Today…

1. What is assessment?
2. What is “good” assessment?
3. Setting standards or benchmarks
4. Sharing assessment results
5. Using assessment results to improve teaching & learning
1. What is Assessment of Student Learning?

- Deciding what we want our students to learn
- Making sure they learn it!

—Jane Wolfson, Director, Environmental Science & Studies Program, Towson University

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The Teaching-Learning-Assessment Cycle

1. Learning Goals
2. Learning Opportunities
3. Assessment
4. Using Results
2. What is “Good” Assessment?

Five Dimensions of Good Assessment

- Are planned and purposeful
- Focus on clear and important goals
- Active participation of stakeholders
- Results communicated widely and transparently
- Results used fairly, ethically, and responsibly

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Five Dimensions of Good Assessment

- Focus on clear and important goals (3-6)
- Start with what you have
- Simple (one assignment for several goals)
- Realistic expectations

- Flow from clear and important goals
- Represent a balanced sample of goals, including thinking skills
- Use multiple approaches, including direct evidence of student learning
- Assess teaching-learning processes as well as outcomes
- Developed thoughtfully
- Perpetual works in progress
Five Dimensions of Good Assessment

- Results inform important decisions on important goals
- Assessment efforts are recognized/honored
- Innovation, risk-taking, efforts to improve teaching are recognized/honored
- Sustained
- Supported with appropriate resources

Five Dimensions of Good Assessment

- Flow from & focus on clear & important goals
- Inform important decisions on important goals
- Have clear, appropriate standards for acceptable & exemplary student performance
- Reasonably accurate & truthful results
- Used
- Valued
- Cost effective

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Time to Talk!

3. Setting Benchmarks or Standards: How Good is Good Enough?
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**
  - *aka competency-based*
  - *aka criterion-referenced*
- **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**
  - *aka competency-based*
  - *aka criterion-referenced*
- **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**
- *aka* norm-referenced
- 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**
  - *aka* growth, change, pre-post
- 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
  - aka improvement
  - aka (incorrectly) longitudinal
- 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.
Time to talk again!

3. Sharing Assessment Results
Why are you assessing your program or curriculum?

- Validate it to others (accountability)
- Improve it
- Make sure it isn’t slipping

Keep assessment summaries useful to you and your colleagues.

- Who on campus or off campus needs to see the results?
- Why? What decisions will they make?
- What do they need to see to make those decisions?
What decisions will your assessment help with?

- **Learning goals**
  - Are our learning goals sufficiently clear and focused?

- **Curriculum**
  - What is the value of service learning?
  - Should our courses have more uniformity across sections?

- **Teaching methods**
  - Is online instruction as effective as traditional instruction?
  - Is collaborative learning more effective than traditional lectures?
  - Are we developing a community of scholars?

- **Assessments**
  - Have our assessments been useful?

- **Resource allocations**
  - Where should we commit our resources first?

Time to Talk!
Keep assessment summaries short and simple.

- Fast and easy to read and understand
  - Use short, simple charts, graphs, and lists.
    - Use PowerPoint presentations.
    - Avoid narrative text.
  - First aggregate (sum up) data, then drill down into details as needed.
  - Round results.
  - Sort results from highest to lowest.
  - Percentages may be more meaningful than averages.
    - Avoid complex statistics.
  - As you collect results over time, show trends.

Tell a story.

- Key questions to address:
  - What have you learned about your students’ learning?
  - What are you going to do about what you have learned?
  - When, where, and how are you going to do it?
    - Doug Eder
  - Focus on “big news.”
    - Have a statistician identify meaningful vs. insignificant differences.
  - Find someone skilled at finding the stories in reams of data.
Time to Talk Again!

When Assessment Results Are Good

Celebrate!

Publicize!
When assessment results are disappointing...

- Goals
- Curriculum
- Pedagogy
- Assessments

Look at your learning goals.

- Are your goals inappropriate or overly ambitious?
- Do your goals need to be clarified?
- Do you have too many goals?
Look at your curriculum.

- Including placement and developmental education.
- Does the curriculum adequately address each learning goal?

Look at your teaching methods.

- How do students learn best?
Time to Think & Discuss!

Look at your assessments.

- Are they poorly written and misinterpreted?
- Do they match your key learning goals?
- Are they too difficult for most responsible students?
Isn’t poor performance the student’s fault?

- Sometimes, but usually a minority
- Suskie’s “50% rule”

Time to Think and Discuss!
Questions?