Project Details

Title   Implementation of Assessment Plans Status   REVIEWED

Category Any Category   Updated   09-30-2012

Timeline   Reviewed   10-04-2012

Planned Project Kickoff
04-26-2011   Created   04-24-2011

Target Completion
05-16-2015   Last Modified 10-04-2012

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: For the most part, great progress has been made on the "Implementation of Assessment Plans" Action Project. Faculty representatives from the different colleges have been given release time to dedicate to the implementation of the assessment plan. An assessment report template for academic program assessment has been developed and implemented; almost all academic programs submitted complete reports during the Spring 2011 semester, including data on student success and student weaknesses, and plans for improving learning and assessment processes. The report template was developed to help guide department assessment work step-by-step through the process, and it used progressive completion dates to allow the Assessment Committee the time needed to review the reports and assist the programs with their work. The Assessment Committee met multiple times during most weeks to review the step-by-step submissions. Weekly progress reports were shared with the Assessment Committee and the President; the faculty, Provost's Council, and the Board also received the progress reports at various times throughout the year. An assessment website has been developed and all assessment reports are public at improve.vinu.edu. The site also includes access to workshop PowerPoints, information about assessment processes, various assessment and AQIP reports, and other AQIP information. The assessment process was also assessed, giving faculty an opportunity to comment on the template, the process, and the assistance offered by liaisons. 99% of the 110 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their college liaison offered helpful assistance; 80% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed the new process was helpful in assessing learning in their programs; and 83% of those reporting agreed or strongly agreed that the process helped them identify improvements for their program. On April 30, VU submitted a required Progress Report on the implementation of the assessment strategic plan. The HLC response described the 144 page report as "exemplary" and described VU's progress as excellent, except for general education assessment. In addition, VU submitted its AQIP Portfolio June 1st and reported both assessment progress and and results there. VU believes the quality of the Portfolio was enhanced due to the progress made on the Action Project.

R: The institution has continued to move forward with its assessment plan. The use of the template will assist in gathering and analyzing data. It is important that most academic programs submitted reports and even more important that they not only identified strengths and weaknesses but that they used this information to improve learning (Category 1: Helping Students Learn; Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement). The commitment of administration and the board are also important factors in the continued success of this project. Conducting a survey of faculty provided an opportunity for them to have input which is essential. Keeping the momentum going as plans for assessment of general education are developed will be the next challenge in this project.

2: Institution Involvement

A: As noted above, one important method for involving people in the process has been employing college liaisons. The release time enabled liaisons to give one-on-one time to faculty in their respective college, using the feedback from the Assessment Committee to guide their assessment and improvement plans. The report template focused energy on the multiple steps in the process at a manageable pace; a number of faculty commented on how that step-by-step approach helped to reduce the anxiety over completing the whole process. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness sent emails to all faculty describing expectations for each step, college liaisons then helped to identify faculty difficulties and offer assistance, and deans regularly sent follow-up emails emphasizing the importance of completing the work on time.   In addition, various assessment workshops were offered in the last year. A three-hour workshop in May 2011 kicked off the process by introducing the new report form and the expectations. Multiple departments that had been doing assessment completed forms as models. The President also made a half hour presentation on the importance of VU's commitment to the assessment process. Additional workshops covered the steps in the assessment process, addressing issues such as developing mission statements and outcomes, developing key assessment tools, analyzing data, and planning improvements. Throughout the last year, the President and various administrators made their commitment to assessment clear in presentations to personnel and the Board, emails, and reports such as the annual report. This administrative and faculty liaison support has made clear that assessment is an expectation, not an option. Weekly progress reports were used to document progress and drive Assessment Committee discussions about what was needed to keep the process on track. The reports were shared with college deans, who distributed them to their faculty, encouraging those who might have fallen off track to catch up.

R: The engagement of multiple stakeholders contributed to the forward progress of this project. Having college liaisons with release time that could assist faculty on a one-to-one basis helped relieve some of the anxiety and stress that come naturally with "change". Offering educational sessions via workshops was an important part of this project to encourage compliance and understanding (Category 4: Valuing People). Having support from the President and administrators via presentations, board emails, and the annual report demonstrated the commitment to quality and assessment (Category 5; Leading and Communicating). Sharing the results with external stakeholders would be a logical step.

3: Next Steps

A: Progress will continue, using the Assessment Strategic Plan as the guide. Efforts will be made to:
- Review and revise the assessment process, using assessment to assess the process
- Present workshops, such as the recent workshop on "closing the loop" and possible revisions to mission statements and outcomes.
- Evaluate the learning and assessment improvement results planned during the 2011-2012 process; the improvement plans are part of the 2012-2013 assessment process.
- Develop a general and liberal education assessment plan. The response to the Assessment Progress Report noted that this plan is the one missing element of a full-blown academic assessment plan.

