Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on Assessment
June 25, 2010

Introduction

The President created the Advisory Committee on Assessment (ACA) at the request of Karen Forbes, Director of Counseling Services, and Mary Roth, Associate Provost for Academic Operations. Their request was made in response to suggestions made by the Middle States evaluation team in spring 2009. The committee is charged to serve as a centralized and formal mechanism through which each division of the College can collect and share its contributions to the achievement of the learning goals for students as stated in the College's mission. Specifically, the committee is charged to do the following:

- Identify connections between division activities and the College's mission concerning student learning;
- Create a common assessment vocabulary to facilitate communication about student learning across divisions and to the general public;
- Document existing campus assessment programs to avoid redundancies and identify gaps;
- Make recommendations about which college-wide assessment instruments should be used;
- Connect budget priorities to learning outcomes;
- Document progress on assessment for accreditation purposes;
- Advise the president and his cabinet on campus-wide assessment issues.

Membership on the committee includes the following:

- the Associate Provost
- the Chair of the Faculty Assessment Committee
- the Chair of the Student Learning and Assessment Committee (SLAC)
- the Director and Assistant Director of Institutional Research
- the Director of Career Services or her designee
- the Director of Alumni Affairs or her designee
- the Vice-President for Communications or his designee
- the Vice-President for Business Affairs or his designee
- a representative from the student body

The committee met four times during 2009-10. This report contains a description of the activities of the committee and a summary of the committee's recommendations.

Review of Committee Activities

The ACA's activities for 2009-10 focused on three areas: initial development of an assessment inventory, mapping of major assessment activities to the College's mission statement, and a review of the NSSE, CIRP, and CSS surveys (NSSE –

National Survey of Student Engagement, CIRP – Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey, and CSS – College Senior Survey).

Assessment Inventory

The ACA began development of a list of assessment activities done annually or bi-annually involving large numbers of single or multiple constituencies of the College. These surveys are summarized in Table 1.   This initial listing of assessment activities led to committee discussions concerning issues of survey fatigue, the need to educate our community about the best uses for surveys, and the possible benefits of centralized coordination of College surveys.

Mapping of Assessment Activities to the College's Mission

Table 1 also presents a summary of the committee's mapping of assessment activities to the College's mission statement. The committee did this exercise to see if as a College we were doing assessment that provided information concerning the student learning outcomes articulated in the mission.

Based on the mapping, the committee noted that there appear to be gaps between the College's mission and current assessment activities. Specifically, the mission statement speaks of the importance of creative expression and yet there is no current assessment activity that captures this aspect of student learning. In addition, the committee agreed that assessment being conducted in the areas of vocational preparation and alumni satisfaction indicate that the College values these activities but notes that these areas do not find expression in the College's mission.

Review of NSSE, CIRP, and CSS Surveys

The NSSE, CIRP, and CSS surveys are national surveys of students that the College has participated in for multiple years. These surveys include questions that are likely to predict student engagement in their education (CIRP), reflect the experience of first year students (NSSE), and reflect the experiences of seniors (CSS and NSSE).   The committee reviewed the questions asked in each survey and samples of the survey results.

Of particular interest to the committee was the issue of whether we should continue to do all of these surveys and whether there was significant overlap between the NSSE and CSS surveys. The Office of Institutional Research and Karen Forbes had done a comparison of the NSSE and College Student Survey (Senior Survey) and had noted that although there is significant overlap between the items included on the two surveys, each has areas that are not covered on the other. The NSSE emphasizes learning that happens with faculty both in and out of the classroom and includes questions about the level of academic challenge and the degree to which students engaged in a variety of academic activities (e.g., doing problem sets, writing papers of different lengths, and reading). The CSS includes more questions about campus

climate and diversity and asks students in more detail about their activities, values, career aspirations, and views on current political and social issues. The CSS also asks students to rate specific administrative and student affairs departments in addition to feedback about faculty interactions The CSS is a better choice if we want to assess the student experience more broadly but the NSSE is preferable if we care more about specific classroom experiences.

Recommendations

The ACA developed recommendations in five areas: the committee name and membership, areas where assessment is less developed and assessment work should be facilitated, areas where we have assessment data that is not being used to its greatest advantage, and activities for the committee to focus on during 2010-11.

