EVERYONE’S DOING IT. OR ARE THEY?
ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AT SMALL PRIVATE COLLEGES

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INTRODUCTION

• Student Affairs faces mounting pressure to provide proof of effectiveness.
  • Stakeholders
  • Accreditation agencies
  • Institutions (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

ASSessment…

• Is the primary method to prove effectiveness to external constituents (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996)
• Satisfies questions from accrediting agencies about program efficacy.
• Accreditation helps answer questions of accountability from stakeholders by showing effectiveness of institutions.
• Provides data for program evaluation and improvement.

INTRODUCTION

• Why perform assessment?
  • 1. Dwindling financial resources
  • 2. Student Affairs professional organizations called for “seamless” learning experience and ownership for education of students (Bresciai, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).
INTRODUCTION

• ACPA and NASPA engaged joint venture to produce *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (1997).
  • Provided clear and concise guidelines by suggesting seven components of good practice.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. Engage students in active learning.
2. Help students develop coherent values & ethical standards.
3. Setting and communicating high expectations for student learning.
5. Use resources effectively to achieve institutional missions & goals.
6. Forge education partnerships that advance student learning.
7. Build supportive and inclusive communities.

WHAT IS KNOWN?

• Very little is known about what student affairs programs are doing for assessment.
• One study examines three major research institutions with best practices (Green, Jones, and Aloï, 2008).
• Another study profiled four student affairs programs with best practices (Banta, Jones, and Black, 2009).
• Programs in each study had a wide variety of ways they performed assessment.

STUDY POPULATION

• Institutions with less than 3,000 undergraduates
• Two year and Four year
• For- and Non-profit
• Community, technical, and liberal arts colleges
• Chief Student Affairs Officer invited to respond
• N= 869
WHY THIS POPULATION?

• Tend to have fewer resources and personnel than larger institutions.
• Often look to practices at larger institutions to adapt to their programs.
• Differing characteristics may lead to creative solutions to assessment.

PURPOSE

• The purpose of this study was to examine how student affairs professionals at small private colleges assess and evaluate their programs in relation to the Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs (ACPA & NASPA, 1997).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• 1. How do student affairs professionals at small private colleges assess their programs?
• 2. How do student affairs professionals at small private colleges use assessment data for evaluation.
• 3. How do student affairs professionals at small private colleges rate their familiarity with the Principles of Good Practices for Student Affairs (ACPA & NASPA, 1997) and expertise at performing assessment.
• What challenges do student affairs professionals at small private colleges face to performing assessment.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

• Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs (1997)
• Hallmarks of Effective Outcomes Assessment (Banta, 2004)
RESPONSES

• 19.5% of those invited responded to the survey.

• A group of non-respondents was contacted to improve validity (Curtin, Presser, & Singer 2000; Keeter, Miller, Kohut, Groves, & Presser, 2000).

RESPONDENT/ NON-RESPONDENT

• No significant differences were found between the two groups based on two-/four-year status, institution type, for- or non-profit status.

• Non-respondent group rated their familiarity with Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs significantly lower than respondent group.

INSTRUMENT

• Likert-type using “none of the time” to “all of the time” on 18 questions in two sections.

• First section asked respondents to assess their familiarity with and their program’s assessment of the use of the Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs (1997).

• Respondents were also asked to rate their own expertise at performing assessment.

INSTRUMENT

• In the second section respondents were asked how they used assessment data, options included:
  - Strategic planning
  - Accreditation
  - Mission Achievement
  - Resource acquisition for division
  - Resource acquisition within division
  - Personnel evaluation
  - Program evaluation
  - External accountability
  - Program accountability (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996)
INSTRUMENT

- Third section was an open-ended section and asked respondents:
  - “What challenges does your institution face regarding assessment?”
  - Respondents were provided a space to write as much, or as little, as they wanted.

ANALYSIS

- Independent variables were institutional characteristics including:
  - Accrediting agency
  - Institution size (undergraduate enrollment)
  - Institution type (liberal arts, community or technical college)
  - Number of programs included within student affairs program
  - Number of staff members in student affairs program

- Dependent variables were items survey items from each section.

FINDINGS- RQ1

- No significant differences between institutional characteristics and respondents assessment of the seven Principles.

- Respondents indicated the assessed practices related to Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs “None of the time” and “hardly ever” at 24% and 14% respectively.

FINDINGS- RQ1

- 60% regularly assessed how they used resources to achieve institutional mission and goals and supportiveness and inclusiveness of campus environments.

- Educational partnerships to advance student learning and impact on active learning and student engagement were the least frequently assessed principles. 25% rarely, if ever, assessed these!
**FINDINGS-RQ1**

- Only 9% of respondents assessed their programs practice of principles regularly.
- 40% rarely, if ever, engaged any assessment of their programs practice of principles.

**FINDINGS-RQ2**

- Program size and use of data for planning and personnel evaluation were significantly different;
- Significant differences were also found between the accrediting agency a respondent belonged to and use of data for external data.
  - Data was used for accreditation and strategic planning most often at 80% and 70% of the time.

**FINDINGS-RQ3**

- Familiarity with the *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (1997) and expertise in assessing student learning outcomes.
  - 20.2% of respondents were “not at all” or “slightly” familiar with *Principles*.
  - Only 38.1% of respondents rated their expertise at performing assessment as “good” or “excellent”.
  - No significant differences between characteristics and familiarity or expertise.

**FINDINGS-RQ4**

- Challenges to assessment:
  - Lack of training/skills/knowledge
  - Lack of financial resources;
  - Lack of personnel;
  - Lack of prioritization by institution/department;
  - Lack of institutional/departmental coordination;
  - Lack of time;
  - Lack of expertise/knowledge as to how to use data;
  - Campus assessment efforts are too new;
  - Cultural resistance (lack of appreciation of value on campus)
Discussion

- Appears to be a disconnect between familiarity with literature (80%) and implementation of assessment, likely due to a lack of expertise to performing assessment (3% rated excellent).

- Those in this study were less likely to measure practices related to student learning than they were to measure practices related to accountability, despite recommendations from the literature.

- This could be indicative that student affairs programs are not providing student learning opportunities.

- However, in light of research on the topic (Hartley, 2001), it is more likely student affairs professionals struggle to operationalize recommendations from the literature related to assessment.

- Despite the literature recommending assessment be used for program improvement and to improve student learning, student affairs programs use it most often for accountability purposes (Schuh, Upcraft, & Associates, 2001; Spellings, 2006).

- However, if lack of time and resources to perform assessment are major challenges, it may stand to reason student affairs professionals prioritize assessment for the “must-haves” versus the “like-to-haves”.
**DISCUSSION**

- By their own words, student affairs professionals lack the knowledge, training and skills to implement assessment.
- More professional development, resources, institutional prioritization, and training in student affairs academic programs may need to be provided so that student affairs professionals can build the necessary skillset to conduct assessment.

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**LIMITATIONS**

- Narrow population
- Response rate (19.5%)
- Narrow assessment perspective
- Self-report survey

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**IMPLIEDICATIONS**

- Help is needed for student affairs professionals at small private colleges to build a skillset to operationalize recommendations from the literature.
- How are programmatic decisions being made if assessment data isn’t being collected/used?

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Replication of this study with small private institutions to affirm, or not affirm, findings of this study;
- Replication of study at medium and large private institutions;
- Replication of this study at differently sized public institutions;
- A qualitative version of this study to understand factors that affect student affairs programs student-learning outcomes assessment;
- A quasi-experimental study to see if an intervention can be employed that is effective at changing assessment practices.
References