- Implement a curriculum mapping process to ensure alignment between course outcomes and program outcomes.
- Continue work on a Student Services assessment process, including offering a workshop to describe a possible process.
- Implement peer review process, beginning with academic program reviews.
- Continue discussions on both portfolio assessment and a qualitative program review will continue in order to understand and better explain the value of these processes.
- Identify individuals willing to serve as peer reviewers for the HLC and other accrediting organizations.
- Complete VU's New Leadership Alliance Action Plan, which was written to complement the strategic plan.

R: The institution has appropriately identified its next steps. An assessment plan for general and liberal education is essential to assessment of the programs, as is a plan for Student Services assessment. It is admirable that the institution is assessing not only student learning but the process of assessment itself. This is indicative of utilization of the quality improvement cycle and the necessary feedback loop. It is not enough to implement a process or plan – it must be evaluated to see if it worked (Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement). Having individuals educated to serve as peer reviewers for HLC and other accrediting organizations will provide additional insights into the assessment processes.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Several practices made VU's process effective in moving the programs toward a University-wide assessment plan:
- The President has given a clear, unequivocal commitment to the process, expressed in various forms: meeting presentations, resource allocation (including release time for liaisons and establishing an Office of Institutional Effectiveness), emails, and Board updates.
- A step-by-step process and report system has been developed; it has kept the process manageable rather than overwhelming faculty with the complete, abstract assessment process.
- Workshops have been developed and coordinated with the report form due dates.
- Release time has enabled the college liaisons to dedicate time to reviewing the report form submissions and to work one-on-one with program faculty.
- The approach of the Assessment Committee reviewing the assessment reports, step-by-step, helped the group to identify problems and work through them together. The solutions were then carried back into the colleges and shared with the faculty. The approach created a consistent message and clearer communication of process expectations.
- The new Institutional Effectiveness website, improve.vinu.edu, has been developed to offer assistance, keep the University community updated on progress, and make the assessment reports public and fully transparent. Anyone wanting to review the assessment activities and plans can search the reports by program or by steps in the process.

R: Several effective practices will ensure the progress of this endeavor. These include the support from administration, allocation of both financial and human resources such as the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, implementing in a step wise manner versus the whole

project at once, the new web site, and involving all stakeholders. These lessons learned will serve as models for future projects.

5: **Project Challenges**

A: Two major challenges exist in order to complete the Action Project:

- The workload of the strategic plan is ambitious. VU is working to implement as much as possible without overwhelming faculty and staff. Renewing the program assessment process for 2012-13, developing a general education assessment plan, completing a curriculum mapping process, and implementing a peer review process (as well as managing other plan objectives and discussions) will all demand a great deal of the Assessment Committee and the faculty.   On the other hand, a number of Student Services and Library personnel would like to organize and systematize their assessment processes, but the focus of the Progress Reports is clearly academic assessment. Organizing the workload and sustaining the support for assessment is a challenge. The Assessment Committee will be discussing the load and how best to manage it, but again, suggestions for sorting through the various responsibilities and priorities would be beneficial.
- First, and most important, is the development of a general education assessment plan, which is the focus of VU's April 15, 2013, required Progress Report. VU is wrestling with general education, in part due to newly developing state-wide gen. ed. expectations. The state has set up faculty committees to develop outcomes, but that work is evolving, and the expectations of the state are not clear. In addition, VU must develop a vetting process for general education courses, and clear assessment expectations must be a part of the vetting process. Both of these efforts are somewhat hamstrung by the lack of clear state expectations (which are supposed to include assessment reports on student success). VU has developed its own draft set of liberal education outcomes, but is still wrestling with where those will fit with the newly developing state expectations. While VU needs to make progress on general education assessment, VU wants to avoid a situation where courses are vetted twice (the second time, potentially, after the state expectations become more clear). VU would welcome feedback and suggestions on this issue.

R: The workload is daunting at times. It may be useful to set a specific timeline for some of these projects mentioned above. They do not all have to be done at once. The use of sub-groups could also be considered to work on parts of the major projects – breaking down the project much as the institution broke the implementation into pieces. As interest and commitment grow there is an opportunity to engage more people into the working groups which can help maintain momentum and relieve some of the fatigue of those who have been working on this since its inception. Some may appreciate a year or a semester off. A very important piece is celebrating success which was not mentioned. Providing recognition to those who have worked so hard is essential to maintain momentum as well as to demonstrate appreciation for their commitment to the project (Category 4: Valuing People). Assessment of general education is a challenge in most institutions. This is especially difficult here due to the newly developing state-wide general education expectations. Could some of the faculty be actively involved in the state-wide process? This might provide some direction for the institution as to the direction the state is moving. It will be important to establish some draft expectations and not to wait for the state. Rather than implement these right away, the focus could be on the other areas mentioned in this report as areas needing attention.