

CHAPTER 9: REPORTING AND USING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

This chapter discusses how assessment results can be reported and used by departments.

Topics Presented

- Reporting assessment results
- Primary and secondary uses of assessment results
- Assessment audiences
- Creating assessment reports
- Confidentiality in assessment results reporting

General Information

Assessment Results Reporting

Purpose of the Assessment

Why did we do the assessment? Was it to improve and/or evaluate existing programs, to report on programs within the department, or a combination of the two reasons? When the assessment focuses on program improvement, results reporting usually focuses on program strengths and weaknesses and participant needs. Results will be more focused on outcomes when the purpose of an assessment is reporting for accreditation or review.

Using Assessment Results

Primary Uses:

- Accreditation reports and reviews
- General education evaluations
- Curriculum review
- Requests to a curriculum committee

Secondary Uses:

- Recruiting
- Alumni newsletter
- Publications
- Career services
- Securing grants

Assessment Audience

It is necessary to determine who the audience is and what it wants to know before determining the content, style, and method of reporting assessment results.

Examples of audiences are:

- Accrediting bodies
- Federal agencies
- Commission for Higher Education
- High-level administration
- College curriculum committees
- General education committees
- Departmental planning committees
- Alumni
- Colleagues at other universities
- Students

Assessment Report Format

The choice of report format should be based on the material in the report and its audience. **Full reports** are useful to audiences interested in the details of an assessment. They can also serve as complete records of assessment activities.

Assessment summaries are used to highlight particular findings, to focus on specific issues, and to summarize assessment activities for audiences not inclined to read a full report. Results can also be used in assessment notes, brochures, or flyers to publicize an assessment project or finding or highlight a particular program. **Web reporting** provides easy access to a wide range of audiences, makes specific data available and interactive, and enables audiences to answer customized questions.

Assessment Report Components

- **Description of Activities**
 - What did we do?
 - Why did we do it?
 - How did we do it?
 - Who did we assess?
- **Description of Results**
 - What did we find?
- **Interpretation**
 - What do our findings mean?
- **Suggestions/Implications**
 - What should or could be done based upon results of the assessment?

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is extremely important in assessment result reporting. Who will have access to the results? Open reporting will probably be appropriate if an assessment is focused on a university-wide program and results are aggregated at the university level. Reporting to program directors only may be most appropriate if assessment is focused on improving a particular program. The assessment team must be concerned with participant confidentiality, also. Data should be aggregated to protect individuals and comments and open-ended survey responses revised to remove individual identifiers.

Frequently Asked Questions

How can we ensure that results of assessment activities are used?

Faculty, staff, and administrators who are involved in assessment planning will be more likely to use the results. Findings should be shared with department faculty members in a written report that could be used to generate discussions at faculty meetings or annual retreats. (What does the report tell you about your course or program? What possible changes are indicated? How could our department use these results to best advantage?) Additional reports or presentations can be prepared for different audiences, depending on their assessment needs.

In reporting results, do we report *actual data* or *interpretation of the data*?

This depends on the audience. Some constituents may request that the department report actual findings while others will prefer a summary that includes implications of assessment results.

Do we report everything?

The department will usually decide. It may find both expected and unexpected results to be useful. For example, an alumni survey may reveal that not only are graduates getting jobs, but the majority of graduates are securing jobs in one particular type of firm or company. This finding could be used to determine what job skills department graduates have that are making them so marketable with these companies. This information, while useful to the department, will probably not be of interest to accreditation teams or college curriculum committees.

How long should we keep assessment results?

It is advisable to keep assessment project results for at least 3 to 5 years (for ease in knowing what has been done before, for learning from past mistakes, or for doing longitudinal studies).

Departments find it useful to do longitudinal studies of assessment projects to determine trends or patterns ***over time***. Results of assessment activities may change with time along with the job market, the economy, technology, and even the department itself. Many assessment evaluations are on cycles and will necessitate the use of results from past years. (State commission or accreditation reviews may be every 5 to 10 years. Similarly, some departments do surveys annually, while others prefer to do them every 5 years.)

Topics Reviewed

- The purpose of the assessment, potential use of results, the audience and its needs, and the format are important to consider when reporting findings of an assessment.

- Assessment results are usually shared via a report that includes a description of assessment activities, a description and interpretation of results, and implications of the results.
- Confidentiality is extremely important when reporting results. Open reporting is appropriate when a university-wide program is assessed. More restricted reporting is appropriate for other assessments.
- Participant confidentiality is imperative. Open-ended survey questions and comments should be reviewed and individual identifiers removed.

Sources of Additional Information

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