Seven Approaches to Assessment

The following seven approaches to assessment are from: M. Lee Upcraft and John H. Schuh. <u>Assessment in Student Affairs</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996.

1) Tracking

One component of assessment is *keeping track of who uses our student services, programs and facilities*. This can include the tracking of users by gender, race, ethnicity, age, academic major, and other important variables.

Most offices have some form of tracking but the challenge is to make meaning of the data scollected and how it provides insight into both users and non-users of our programs & services. It also provides a baseline for establishing a benchmark, and for examining clientele trends throughout time.

Sheer numbers will not tell a full story, but "other components of assessment are based on the assumption that we know who uses our services, programs, and facilities."

2) Needs Assessment

The second component is *assessing student and other clientele needs.* One difficulty is distinguishing students' needs from their wants. However, needs assessment can help us to:

- Identify the services, programs, and facilities students and other clientele need, based on student and staff perceptions, institutional expectations, and national research on student learning and engagement.
- Explain to students why certain experiences are required of them.
- Align resources with program and service offerings.

3) Satisfaction Assessment

The third component is *assessing student and other clientele satisfaction with our services, programs, and services, and that those experiences are consistent with the goals of the institution.* Satisfaction assessment seeks to determine: of those persons who use our services, programs and facilities, what is their level of satisfaction? Through assessment of satisfaction, we also seek to identify strengths and weaknesses of our programs, services, and facilities.

4) Student Cultures and Campus Environment Assessment

A fourth approach is to look at the *collective perceptions of a campus. It is important to understand student cultures - where they conduct their day-to-day lives*. Students aren't all peas-in-a-pod; each student lives in his/her own cultural environment. Likewise, all students do not have the same interests, friends and classes.

Assessing student cultures and campus environments would seek to answer questions such as:
Who are our students? Where do they come from? What do they want from their university experience? What does the institution expect from its students? How are students socialized into the cultures of MSU? What subcultures exist?

5) Outcomes

A fifth component is *assessing outcomes.* For those who use our services, programs and facilities, is there an effect on their academic success, learning or development - particularly when compared to those non-users? Not all outcomes important to student services and programs are learning outcomes. There may be other important programmatic outcomes, such as the delivery of services in a timely and efficient manner.

Outcome assessment is the most valid way to demonstrate the effectiveness of student services; however, it is also the most difficult, complex, and misunderstood of all assessment methodologies.

6) Comparable Institutional Assessment, or Benchmarking

How does the quality of our services, programs and facilities *compare with like institutions*? The key is to compare ourselves to like institutions that have good assessment programs and collect good data. When conducted properly, a benchmarking study can help to 1) justify existence, (2) improve quality, (3) demonstrate affordability, (4) develop strategic plans, (5) formulate policy, and (6) improve decision making.

7) Measuring Effectiveness

A seventh component is *assessing effectiveness - through reference to national or professional standards and/or through measuring cost effectiveness*. How do our services, programs, and facilities compare to accepted national standards, such as those standards developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) for Student Services/Development Programs, various national and regional accrediting agencies, and professional organizations. Are the benefits students derive from what we offer worth the cost, and how do we know that?