Committee Name and Membership

The Committee as originally proposed was named the College-Wide Assessment Committee. This name led to an acronym that was seen be some to be problematic (CWAC). Unless there is reason to modify the name further, the Committee has adopted the Advisory Committee on Assessment as its new name.

Current membership on the Committee was viewed to be appropriate and members expressed appreciation for being able to participate in discussions in this format. It was agreed however that the committee membership should be increased to include representation from Human Resources and Facilities/Planning – key areas of campus that were overlooked in the original membership.

Areas Where Assessment Should be Facilitated

Assessment in all areas of campus is still developing and would benefit from continued campus-wide and division-specific support.   However, it was noted that in the area of student government and student organizations assessment is particularly undeveloped. It is therefore recommended that during 2010-11 the College facilitate adoption of basic assessment approaches in student organizations.[1]

The committee discussed areas where campus-wide initiatives might be beneficial. It was agreed that continuing the committee and its discussions helped to support assessment efforts. Additionally, it was agreed that the campus would benefit from a common vocabulary for assessment and clarity concerning the difference between

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[1] Copies of the ACPA and NACA publication Assessing and Improving Student Organizations: A Guide for Students have been purchased for the co-chairs of ACA and for the student member. They will review this reference during summer 2010 for potential use by student groups in 2010-11.

assessment and evaluation – a factor in some areas of resistance to assessment efforts.

Finally, the committee noted the issue of lack of assessment of student learning in the area of creative expression but it was unclear to the committee what action steps should be taken to address this gap between current assessment activities and the College's mission statement.

Using Existing Data to Greatest Advantage

The committee recognizes that there are a number of assessment activities occurring on campus but that not all the data that are collected are used. Specifically, the NSSE, CIRP, and CSS databases contain data about student perceptions about their own learning and about the services and facilities available on campus. Easy access to the data and additional training about ways to use this information may benefit efforts in all divisions of the College.

The committee did agree that the benefits of NSSE, CIRP, and CSS were significant and that all three surveys should be continued but should be timed so that no more than one of the three surveys is conducted in any given year and so that longitudinal data can be obtained.

Recommendations for Committee Activities during 2010-11

Based on the discussions the committee held during 2009-10 and on the recommendations presented above, the committee would like to pursue the following activities during 2010-11.

- Continue to meet and share information concerning assessment across the College
- Discuss how to create a College-wide culture that changes how people think about how they measure the effectiveness of programs and services and promotes clear discussions about the questions that need to be answered prior to deciding on a particular measure.
- Develop recommendations related to reducing survey fatigue
- Facilitate opportunities for colleagues to collaborate when using outside consultants or resources (e.g., webinars, on-line learning opportunities)
- Develop a webpage that would provide assessment information to all constituencies.   Analytics would be included on the web page to help assess the effectiveness of this method of communication. Information on the web page would include (but not be limited to) the following:
    - Inventory of assessment activities
    - Definition of terms
    - Links to descriptions of the data the College has and information on how to request access to the data

- Links to best practices in assessment

Respectfully Submitted by

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Table 1. Large-Constituency Surveys and Mapping of Surveys to College's Mission

Division/Area	Survey	In an environment that fosters the free exchange of ideas,	Lafayette College seeks to nurture the inquiring mind	and to integrate intellectual, social, and personal growth.	The College strives to develop students' skills of critical thinking, verbal communication, and quantitative reasoning	and their capacity for creative endeavor;	it encourages students to examine the traditions of their own culture and those of others,	to develop systems of values that include an understanding of personal, social, and professional responsibility,	and to regard education as an indispensable, life-long process.
Academic									
	NSSE	X	X	X	X		X	X	
	Climate	X							
	COACHE	X	X	X					
	Library/ITS				X				
Career Services									
	Placement report								
	Externship program (students and hosts)							X	
	Internships				X				
	Alumni sponsored internships (students and hosts)				X				
	Universum Survey								
	NACE Student Survey								
	Intern Bridge Survey								
Student Life									
	Recreation Services – customer survey			x					x
	Residence Life – EBI Resident Survey			X	x		x	x	
	Residence Life – Move-in Survey			X				x	
	Counseling Center – Lafayette Alcohol and Drug Survey			X				x	
	Counseling Center – enter for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health			X				x	
	CIRP – Freshman Survey		X	X	x	x	x	x	
	CIRP – Senior Survey		X	X	x	x	x	x	