BUILDING A CULTURE OF ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT ASSESSMENT: MANAGING NEW EXPECTATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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SESSION OVERVIEW

• Introduction to administrative unit assessment
• Context
• The SACSCOC administrative assessment rationale
• Example of an established process
• Role of the administrative assessment leader
• Culture and infrastructure
• Conclusion/question and answer
ABOUT ME AND MY WORK

• Assistant Director of Residential Life and Housing for Assessment, Virginia Commonwealth University

• Previously, Senior Assessment Coordinator in the Office of Academic Decision Support, Virginia Tech

• Coordinated the administrative unit assessment process

• Student Affairs background
WHO’S IN THE ROOM?
ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT ASSESSMENT

• Administrative unit assessment is the process by which administrative offices, including academic and student support areas, engage in and document cycles of continuous improvement.

• Engaging in this process enables administrative units to obtain data that can be used to inform the improvement of their processes and functions, as they relate to the institution’s mission and strategic plan.
ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT ASSESSMENT VS. ACADEMIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

• Administrative Unit Assessment
  • Focus is on administrative functions
  • AUOs (and sometimes SLOs)
  • Measures often consist of tracking numbers, counts, surveys
  • Targets and findings focused on percent increase/decrease, improvements in efficiency
  • Action plans are about changes that will be made to improve the unit

• Academic Program Assessment
  • Focus is on student learning
  • SLOs with some POs
  • Measures are often student artifacts, tests, oral presentations, e-portfolios, etc.
  • Targets and findings focused on percentage of students who can demonstrate the outcome
  • Action plans are about changes that will be made to improve student learning
WHY ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT ASSESSMENT IS IMPORTANT

- Help clarify/reinforce the mission of the unit
- Engage in documented cycles of continuous improvement
- Use evidence (not anecdotes) to improve unit efficiency and effectiveness
- Provide evidence of continuous improvement to unit stakeholders
- Inform students as to what they are expected to achieve, when applicable
- Meet SACSCOC accreditation standards
A LITTLE CONTEXT...

- Prior to 2016 Virginia Tech’s administrative unit assessment process was called Administrative Quality Improvement (AdQI)
  - Managed in WEAVE
  - Rationale was unclear
- An Assistant Director was hired in 2016 to overhaul and manage the process
  - The new process aligned with the academic assessment process
  - AD met with every VP/designee
  - Worked with VT SACSCOC liaison to solidify rationale
THE RATIONALE

• Virginia Tech: Large Research I institution with several layers in the organizational chart.
  • Challenge: not reasonable or manageable to require every administrative unit/department to submit annual assessment reports.

• Rationale for selecting units: Senior management areas and units that report directly to those areas.
  • Include the President’s office and any units reporting directly to the President
  • Include all VP division offices
  • Include all units that directly report to the VP’s (with a few exceptions)
  • Other units encouraged to participate, but are not required
SACSCOC STANDARDS

• At Virginia Tech, two sections of the standards are referenced in the administrative unit assessment process:
  • Section 7, Institutional Planning and Effectiveness
  • Section 8, Student Achievement

• We encouraged units to develop and measure 1-2 student learning outcomes each year if they had direct contact with students
  • Some units were already doing this
THE PROCESS

• Units typically complete their assessment plan before the beginning of the academic or fiscal year
• Data collection occurs throughout the year
• Ideally, the assessment plan is updated with findings, action plans, and other relevant information throughout the year
• At the end of the year, units should share findings, create/implement action plans, make improvements, update the assessment plan, and close the loop
• Assessment reports from the previous year are requested by A&E each fall semester (usually by September 1)
THE PROCESS

• Reports are received by A&E in the fall semester
• All reports are assigned a first reviewer and a second reviewer
• First reviewers type formative feedback into the assessment reports
• Second reviewers look at the report along with comments from the first reviewer, and offer any additional feedback they may have
• The first reviewers combine feedback and finalize the reports
• One final review is completed by the coordinator of the administrative assessment process
• Reports with A&E feedback are sent to units by the end of fall semester
HOW THE NEW PROCESS CAME TO BE

• New Assistant Director hired
• Modeled the assessment report and the review process after academic assessment
• Meetings, meetings, and MORE MEETINGS
• Formal call for submissions
• Evaluated the process after submission and review
WHAT DID WE LEARN?

• Reminders and follow-up needed
  • Individualized
• More meetings/education
  • One-on-one
  • By unit
• Thorough documentation needed
ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT ASSESSMENT LEADER AT VIRGINIA TECH

- Manage/maintain/improve the process
- Set clear expectations
- Educate unit leaders and are assessment contacts
- To the extent possible, remove barriers to building an assessment culture
WHAT OTHER ROLES DO YOU PLAY IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSESSMENT PROCESS?
SPEAKING OF BARRIERS...

• Satisfaction/comfort with the status quo ("if it ain’t broke...")
• Not able to see the relevance of assessment
• “Too busy”
• “We’ve tried this before…”
• Worried about needing to develop new technical skills
• Misconceptions of what assessment is and how the results will be used

(Linda Suskie, 2004)
REMOVE THE BARRIERS

• Empower faculty and staff working on assessment
• Make assessment relevant
• Be flexible
• Minimize the burden of assessment
• Start with successes
• Celebrate and reward assessment efforts
• Provide opportunities to learn about assessment
ASSESSMENT EDUCATION FOR ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

• Knowing is half the battle!
• This is about building capacity
  • Workshops
  • One-on-one meetings
  • Unit lunch-n-learn
  • Assessment camp/retreat/conference/institute
WHAT’S YOUR ASSESSMENT CULTURE AND HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE IT?
FINAL THOUGHTS

“There is no magic formula to creating a culture of assessment. What works on any campus depends on its culture, history, and values.”

(Linda Suskie, 2009, p. 78)
QUESTIONS?
REFERENCES

• *Administrative Unit Assessment Part I: The Plan* (2018). Presentation created for administrative unit assessment leaders at Virginia Tech.

• *Administrative Unit Assessment Part II: The Report* (2018). Presentation created for administrative unit assessment leaders at Virginia Tech.