

Assessment Experiences, Expertise, and Needs

Executive Summary

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Introduction

The Assessment Experiences, Expertise, and Needs survey was administered in January and February of 2014 to staff members in executive, professional, and Paraprofessional / Technical / Office Support job bands in the Division of Student Affairs. The primary purposes of the survey were to identify staff members' dispositions towards assessment, the current level of engagement in assessment activities, and staff development needs and interests. The survey was administered through email using the Campus Labs Baseline product. Response rate varied by job band – 89% for executive / administrative, 56% for Professional, and 39% for Paraprofessional / Technical / Office Support. However, not all respondents answered all questions. In some cases this was by design and in other cases this was the choice of the respondent. Full results are available in Appendix A and Appendix B.



Key Findings and Recommendations

Assessment Dispositions

- There was wide support for assessment, and assessment was regularly conducted and used for decision-making. In contrast, many qualitative comments found the use of results was token or not used as much as perhaps indicated in the quantitative items. This might suggest a feeling that assessment results are used but a desire to see even more use of results.
- There was a shared belief that assessment is everyone's responsibility and that the primary purpose of assessment is to determine the impact of programs and services on student learning.
- Not having enough time to do assessment was a concern for some staff members, in particular those in the executive band.
 - *Recommendation:* Increase involvement of professional (and possibly paraprofessional) staff members in order to alleviate the workload on executive staff and to increase direct involvement of other staff in the assessment process.

Level of Engagement

- There was engagement in assessment across all three job bands, however executive / administrative positions reported much higher levels of engagement than those in the Paraprofessional / Technical / Office Support positions.
- Many staff members are engaging in assessment but are unsure whether or not it is part of their official job duties and many others are engaging in assessment but do not have it as part of their official job duties. A smaller than expected number of professional staff reported assessment was part of their official job responsibilities (38%).
- Only 38% of staff who engaged in assessment activities felt "prepared" or "very prepared" to meet the assessment responsibilities of their current position.

- Across all items related to engagement in assessment, staff in the executive band were most engaged (often leading these activities), followed by professional staff, then paraprofessional / technical / office support. The average level of engagement reported by paraprofessional / technical / office support staff was very low – never greater than 2 – suggesting a very limited role in supporting assessment for staff in this job band. However, members of this job band report contributing to assessment, although it is not clear what form these contributions take. Qualitative responses indicate that the contributions for paraprofessional / technical / office support staff were generally small and specific. For example, sending out evaluation surveys to campus visitors.
 - *Recommendation:* Keep job descriptions up-to-date and include assessment in the job description if that is a part of that position's responsibilities. Also consider including or adding assessment as an official responsibility for a wider array of staff members to increase engagement. Give careful thought for how assessment responsibilities are delegated or assigned.
 - *Recommendation:* Encourage or require participation in professional development activities for those who have responsibilities for assessment.

Staff Development: Needs and Interests

- Across all job bands the highest level of interest for professional development in the area of assessment was for using assessment results for program and service improvement. This is strongly supported by qualitative response themes, especially among the professional and para-professional staff members. Members of these bands indicated a desire to see assessment results used to shape decisions and drive quality improvement.
- 60-90 minute training programs were the most popular choice for development approaches while a full-day workshop was the least popular. Online videos were surprisingly unpopular as was attending an assessment conference or workshop off-campus. Discussion with colleagues was selected by a substantial number of staff in the executive / administrative and professional band, although it did not receive as much interest from the paraprofessional / technical / office support staff.
 - *Recommendation:* Staff responsible for assessment efforts may wish to share clear, brief summaries of all departmental assessment efforts, including a section on changes or recommendations made based on the data collected. Furthermore, exec/admin staff may wish to have all staff review annual assessment reports prior to or following submission in the spirit of transparency and keeping staff members informed of assessment efforts and results.
 - *Recommendation:* Offer a variety of staff development opportunities, recognizing different levels of interest in any one particular approach. The 60-90 minute workshop still seems to be a good strategy as does workgroup meetings, while full-day workshops, attending off-campus workshops, and online videos may be less useful strategies.
 - *Recommendation:* Clearly communicate the name of the identified Assessment Coordinator in each department as someone who can discuss assessment with colleagues in the department and clarify this as one of the roles or responsibilities of

an Assessment Coordinator. As a result, Assessment Coordinators are an important target group for staff development opportunities.

Future Plans: Staff Development

- Continue the Student Affairs Assessment Academy with a new group of participants beginning in January of 2015. Eliminate the full-day kick-off with two shorter events.
- Increased focus in staff development on using assessment results for program and service improvement.
- 60-90 minute training programs should receive the most emphasis for staff development resources for assessment. Instead of one-shot events, develop a coherent series of events that link together and find ways to recognize those individuals who complete the series.
- Work with the para-professional team to create opportunities for staff development for staff in this job band.
- Create short, “just-in-time” modules that can be made available for staff needing short introductions to assessment or training when asked to participate in an assessment project.

