Supporting What Faculty Do Best: Teachers, Scholars, Researchers, and Critics Take on Assessment

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Objectives

• You will learn:
  – How engaging **faculty** in assessment, **as teachers, scholars, and researchers**, has contributed to the sustainability of the assessment efforts at Fordham.
  – How our university has been **integrating** assessment **into annual reporting/planning** process.
  – Some of the costs and benefits to **flexible management** of program assessment.
INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
“We refuse to be stampeded into following the pseudo-educational vagaries of experimentalists, ...[they] advise the introduction of some whimsical fad. We refuse to fore-go our time-proven...unassailable principles...because of the formalistic, purely extrinsic requirements of so-called standardizing agencies which are cramping and maiming our educational activity in America today.”

Reverend Aloysius Hogan, Faculty Convocation, 1934
Teachers, Scholars, Researchers

• Deeply involved in teaching
• Concerned about learning
• Responsible for course and program curricula
• Possess research and reasoning skills
• Creative
• Experts in their fields
• **Intellectually active and engaged**
Obstacles & Loss of (Intellectual) Power

- Language of assessment is unfamiliar
- Intellect & expertise ignored
- Purpose of assessment is disconnected from teaching and learning

Photo credit: Lillian Whitney-Morley, Nov. 2012
Administrative Flexibility is Essential

• Diverse agenda: Program faculty select focus to suit needs of program
• Use of their language: Minimize use of assessment jargon
• Requirements for content, not form
  • Monitor progress annually, permit longer-term work
ENGAGING FACULTY
Scholars & Researchers

- Faculty reading group to reconnect assessment to research, teaching and learning
  - First reading: *Academically Adrift*
- Support scholarship of assessment
  - Including dissenting perspective
- Integrate assessment into professional development
Department Chairs & Program Directors

• Annual reporting by programs includes assessment reports
  – Assessment reports are loosely standardized
• Annual planning documents prompt for assessment results as related to planning
• Deans provide feedback on assessment projects
• Internally-funded projects require assessment plans and reports
Outcomes

• Most programs choose assessment-for-improvement
• Programs that chose assessment-for-improvement sustain commitment to assessment
• Leadership promoting “curricular conversation” and faculty development
Graduate Assessment in a School of Arts and Sciences
Graduate Assessment in a School of Arts and Sciences

Different from undergraduate and professional programs

• Deeper and broader
• Professional development
• Emerging scholar not assessed through coursework
• Inherent in mentoring
• Using end products
Use of Flexibility: 3 Examples

• Programs chose their assessment focus
  – Meaningful and valuable
• 3 programs, 3 different approaches
  – Professional needs of graduate students
  – Academic outcomes, intellectual development
  – Capturing outcomes of program learning objectives across courses
• Flexibility led to sustainability
Example: Philosophy Department

- Alumni Survey – Feedback from graduates
- Reveals
  - What department is doing well
  - Where it could use improvement

Informed by experience in job market and employment
Program Evaluation

Complete the sentence to best describe your experience:

I felt Fordham’s PhD. program could have prepared me better by [select any that apply]...

- [ ] Offering more history of philosophy courses
- [ ] Offering more contemporary philosophy courses
- [ ] Helping me publish my work
- [ ] Offering more training in teaching
- [ ] Offering more opportunities to learn about non-academic careers
- [ ] Helping me build a professional network
- [ ] Preparing me for job interviews
- [ ] Other
  
  Other

Survey Powered By Qualtrics
Results from Philosophy Department Survey of PhDs

• Current Employment
  – 71% of those working in academia hold tenure or tenure-track jobs
  – 57% work for Catholic institutions
Survey Revealed Student Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas for Improvement</th>
<th>Percent reporting program needs improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping me Publish</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn Non-Academic Careers</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Networking</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Year of Graduation
- Before 2002
- 2002-2007
- 2008-2012
Survey Revealed Success of Changes: Preparing for Interviews

Year of Graduation

Percent reporting program needs improvement

- Before 2002
- 2002-2007
- 2008-2012
• Focus on dissertation quality
• Rubric generated using Barbara Lovitts’ *Making the Implicit Explicit* and *Developing Quality Dissertations* examples
• Assesses knowledge accumulated throughout graduate career
# Theology Department

