Authentic Accountability

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Overview

- **Accountability options**
- **Why do we need authentic accountability?**
- **What is authentic accountability?**
- **How do we do authentic accountability?**

Why is accountability an issue?

- Accountability is an ever more pressing issue with the Spellings Commission's report and recommendations and the growing influence of standardized testing.

- If colleges want to counter the pressure for standardization they must be clearly accountable for student learning.

Accountability options

- Maintain the status quo and

- Stay on the defensive;

Or

- Adopt standardized tests and other standardization measures and

- Accept greater federal control;

Or

- Adopt a practical, meaningful alternative—authentic accountability.

What's wrong with the status quo?

- Colleges and universities demonstrate accountability through accreditation. Critics cite the following problems with the current accountability system:
    - Evaluation is "process oriented" rather than "outcomes oriented."
    - Evaluation is not sufficiently focused on student learning outcomes.
    - There are no clear quality criteria for assessing instructional quality and institutional effectiveness.
    - Results of accreditation visits are not transparent.

What's wrong with standardization?

- Standardized tests measure the basics—verbal, quantitative, critical thinking. They miss any specialization, anything unique to a college.

- Standardized tests are divorced from instruction—if test scores indicate a problem, pinpointing and then solving the problem is a separate, time-consuming, resource-intensive matter.

- Standardized tests don't provide a good return on investment—they do not provide meaningful information that satisfies stakeholders' need to know the quality and value of instruction.

Pseudo-accountability:
Validity and reliability as the goals

- Validity and reliability are appropriate quality criteria for a single test or treatment, not for an entire accountability system.

- Change compromises validity, and colleges and their populations are always changing.

- Reliability depends upon similarity across sample populations, and that cannot be assured.

Why is authentic accountability the best option?

- Authentic accountability tells the story of a college—with credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness.

- It is better than purely quantitative accountability because authentic accountability puts the numbers in context.

- It integrates student learning, instructional improvement, meaningful evidence and documentation.

What is authentic accountability?

- It's a framework for assessing and reporting student learning outcomes and instructional effectiveness.

- It uses the quality criteria of naturalistic research—trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, generalizability and transferability.

Accountability for what?

- Colleges and universities should be accountable for students' developing proficiency, the ability to apply knowledge skillfully, not just for their acquisition of knowledge.

- Proficiency can include proficiency as community members, employees, and other roles as well as scholars.

Course and program level accountability

- Programs articulate student learning outcomes that graduates are expected to achieve.
- Programs ensure that courses in the program "add up" to program outcomes.
- Courses specify student learning outcomes, including level indicators and assessments, and grade on the level of mastery achieved.
- Through rigorous instruction, assessment, documentation and grading on mastery of SLOs, course-level accountability forms the basis of program-level and institutional accountability.

For each program of study:

- Define expected student learning outcomes for program graduates.

- For each student learning outcome, list courses that contribute to its development.

- Describe the evidence or documentation that will be used to demonstrate achievement of each outcome by graduation: e.g., portfolio, capstone course, field experience, tests, project, senior thesis, and aggregate of course completion with documentation of course level learning outcomes.

For each course:

- Define expected student learning outcomes.
- List the indicators for each outcome.
- Define levels of progress and performance, and describe each level of performance for each indicator.
- For each student learning outcome, list (learning/instructional) activities that contribute to its development.
- Create assignments and learning activities that incorporate instruction and practice for development of all the course outcomes.
- Describe the evidence or documentation (assessments) that will be used to demonstrate the level of performance for each outcome by the end of the course.
- Define and explain the relationship between achievement of outcomes and final grade.

Using the framework for accountability and improvement

- Start with individual assessment.
- Aggregate individual assessments to evaluate instruction at the classroom level.
- Aggregate classroom-level data to evaluate programs.
- Since accountability measures are directly drawn from individual, course, and program data, they can also be used to guide improvement.

How to "do" authentic accountability

Build trustworthiness through

- *Credibility*—the level of confidence in the "truth" that the findings have for the subjects of the study.

- *Dependability*—the extent to which the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the course, department, program, or college under consideration as well as changes in the assessment and evaluation activities.

- *Confirmability*—the extent to which the conclusions rest on the evidence of the data and not on the biases of the faculty, staff, and/or self-study team.

- *Transferability*—the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other people.

Using authentic accountability for self-study and accreditation

- Aggregate information from individual, course, and program assessments.

- Use outcomes-based grade information to document levels of achievement of SLOs.

- Assure quality by building trustworthiness (see handout).

Conclusion

- Authentic accountability integrates instruction, assessment, and accountability, centered on colleges' core mission of facilitating student learning.

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