Special Session Abstract Assessment of the Marketing Program: The Eastern Illinois University Experience

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Abstract

Over the last 15 years, formal assessment plans have proliferated in colleges and universities. Whether these plans will achieve their lofty goals remains uncertain. Clearly, assessment can benefit both students and faculty. A well-planned and administered assessment process should lead to an updated, integrated curriculum delivered in a manner that best facilitates learning. These are qualities that engage students in the learning process and better prepare them for employment and study after graduation. The assessment process also should benefit faculty by encouraging continuous updating of the knowledge and skills demanded by their discipline as well as ongoing analysis of teaching techniques and methods.

Why then do the goals of student outcomes assessment remain largely unrealized? The experience of the marketing area at EIU suggests that a successful assessment requires a confluence of support from all levels of the university--institution, college, department, faculty, and students. The alignment of these factors is difficult both to achieve and to maintain.

Factors Supporting Assessment

General Factors

EIU has tried to incorporate student outcomes assessment into academic programs for over 10 years. Until recently, these efforts appeared to be at a standstill. Among the factors supporting more recent progress are: external pressure from accreditation bodies; demands for accountability from the Illinois Board of Higher Education; change of focus within the university from elaborate planning to simplifying objectives and identifying and evaluating outcomes even in limited areas; and more visible resources for assessment including a staff person responsible for assessment, and an assessment coordinator in School of Business.
The Marketing Difference

During this same time, the marketing area has progressed farther than most all other disciplines in the School of Business. The factors that have influenced this progress include:

- Excellent communication among a small number of marketing faculty and strong collegiality
- Faculty consensus on learning goals that are simple and clearly articulated
- Inherent customer orientation of marketing faculty

All of these factors came together when the marketing faculty informally began discussion of student performance in the marketing capstone course. The concern for lower than expected performance was the pivotal factor in motivating the faculty to implement systematic assessment of student learning.

The Marketing Assessment Plan

Through meetings and discussion, the marketing faculty established clear objectives and selected assessment tools. Upon completing the program, marketing majors should be able to:

- Use marketing terminology and concepts (assessment tool: comprehensive principles final)
- Identify, analyze, and evaluate market segments (assessment tool: buyer behavior profiles)
- Analyze the interrelationships among the components of a marketing system (assessment tools: capstone marketing course, senior surveys, alumni surveys)
- Develop a comprehensive marketing plan (assessment tool: marketing plan from capstone marketing course)

A student portfolio submitted by all graduating seniors in the capstone course serves as the primary vehicle for assessment. The portfolio includes a buyer profile project, a project from the student's area of concentration, a project from an elective course, and the comprehensive marketing plan. All marketing faculty review the portfolios and assess them holistically.
Results of the Assessment Process

The marketing faculty have noted positive impacts from their new focus on assessment. Faculty have become aware of what is being taught in all courses enabling elimination of unnecessary content repetition and improved content integration. Data generated from assessment have been used to reduce the time needed for curriculum changes. An unexpected benefit has been the opportunity to use adjunct faculty more effectively by providing better guidelines for course content and creating a sense of inclusion. As the assessment plan continues to evolve, marketing faculty have identified concerns and potential problems that must be addressed. Perhaps most importantly, the faculty are using assessment for improvement of teaching thereby ultimately improving student learning.