Project Details

Title   Implementation of Assessment Plans   Status   REVIEWED

Category Any Category   Updated   11-06-2013

Timeline   Reviewed   04-03-2014

Planned Project Kickoff
04-26-2011   Created   04-24-2011

Target Completion
05-16-2015   Last Modified 04-03-2014

- 1: **CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY**
- **VU Answer:** VU is making good progress on the implementation of its Assessment Strategic Plan. Now early in the third year of implementation, initial processes are beginning to become part of the VU culture, and new processes continue to be developed. Academic major program assessment is beginning its third year. VU faculty understand the basic assessment process and the focus now is on refining the reports to collect more specific data on student strengths and weaknesses in order to better identify needed improvements. The Assessment Committee has developed a rubric for reviewing the initial three steps of the academic major program assessment plans. The rubric helps the Committee to identify quickly issues that have limited the depth of past assessment reports and plans. For instance, the Committee is more conscious of the need to establish detailed success standards in order to produce detailed and useful results. The Committee has greater awareness of the need to ensure that projects on the same outcome are complementary so that the data from the different assessment projects work together to identify student strengths and weaknesses and create a better vision of needed curriculum improvements or tools improvements. Other key processes are advancing. For instance, professional development activities continue to evolve to meet the needs of both new faculty and experienced faculty. As our report form is tweaked, the experienced faculty members need to be made aware of new expectations, while new faculty must hear about assessment basics. A regular slot during the new faculty orientation has been designated to discuss assessment expectations. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is more firmly established as part of regular operations, including the regular budgeting for a variety of assessment needs and expenses.

  Great progress is also being made in a couple essential assessment areas, general education and co-curricular assessment. VU is preparing to collect data from all of its liberal education offerings, those courses that address both VU's liberal education outcomes and the new state general education outcomes. VU reported in its last update that it had a plan to map its liberal education outcomes to the new state outcomes. The goal was to make the assessment process "lean" by focusing on VU's liberal education outcomes and mapping those to the state's outcomes. Those maps have been completed. VU faculty completed the task by first approving a common critical thinking rubric (a derivative of AAC&U's VALUE rubric) and then developing and approving maps to the state's social science, humanities and science outcomes. Next, the institution established expectations for critical thinking assignments that asked students to work on

and solve for themselves "ill-defined problems," following an approach to critical thinking described in the book, "Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: Shifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning," by Mary E. Huba and Jann E. Freed. All faculty members teaching liberal education courses have been given copies of the chapter from the text for their reference. Then, the Liberal Education Committee was established to review the assignment proposals. Seven faculty were given release time to develop the assignment expectations and a checklist for faculty to use as they proposed their courses. These individuals also took the lead in developing what might be considered VU's "signature assignments." Their assignments, which reflected the template of expectations, became the models for other faculty to use in developing their own assignments. Over 125 assignments were reviewed for final approval, most of which are being used for the first time this Fall 2013. VU considers this first assignment use and assessment its pilot; the pilot will give the institution baseline data and help identify professional development needs. Both student reflection and faculty reflection activities have also been developed, and VU is currently improving one of its online survey tools (Survey Dig) in order to allow for on-line completion of the reflections. VU has recently completed its plan for collecting the initial round of critical thinking data, including the development of a spread sheet that mirrors the rubric for faculty to tabulate and enter their results. In addition, plans have been made to collect a sample of student artifacts from each of the sections that will be used for a focused review by a team of faculty this coming summer. Data from the focused review will be compared to the course reports in order to help determine student strengths and weaknesses, as well as identify curriculum and assignment issues and needed improvements. VU expects to have a very extensive set of data on students' critical thinking skills, but recognizes that inter-rater reliability and critical thinking professional development activities will be needed to move the whole effort forward. Plans for follow-up are in the works. VU is also looking at Blackboard "Outcomes" as less labor-intensive method for collecting data, especially as the new general education assessment program, piloted on the Vincennes and Jasper campuses this year, is expanded to other locations.

Another major effort underway is the assessment of co-curricular outcomes in Student Affairs and Library programs. Research on co-curricular assessment led to a slightly modified assessment template and professional development for the staff in the two areas. These areas have been encouraged to identify learning outcomes, but their assessments might also include program effectiveness/satisfaction outcomes and developmental outcomes. Co-curricular programs submitted their program mission statements and program objectives on October 4th, and identification of their outcomes and assessment projects are due in early November. Many of the programs have already completed their expectations for November. By the end of May, 2014, VU will have its first round of assessment data and improvement plans for all Student Affairs and Library programs. These assessment plans, like the academic plans, will be added to the Institutional Effectiveness website, improve.vinu.edu, and will be part of VU's transparent process of making its assessment and improvement plans open to the public.

VU will continue working on this action project for another year or two. VU is making great progress on its strategic plan, but there are some projects on the strategic

plan that are not yet finalized, in part because of the significant dedication that has been given to move forward on the key assessment process described above. For instance, VU is, a little at a time, building toward the program review process described in the plan. VU has standardized an advisory committee survey and is working toward building systems to collect other data that will be used in program review. Some of those systems will come out of an action project VU will soon announce, one that grew out of the Strategy Forum. VU's new action project will tackle the development of a data warehouse environment, including dashboards and data blocks of key retention data, a student profile, and tools to help identify at-risk student behaviors. As these data tools and results become more available, access to key pieces of program review data will be easier to attain and more complete, and the hope is the program review process will be more palatable to faculty and staff.

     VU expects that in about a year and a half, it will have established enough progress on all aspects of the assessment strategic plan to close this project.

