academic assessment is resource intensive whether it is driven by accreditation requirements or solely by UAA. The resources needed were mainly personnel (faculty, staff and administrators) who initiated, collected and analyzed the data required. Some programs had invested considerable funds in data management applications to assist in data collection and analysis, all with as yet unproven long-term benefit. Storage space was an increasingly important resource as the boxes of surveys, test results, etc. need to be kept for accreditation reviews.

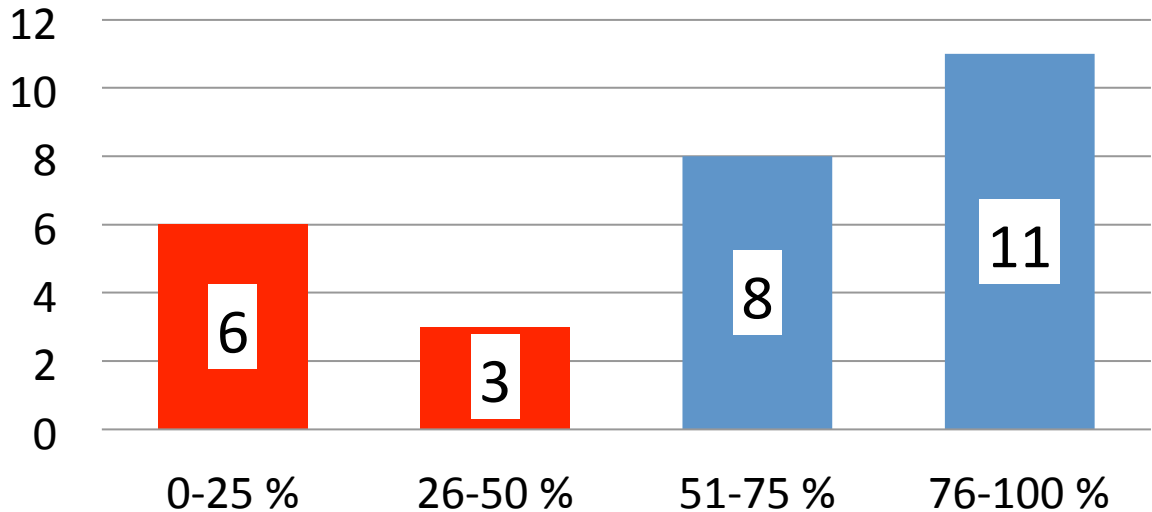
Fig. 1 CoH – Accredited Programs



Source: 2013 Annual Surveys

- For accredited programs, the UAA assessment process can be seen as an unnecessary additional process. Accredited programs, (see Fig. 1) generally, are required to capture and report on very specific aspects of their programs. This could result in well over 200 individual data points and can cover in-class student assessments, field supervisor evaluations and even employer opinions. These programs often see UAA Academic Assessment as another “layer” of bureaucracy that is merely duplicative “make work” without really adding to what they are already doing.

Fig. 2 Estimate of a Degree/Program's Faculty Involved in Assessment



Source: 2013 Annual Surveys

- Not all faculty are involved in assessment. Much of the assessment activities fall to a single person with varying degrees of participation by the degree/program's faculty. Although some of the low percentage involvement in assessment indicated in Fig. 2 is due to small programs which rely heavily on one main faculty to manage the accreditation and assessment activities, the lack of full faculty involvement was reported in all types of degrees independent of program faculty size.
- Program delivery methods increase complexity of assessment. Programs which have significant off campus aspects of their program experience difficulty in assessments which require cooperation from community field supervisors. This even extends to course level assessments which rely on distance delivery and adjuncts.
- Finding program graduates and employers for assessment has been problematic. Many programs have had trouble finding graduates for follow-up assessment. This extends to employers who, even when known, return surveys at a very, very low rate. Human Services seems to have solved the questions surrounding the employment rates/salaries of graduates. Surveying beyond the classroom, in general, has proven difficult and inefficient.
- Accreditation may not mean that all graduates will be "good" representatives of a program. We heard that although accreditation standards often force programs to collect highly specific skill data, that collection of specific skills may not always translate into the "professional" program graduate prized by the faculty. This issue caused the Task Force to reconsider accreditation as a valid substitute for program student learning outcomes (PSLOs) and the often heard complaint that the UAA assessment process "duplicates" the program's accreditation. Further, this consideration also extends to non-accredited programs in that they may also have PSLOs that do not translate into valid "professional" employment activities. The Task Force did not resolve this issue.