Future Plans: Job Descriptions

- Encourage directors to update job descriptions when assessment is part of the official job responsibilities for employees.
- Encourage directors to consider including or adding assessment as an official responsibility to a wider array of staff members to increase engagement in assessment.
- Develop a Division-wide assessment “support group” where those who have responsibility for assessment in the Division can share strategies, good approaches, and challenges, and collaborate on projects.

Future Plans: Using and Sharing Assessment Results

- Implement a campaign during the next academic year to share what feedback the division has been receiving as well as how that feedback has informed improvements in the division.

Appendix A: Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Assessment Responsibilities

Please indicate the level of responsibility for assessment activities required in your position.	Executive / Administrative (n = 17)		Professional (n = 55)		Paraprofessional / Tech / Office (n = 35)	
	n	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent
I do not engage in assessment activities	2	12%	10	18%	18	51%
I engage in assessment activities, but I am unsure if it is a part of my official job duties	0	0	11	20%	11	31%
I engage in assessment activities, but it is not part of my official job duties	1	6%	13	24%	2	6%
Assessment responsibilities are part of my official job duties	14	82%	21	38%	4	11%

Table 2. Preparation for Assessment

To what extent are you prepared to meet the assessment responsibilities of your current position?	Executive / Administrative (n = 15)		Professional (n = 37)		Paraprofessional / Tech / Office (n = 11)	
	n	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent
Very unprepared	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unprepared	0	0	2	5%	2	18%
Somewhat unprepared	1	7%	4	11%	1	9%
Somewhat prepared	7	47%	18	49%	4	36%
Prepared	4	27%	12	32%	3	27%
Very prepared	3	20%	1	3%	1	9%

Table 3. Engagement in Assessment Activities

1 = I do not participate in this activity 2 = I participate in this activity with assistance or direction 3 = I plan or assist others with this activity 4 = I lead efforts related to this activity	Executive / Administrative (n = 15)		Professional (n = 37)		Paraprofessional / Tech / Office (n = 11)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Planning assessment at the program level	3.53	.64	2.51	.99	1.45	.52
Planning assessment at the office / department level	3.60	.51	2.35	.89	1.45	.52
Considering guidelines for ethical assessment (i.e., IRB guidelines, sensitivity of data, etc.)	3.33	.82	1.97	.96	1.36	.51
Writing program learning outcomes	3.40	.63	2.49	1.01	1.27	.47
Aligning program and learning outcomes with division and institutional goals and values	3.67	.62	2.35	.98	1.36	.51
Choosing appropriate data collection methods (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, rubrics)	3.33	.62	2.54	.84	1.64	.67
Designing and implementing appropriate data collection methods	3.07	.88	2.43	.90	1.64	.67
Designing and implementing fidelity studies (i.e., evaluating the extent to which a program is implemented as it was planned)	2.67	1.13	1.81	1.02	1.27	.47
Analyzing quantitative and / or qualitative data	3.07	.88	2.30	.94	1.55	.69
Using assessment results for program / service improvement	3.80	.41	2.76	.98	1.64	.67
Communicating assessment results to internal stakeholders (e.g., reports, meetings with stakeholders, marketing materials)	3.60	.63	2.19	1.08	1.18	.41
Communicating assessment results to external stakeholders (e.g., press releases, publishing reports or articles, conferences)	3.13	1.19	1.65	.92	1.18	.41
Effectively using external assessment instruments (e.g., NSSE, CIRP, and other external instruments)	2.33	1.11	1.51	.93	1.00	0
Using Campus Labs Products: Baseline (formerly Student Voice) and / or Compliance Assist	3.07	.70	2.16	1.09	1.55	.82
Evaluating and using appropriate sources of evidence from professional literature (e.g., journal articles, reports)	3.20	.78	1.84	.93	1.09	.30

Table 4. Disposition towards Assessment

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Somewhat disagree 4 = Somewhat agree 5 = Agree 6 = Strongly agree	Executive /		Professional		Paraprofessional /	
	Administrative		(n = 35)		Tech / Office	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Assessment efforts are supported in my program / department	5.47	.64	5.11	1.18	4.91	.94
Assessment is regularly conducted in my program / department	5.00	.85	4.74	1.36	4.55	.93
Assessment results are used for decision-making in my program / department	5.27	.70	4.51	1.44	4.55	.93
I contribute to assessment activities in my program / department	5.53	.52	5.03	.89	4.18	1.25
I do not have time to do assessment	3.33	1.72	2.97	1.27	2.64	1.29
I incorporate assessment directly into my work	4.87	.64	4.26	.85	4.00	1.10
Assessment is everyone's responsibility	5.27	.88	4.83	.95	4.73	1.10
The primary purpose of assessment is to justify requests for resources	3.27	1.22	3.46	1.29	3.27	1.19
The primary purpose of assessment is to satisfy division and university requirements (e.g., assessment reporting, accreditation)	3.53	1.23	3.74	1.38	3.73	1.27
The primary purpose of assessment is to determine the impact of programs and services on student learning	5.47	.74	5.40	.70	4.82	.75