- **Reviewer Response:** Great work. It is clear that this institution has really applied the feedback it received for the system appraisal process as well as the forum. HLC recognizes that the project was a large undertaking to achieve within the time-frame that was set but your university is progressing well. It is also very clear that your institution is building a more invested and informed group of internal stakeholders by expanding your assessment efforts beyond the academic areas and programs (AQIP Category 3: Understanding students' and other Stakeholders' Needs). Hopefully, student affairs personnel are playing an active role in the development of the co-curricular measures (AQIP Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationship).

- 2: **INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT**
- **VU Answer:** VU has used a variety of methods to engage people in this project, which has been going on for almost three years. The keys to involving people at VU are (1) the support of the administration and board, (2) an extensive assessment strategic plan that gives direction to a process and calls for increasing numbers of participants and qualitatively higher levels of participation, (3) an assessment committee that facilitates the strategic plan processes, including the engagement of an expanding group of people, and (4) an assessment progress report form that keeps everyone up-to-date on assessment report progress. The President, Provost, and Board have all signaled their support of the assessment action project in University meetings, including the annual opening meeting, governance group meetings, Provost's Council, the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, and Board meetings. One board member, Rick Schach, has taken responsibility for participating in AQIP matters, including participating in the search for the Director of Institutional Effectiveness, asking questions during Board meetings about assessment progress, and attending the Strategy Forum. The President and Provost also use email to discuss assessment issues, and the President has addressed assessment during radio broadcasts on VU's radio station. The budget built for assessment includes money to recognize successful assessment programs and to do professional development. This project has called for a significant institutional commitment aimed at making

assessment a part of the VU culture. Gradually, more and more programs and people are being asked to do their part.

- **Reviewer Response:** Outstanding level of endorsement and action by senior leadership. This level of communication and active interest will continue to be important in building an evidence-based organization (AQIP Category 5: Leading and Communicating). This is the mark of a high performing institution (HLC Principles of High Performing Organizations: Leadership Support).

- 3: **PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIMELINE**
- **VU Answer:** The next major steps for this project, following the strategic plan, will be to work through general education assessment, expanding beyond critical thinking to include basic skills this year (writing and speaking assessment), and to pull in co-curricular assessment and work on refining it. In addition, VU plans to complete curriculum mapping. A professional development session was offered in May, and some programs have begun the process. These first program curriculum maps will be offered as examples for other programs. A little at a time, VU is also working to put in place pieces of a qualitative program review. For instance, VU has developed a list of advisory committees and a standardized advisory committee survey, both of which will be used for discussion about VU's expectations for program development. VU's next Action Project, its data warehouse project, will provide greater access to the data used for the new state funding metrics. This data will be essential for program review. VU has also developed an employer survey; it should provide VU with information regarding the success of graduates and help VU better serve its "other" stakeholders as part of the program review process.
- **Reviewer Response:** The development and execution of advisory committee and employer surveys is a very important and logical next step in the production of program review data as well as revisions to the curriculum. I'm curious on how this data will be allied to the project at this point given that there are still major components of your institution's plan and structures (data warehouse) to be implemented ((AQIP Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness and HLC Criterion 5: Resource, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness).

- 4: **BEST PRACTICES**

  VU Answer: Last year's update noted a number of effective practices. Some of those are repeated here, but this is not mere repetition. The ultimate goal of this project is to change the culture of the institution, making it more accustomed to collecting and using data to drive improvements in the curriculum, in co-curricular programming, and ultimately in non-academic programs and processes. Being a project that requires several years, certain practices have proven effective in sustaining the progress towards VU's goal of developing a culture of assessment:

    o The commitment of the administration and board. The message must be sent, from the top, that this is essential work.
    o The development of a strategic plan before starting work, a plan which is used to check, drive, and validate progress.

- o Release time for faculty liaisons, giving them time to work with faculty and, now, co-curricular staff, to develop and improve their assessment plans.
  - o More of an asynchronous reporting process, one that asks for reports to be completed in steps and allows liaisons to identify potential problems and needed improvements before faculty or co-curricular staff complete the actual assessments, final analysis, and reports. This back-and-forth process is slower, but it has helping faculty and staff understand the goals and expectations of assessment, and the process is moving VU to a position of producing high quality assessments in a short amount of time.
  - o A detailed report program assessment progress form. The form details each program's progress through the assessment process and makes it easy to identify which programs have submitted information and materials for each step in the assessment process. It also distinguishes draft reports from finalized reports, showing qualitative progress on the assessment reports.
- **Reviewer Response:** Great statement. "The ultimate goal of this project is to change the culture of the institution". Transforming the culture of the institution is key. Changing an organization's culture can be a slow process but Vincennes' is on its way to achieving this. How will these changes be communicated to students and other stakeholders not directly involved in the project? What additional professional development will be needed to train other institutional stakeholders on effectively using data to improve other services that promote student success? These are important questions to address in order to sustain the institution's progress in creating a culture "accustomed to collecting and using data to drive improvements in the curriculum as well as co-curricular programming" (AQIP Category 9 Building collaborative Relationships).

- 5: **ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS**
- **VU Answer:** The greatest challenge that VU is facing is the timing for the planned progress on the strategic plan, but this is a relatively minor problem. VU is making progress on all subcategories of its strategic plan, despite a significant set of expectations for a large number of people. For example, VU had planned to get the co-curricular assessment started prior to this year, but the process is now underway and programs will be reporting data and improvement plans by the end of the academic year. VU's strategic plan was ambitious and, for the most part, VU has very successfully implemented the plan. That success has been recognized in the HLC responses to VU's Progress Reports on assessment.
- **Reviewer Response:** Great job on implementing and meeting an aggressive plan.