Other findings

- Accreditation standards keep growing and changing. Unlike the published PSLOs which are under the complete control of each program, accreditation standards for many programs seem to be increasing in scope, requiring more detail and even changing fundamental aspects of how and what is to be assessed.
- The “bundling” of programs for UAA academic assessment seems to be a good idea. Some programs have degrees that build on each other or are integral parts of larger degrees. Combining these into one assessment effort appears to be an efficient use of assessment efforts.
- Programs were concerned that assessment efforts would be inappropriately used in the current Prioritization process. There have been lots of changes to the UAA assessment effort in recent years and programs have been caught up in attempting to meet the requirements of UAA. Before the changes and their efforts to meet those changes have “settled in”, the university may use those fledgling efforts in a manner that misrepresents the overall quality of the program. Programs may be seen negatively when they attempt to “weed out” students who will not succeed in the profession. Prioritization may see this process as a failure by the program rather than as an integral part of the program process.
- The timing of assessment does not always coincide with the programs yearly schedule. It appears that much of the official UAA assessment activities must be accomplished while most of the program faculty are off contract. Other programs have year-round schedules and student cohort constructions that do not neatly fit the UAA assessment schedule.
- The online Annual Survey was a poor instrument for internal use. The Annual Survey is obviously useful to the OAA as it prepares reports for external dissemination about the general state of assessment at UAA. However, the Task Force did not find it particularly useful in understanding individual program efforts and challenges. The face to face meetings with their discussions of data collection, problems, needs, etc. proved to be much more valuable.
- The old style “Tom Miller Reports” at least provided tangible evidence of assessment efforts. There were mixed opinions of this older format. Some hated it and others embraced it as evidence of consistent data collection and analysis.
- No one wanted to see a college committee or even subcommittee charged with evaluating assessment plans and PSLOs. Instead, they wanted the evaluation of these official parts of the assessment process to be conducted at the university-wide level. The Task Force noted that the current procedure calls for such an approval process to be conducted at the college level, however.

Recommendations

- **The college’s assessment efforts should be directed at assisting programs in developing and maintaining exemplary assessment tools and data.** During the academic year, face to face meetings by select college faculty with the various programs could facilitate shared “best practices” and tools. Feedback in these meetings would be informal and directed toward facilitating improvements and suggesting solutions.
- **Funding for off-contract assessment activities will still be needed.** As long as the Annual Survey due date is in mid-June, most programs will need to compensate the person responsible for making certain the Annual Survey is completed. We note that programs are collecting and analyzing data prior to Annual Survey submission. Compensation could also take the form of

release time and some programs saw that as a better strategy given the workload of those directly responsible for accreditation and assessment activities.

- **The college needs to develop a plan to deal with the data storage requirements.** This could be met with physical space or a centralized data scanning facility. The added benefit may be the standardization of data collection instruments (e.g., employer or student surveys; clinical supervisor rating sheets, etc.).
- **The college needs to develop a reliable method of tracking students.** One important measure of student success is eventual employment in their program field. Tracking students up to five years from receiving their degree allows this aspect of success to be reliably measured. Certification exams are often very costly and not every student can immediately (or ever) take the exam. Some programs pay the cost of the exams as part of the curriculum. Human Services is able to know when a student received their degree, the field they work in, their current salary and other important employment information.
- **The college should encourage the spacing of program assessments** across the students' degree progress to facilitate more timely changes to important program activities. Short duration programs can more easily change and adapt their program. Longer duration programs should not wait four or five years to be alerted to fundamental problems. Having short and long term assessment tools can avoid some of this problem.
- **Any college assessment committee should be staffed with individuals who have experience with assessment.** The college efforts should be to facilitate and enhance individual program assessment and only those with some experience with the whole process, not just accreditation, would be seen as more credible and capable of providing meaningful, supportive suggestions.
- **The college could develop, or purchase, one data collection application for programs to share.** There were differing amounts spent on unproven data management solutions and these funds could perhaps be better spent on one proven system. The Task Force recognized the problems associated with the "one size fits all" approach, but the common problems and similar data elements captured by many of them may allow this to work, or work for many. Several programs mentioned potential improvements to Blackboard so as to facilitate relevant student assessment feedback. Programs with students in far flung outposts may especially benefit from more standardized and centralized data collection and storage.

Conclusion

The programs in the college are making an honest effort to assess what students are learning and the quality of their programs. They find this effort to be useful, but time consuming and resource intense, more intense than they feel administrators at all levels understand. They are looking for guidance from other faculty in best practices and tools to use and feel that the college could play an important role in facilitating their efforts. The lack of "buy-in" by so many of the faculty was troubling, but may be due to the seemingly constant changes in assessment requirements, lack of feedback from outside the program that is specific to the UAA assessment requirements (non-accreditation type feedback) or to workloads that inhibit them from being more meaningfully engaged in the broader goals and ideals of academic assessment.