Table 5. Interest in Professional Development Topics

1 = Not at all interested 2 = Slightly interested 3 = Moderately interested 4 = Very interested	Executive /		Professional		Paraprofessional /	
	Administrative		(n = 41)		Tech / Office	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Assessment basics (i.e., overview of purpose, terms, methods, etc.)	2.76	.97	2.41	.87	2.43	.79
Effective assessment planning	3.59	.51	2.78	.91	2.35	.89
Understanding guidelines for ethical assessment	2.88	.99	2.61	.95	2.57	.79
Writing learning and program outcomes	3.35	.79	2.66	1.02	2.09	.85
Aligning program and learning outcomes with division and institutional goals and values	3.53	.72	2.90	.94	2.43	.90
Choosing appropriate data collection methods (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, rubrics)	3.24	.66	2.73	.90	2.17	.78
Designing and implementing data collection methods	3.35	.70	2.73	.95	2.00	.91
Designing and implementing fidelity studies (i.e., evaluating the extent to which a program is implemented as it was planned)	2.82	.81	2.44	.90	2.00	.91
Analyzing quantitative and / or qualitative data	3.35	.86	2.95	.92	1.96	.88
Using assessment results for program and service improvement	3.76	.44	3.10	.80	2.48	.95
Communicating assessment results to internal stakeholders	3.71	.59	2.85	.88	2.09	.79
Communicating assessment results to external stakeholders	3.53	.72	2.68	.99	2.04	.83
Evaluating and using appropriate sources of evidence from professional literature	3.24	.56	2.63	.99	2.04	.88
Using Campus Labs Products: Baseline (formerly Student Voice) and / or Compliance Assist	3.24	.66	2.66	.97	2.17	.89
Effectively using external assessment instruments	3.18	.64	2.61	1.00	2.00	.85

Table 6. Preferred Staff Development Approaches

Percent selected (check all that apply)	Executive / Administrative (n = 17)	Professional (n = 41)	Paraprofessional / Tech / Office (n = 23)
	Percent	Percent	Percent
60-90 minute training program	76%	73%	57%
Individual consultation	76%	38%	9%
Workgroup meetings	29%	48%	35%
Online videos	18%	35%	26%
Webinar	35%	30%	35%
Online templates and examples	35%	35%	22%
½ day workshop	24%	35%	39%
Full day workshop	0	5%	13%
Professional literature (journal articles, etc.)	47%	25%	13%
Attending an assessment conference or workshop off-campus	6%	30%	26%
Discussion with colleagues	41%	50%	26%

APPENDIX B: Qualitative Response Themes

Executive/Administrative Bands

What role does assessment currently play in your work?

- **Necessary:** whether interpreted positively or negatively, respondents expressed the belief that assessment is a necessary element of their work. It was seen as critical to their exec/admin role and essential to enhance the effectiveness of programs and services.
- **Decision-making:** assessment is used to make decisions about programs, products, and services. It is viewed as an essential part of the decision-making process at this level.

What role do you wish assessment could play in your work?

- **More time:** several respondents indicated a wish to have more time to conduct meaningful assessment and use the results.
- **Increased awareness:** desire for more awareness of the importance of assessment in Student Affairs and how assessment results impact programs and services. Ideally, this would result in increased awareness of the impact of S.A. programs and increased allocation of resources/support to effective programs.

Professional Bands

What role does assessment currently play in your work?

- **Specific focus:** generally, respondents indicated that assessment played a smaller role or had a specific focus at this level. This was observed regardless of the level of responsibility for assessment indicated by the respondent (though respondents with assessment as part of their official job duties indicated a slightly more holistic view of the role of assessment in their work)
- **Decision-making:** as with the exec/admin band, professional band respondents indicated that assessment plays a critical role in determining the impact of programs and services and making decisions.
- **DRIP (Data-Rich-Information-Poor) Syndrome:** respondents across responsibility levels indicated there was a lack of “follow-through” regarding use of the data that is collected. Specifically, data was collected but not analyzed or used.

What role do you wish assessment could play in your work?

- **Moving beyond “token” assessment:** Assessment was described using the words “token”, “busy work” and “special project.” Respondents expressed a need for increased support and comfort with the planning and analysis portions of assessment, along with a need for assessment efforts to become part of the “regular work” of all staff members (instead of being the purview of only a few).
- **Using results:** professional band members across assessment responsibility levels indicated a desire to see assessment results used to shape decisions and drive quality improvement.

Para-Professional/Technical Bands

What role does assessment currently play in your work?

- **Specific tasks:** generally, respondents indicated that their involvement in assessment was limited to that of a very specific task (e.g., send a specific assessment tool out on a regular basis) or assessment plays a minimal role in their current work.

What role do you wish assessment could play in your work?

- **Increased data usage:** para-professional/technical band respondents indicated a desire to see assessment data used more regularly for decision-making and to “make a difference.”