Understanding and Using Assessment Results

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Today...

1. Why are you assessing?
2. Understanding your audiences
3. Setting standards or benchmarks
4. Summarizing results
5. Sharing assessment results
6. Using assessment results to improve things
What Are You Assessing?

• Are your goals expressed as clear student learning outcomes?
  – Identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and others’ work.
  – Develop well-reasoned arguments.
Why Are You Assessing?

1. Assign grades & give feedback to individual students.

2. Improve what we’re doing.
   - Our curricula
   - Our teaching
   - Our support programs & infrastructure

3. Make sure quality isn’t slipping.

4. Tell the story of our success to key audiences (accountability).
Who Uses Your Results?

- Faculty
- Institutional leaders
- Administrators & staff in support programs
- Government policymakers?
- Prospective students & their families?
What Decisions Do They Make?

- What do they want to know?
- Why?
- What do they need to see to make those decisions?
Setting Benchmarks or Standards

1. Choosing the type of benchmark or standard
2. Setting performance standards
   - How good is good enough?
3. Setting standards for students’ collective performance
   - How many students should do well?
Michael earned 55 points on the midterm.

• Did he do well on the midterm?
To decide if Michael “did well,” we must compare his 55 against something else.

- Benchmark
- Standard
- Target
- Frame of reference
- Lens
- Criterion
- “Brightline”

• The “something else” depends on what we want the test to tell us.
Suppose 35 is passing and 80 is a perfect score.

- Local standards

- Question answered:
  - Are our students meeting our standards?

- Challenge:
  - *Establishing sound performance standards*
Suppose 35 is passing and 80 is a perfect score on a published exam.

- **External standards**

- **Question answered:**
  - Are our students meeting external standards?

- **Challenge:**
  - *Do the standards match what we think is important?*
Suppose the class average is 65.

• Peer benchmark

• Question answered:
  – How do our students compare to peers?

• Challenge:
  – Identifying appropriate peers & collecting info from them
Suppose Michael scored 25 a year ago.

• Value-added benchmark

• Question answered:
  – Are our students improving?

• Challenges:
  – *Transfers in or out*
  – *Motivating students on pre-test*
  – *Is growth due to us?*
  – *Imprecise assessments mask growth*
  – *Is this question relevant?*
Suppose class average is 65 now and 40 three years ago.

• Historical trends benchmark

• Questions answered:
  – Are our teaching & curricula improving?
  – Are we getting better?

• Challenge:
  – *Using the same assessment*
Suppose Michael scored a 65 for knowledge and a 45 for real-world applications.

- **Strengths and weaknesses benchmark**

- **Question answered:**
  - What are our students’ relative strengths and areas for improvement?

- **Challenge:**
  - *Getting “sub-scores” that are truly comparable*
Suppose Michael’s 55 cost $400 and Melissa’s 55 cost $300.

- **Productivity benchmark**

- **Question answered:**
  - Are we getting the most for our investment?

- **Challenge:**
  - Calculating cost and benefit accurately
  - Keeping the focus on effectiveness as well as efficiency
Which benchmark or standard should you use?

• Each has advantages and disadvantages.

• Each gives a somewhat incomplete picture.

• Multiple perspectives give the most balanced picture of student learning.
2. Setting Performance Standards: How Good is Good Enough?

- Is Michael’s 55 good enough?
  - Why is 35 passing?
  - Why is being above average good enough?

- What level is minimally adequate? Why?
- What level is exemplary? Why?
Do some research.

- Have others set standards?
  - Disciplinary associations
  - Online searches
  - Colleagues in peer programs & colleges
Involve others.

- Employers
- Students
- Faculty in your program
- Faculty in more advanced programs
Use rubrics to articulate local standards.

- Rubrics have no rules!
- Minimally acceptable performance may be a minimum standard for
  - *Every trait*
  - *The sum or average of all traits*
  - *Certain traits*
3. Setting Targets for Students’ Collective Performance

- Are you satisfied with your students’ overall performance?
Again involve others.

- Employers
- Students
- Faculty in your program
- Faculty in more advanced programs
Express targets as percentages, not means.

- "90% will score 65 or better"
- NOT "The average will be 72."
Vary your targets depending on the circumstances.

- Is this competency essential?
  - *Calculating dosages*
  - *Making effective oral presentations*

- What is the cost of perfection?
Isn’t poor performance the student’s fault?

- Sometimes, but usually few

- Suskie’s “50% rule”
Consider multiple targets.

- “100% at least minimally adequate”
- “35% exemplary”
Two Final Suggestions for Setting Standards and Targets

1. Use samples of student work to inform your discussions.
   – Would this paper embarrass us?
   – Would this paper make us proud?
   – Why?

2. View this as an iterative process.
Understanding Assessment Results
Tally the Results

- Percentages are better than averages.
- Round results.
- Sort results from highest to lowest.
Discuss the Results

• Were enough students at least minimally adequate?

• Were enough students outstanding?

• Where did students do best? Worst?

• Where would you like students to do better?
Sharing Assessment Results
The current quest for accountability creates a precious opportunity for educators to tell the full range of stories about learning and teaching.

Lee Shulman
Everyone has a different story to tell.

Tell the **story of your effectiveness** to your audiences in your own way.

- Accurately
- Truthfully
Share only what your audience will find useful.

- Most information is useless.
- Give yourself permission to dismiss it.
Keep it **fast** and **easy** to find, read & understand.

- Short, simple
- Charts, graphs, and lists
- PowerPoint presentations
- No jargon
Focus on big news.

Drill down only if needed.
What Questions Should You Address in Your Story?
1. How do you define a successful student?

- What knowledge, skills, competencies, and attributes does a successful student have?
- Why do you and your colleagues think these are important?
2. What have you learned about your students’ learning?

- Do your students meet your definition of success?
- Systematic, not anecdotal
- Include “direct” evidence
3. Are you satisfied with your results?

- **Why** or why not?
- Distinguish meaningful from trivial differences.
Celebrate Successes!
Publicize Successes

- Prospective students
- Alumni
- Foundations
- Government policymakers
- Employers
4. If you’re not satisfied, what are you doing about it?

• When, where, and how are you doing it?
Using Assessment Results to Improve Things
Improve Assessments?

- Are they poorly written and misinterpreted?
- Do they match your key learning goals?
- Are they too difficult for most responsible students?
- Are the benefits worth time & money invested?
Improve Learning Goals?

- Do you have too many goals?
- Do your goals need to be clarified?
- Are your goals inappropriate or overly ambitious?
Improve Curricula?

- Including placement and developmental education.

• Does the curriculum adequately address each learning goal?
Improve Teaching Methods?

• How do students learn best?
Linking to Planning & Budgeting

• Should improvements be a top priority?
  – Update goals & plans accordingly

• Do improvements need funding?
MSCHE’s Fundamental Expectations for Assessment

1. Read the directions.
2. Keep it useful...and used.
3. Tie assessments to important goals.
4. Include some “direct” evidence.
5. Use multiple measures.
6. Keep doing something everywhere, every year.
Volunteer for Middle States Evaluation Teams!

- Go to www.msche.org
- Click on “Evaluators”
- Consider joining as an Evaluation Team Associate.