An Empirical Model of Culture of Assessment in Student Affairs

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Tuesday, March 14, 2017
Marriott RiverCenter, Salon A
Assessment has emerged as a defining facet of higher education.

Many institutions devote significant resources to assessment and accreditation activities.

– Approximately $660 million is spent on direct costs associated with assessment and accreditation (Woolston, 2012).
• Assessment in student affairs is relatively new topic in the field.
• Much of the prior scholarship on student affairs assessment has focused on applications of assessment techniques.
• There is very little research about assessment culture. Few theories or models of assessment culture have emerged because very little empirical evidence or data exist.
Recent publications, pressures, and opportunities have heightened the need to examine cultures of assessment in student affairs (Bingham & Bureau, 2015; Henning & Roberts, 2016; Schuh, Biddix, Dean, & Kinzie, 2016).

- As higher education faces increased scrutiny to describe its worth, so does student affairs.
- Many in student affairs are driven by a quest to improve their practices and services as well as an ethical commitment to students.
Factors of assessment culture based on attitudes of administrators (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014). Prior factors from Assessment and IR Administrators’ Study

- Clear Commitment
- Connection to Change
- Vital to Institution Faculty Perceptions
Factors of assessment culture based on attitudes of faculty (Fuller et al., 2016). Prior factors from Faculty Study

• Faculty Perceptions
• Use of Data
• Sharing
• Compliance or Fear Motivators
• Normative Purposes for Assessment
Our Work

- Examines assessment culture in the context of student affairs.
- Draws upon Student Affairs Survey of Assessment Culture
- Exploratory Factor Analyses to examine a model.
- Prior studies with other samples offer an opportunity to compare groups.
  - Assessment Administrators
  - Faculty
Instrument

Student Affairs Survey of Assessment Culture

- Forty-eight items
- Five factors (Fuller et al., 2016)
  1. Faculty Perceptions
  2. Use of Data
  3. Sharing
  4. Compliance or Fear Motivators
  5. Normative Purposes for Assessment
- Internal consistency (α) of factor are reported to be above 0.7 (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014; Fuller et al., 2016).
Sample

• Contacted institutions’ Division of Student Affairs
  – Ensured at least 1 participating institution in a stratification matric with 3 levels (institutional size, region, Primarily Associates/ Primarily Bachelors)

• Invited mid-manager or higher level practitioners

• 1,624 practitioners from 59 institutions were invited to participate in the study.

• 771 practitioner responded to the survey (47.% response rate).
Methods

Principal Components Analysis

– Factors were extracted using principal components analysis (PCA).
– Components were obliquely rotated using Promax criteria.
– Multiple criteria were used for component retention
  • Kaiser-Guttman rule (i.e., Eigenvalues > 1)
  • scree test
  • parallel analysis
– Factor pattern matrix and structure matrix were considered in the interpretation of components (Henson & Roberts, 2006)
• The initial model included 9 components explaining 62% of the variance.
• Parallel Analyses and the scree plot suggested a more parsimonious model.
• The final model included 4 components explaining 55% of the variance across items.
• Reliability Coefficients ranged from 0.65 to 0.78.
Clear Commitment to Assessment

– “Upper Student Affairs Administrators have made clear their expectations regarding assessment.”

Assessment Communication

– “Communication of assessment results has been effective.”

Connection to Change

– “Change occurs more readily when supported by assessment results.”

Fear of Assessment

– “Assessment results are used to scare student affairs staff into compliance with what the administration wants.”
Discussion

• Assessment culture may be viewed differently among student affairs practitioners.
  – There is a need to refit the data to all three groups.
• Practices, such as communication strategies or planned use of data, associated with each factor.
• Professional development for senior and mid-level student affairs leaders.
• Consider revisions to the instrument.
Implications for Practice

• Reflective practice opportunities.
  – See Handout

• Engage student affairs leaders in their reasons for education, growth, development.
  – Clear depiction of how assessment supports those reasons

• Clarify roles and responsibilities

• Advise strong yet responsible methods
Implications for Practice for SAA Leaders

• Surveys as “pulse checks” or “read outs” of your division’s culture of assessment across time or across planned developments.

• Not a comparative tool because we believe culture should not be compared.

• Items can help you lay out a plan for improvements in your division.

  – An example
Implications for Professional Development (PD)

• Where are your division’s staff and leaders on the technical—cultural scale?
  – Match their needs with sessions, communications, success stories.
• Who is the best person to deliver X, Y, or Z topics in PD sessions?
• Remember the “peopled” side of assessment.
  – Staff and leaders often need tactics for interacting with a variety of people in the “language of assessment” or research.
• Who is their “assessment shepherd?” Do you have one? (Fuller & Letizia, 2015).
• This work is not “one off” and is “highly relational.”
References


Questions? Dialogue?

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Thank you for joining us today!

Please remember to complete your customized online evaluation following the conference.

See you in Philly in 2018!
**Student Affairs Survey of Assessment Culture**

*Reflective Practice Questions*

**Clear Commitment to Assessment**

- If an external constituent were to come on campus/ pick up a publication, how would they know that you have a strong culture of campus?
- How do students know what assessment’s purpose is?
- What major discourses has assessment traditionally been associated with?
- What is really being done in the name of assessment?

**Assessment Communication**

- What needs to be said to change or maintain our culture of assessment?
- When was the last time a senior administrator mentioned assessment or assessment data? What did he/she say?
- What are people saying about assessment? (Ask different leaders)

**Connection to Change**

- If ideal/challenging results were obtained how would we enact a change?
- If assessment were to cease, what changes would not be realized?
- Who/What are the change centers on our campus?

**Fear of Assessment**

- What are the lived experiences/history faculty, staff, and administrators have with assessment?
- What do faculty, staff, and administrators have to help them think positively /negatively about assessment?
- Thinking of the last time someone sought you out to discuss assessment fears or concerns, what were those concerns and are they logical or founded?