## Program goal and student-learning objectives

Excellent dissertations should clearly **define a compelling problem**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outstanding (4)</th>
<th>Very Good (3)</th>
<th>Acceptable (2)</th>
<th>Unacceptable (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- well written</td>
<td>- competently written but not eloquent</td>
<td>- is not well written or well organized</td>
<td>- poorly written and organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- succinct, interesting, and compelling</td>
<td>- interesting; has breadth, depth, and insight</td>
<td>- makes a standard case for a narrow or pedestrian problem</td>
<td>- not clear or succinct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- provides a clear statement of the problem</td>
<td>- poses a good question or problem</td>
<td>- does not do a good job of explaining why it is important</td>
<td>- provides no motivation or justification for the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- shows independent thinking about the problem</td>
<td>- explains why the problem is important and significant</td>
<td>- provides minimum of poor context for the problem</td>
<td>- does not state the problem (or it is wrong or trivial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- explains why the problem is important and significant</td>
<td>- makes some attempt to situate the problem—albeit in a less interesting or compelling way</td>
<td>- has a routine introduction of the problem</td>
<td>- does not make the case for the importance of the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- places the problem in scholarly and intellectual context so as to illuminate its importance</td>
<td></td>
<td>- lacks a careful and thorough attempt to situate the problem in its intellectual context</td>
<td>- does not provide or does not put the problem in a clear context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Master’s Program assessment coordinated among courses
• Complex rubric generated with TEAGLE grant for undergraduate courses and modified for graduate courses
• See session immediately following:

**Men and Women For and With Others: Collaborative Learning and Innovative Assessment in Humanitarian Studies**

4th Floor, Room 407-409
Hurdles to Assessment & How We Reduce Them

- **Documentation**
  - Incorporate in routine reporting documents and planning

- **Language**
  - Minimize jargon, permit faculty to use any terms

- **Timing**
  - Allow multiple ongoing projects; assume no project is going to fit exactly into one year; pathways may be circuitous
Costs of Flexibility

• More work for administrators
  – Reduces standardization
  – Requires thought and judgment
Benefits of Flexibility in Management of Assessment

• Engages faculty in research/scholarship rather than bureaucratic exercise
  – Taps faculty expertise
• Supports diverse foci and methods
• Yields information faculty value and use
• Minimizes obstacles
• Makes assessment sustainable and meaningful
Acknowledgements & Further Information

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- Department of Philosophy
- Department of Theology
- Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs

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The full text of this presentation is available at:

Administrative Flexibility: Assessment Reporting Guidelines and Optional Templates

**Annual Assessment Report for Academic Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program goal and student-learning objective</th>
<th>How did you measure student performance?</th>
<th>Where, when and from whom did you collect assessment evidence?</th>
<th>What is the result?</th>
<th>Outcome of analysis, follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Objective wholly satisfied. No follow up required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Objective not wholly satisfied. Follow up planned, responsible persons, timeline:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ANNUAL STUDENT OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT REPORT GUIDELINES**

(Updated February 2012)

Your annual assessment report will be a part of the annual planning documents. The report serves two purposes:

1. To document your program- and course-level assessment activities from the academic year, and
2. To summarize results that contribute to your planning.

Your assessment report should address each of the fundamental elements below:

- Which program goals and student outcomes were assessed?
- How you measured student performance or outcomes, including:
  - A description of the evidence (e.g., papers, performance, surveys)
  - A description of the evidence that was obtained (e.g., course and term information, survey administration information)
- Copies of materials, where appropriate (e.g., surveys, outline)
- A summary of the evidence (in sufficient detail that the reader can appreciate the basis of any conclusions you reach)
- Summaries of the conclusions (including conclusions that you participated in the discussion and when and where they took place)
- Decisions arising from the results
- A plan for follow up, as needed, including the persons who are responsible for follow up and target dates for their work

Your assessment report SHOULD NOT include:

- Students’ names, id numbers or other identifying information
- Faculty names or other identifying information in connection with courses or student performance, to the extent that it is possible (though do include the names of faculty who worked on assessment)

For your convenience, forms are available for your use in constructing your report. The forms are available by email from the Assessment Office (priats@fordham.edu). To suit the varying needs and desires of Fordham’s programs, two versions of the forms are available, a grid and a narrative. You may use one of these forms or your may organize your report to best represent your assessment as you see fit.

Detailed summaries of your assessment results should be incorporated into your planning documents whenever they inform your decision-making and planning. Bear in mind that these results may be prerequisites to both past decisions (providing evidence about the effect of those decisions) or future decisions (providing information needed to make choices).
Assessment integrated into planning documents.