

Cultures of Assessment Handout

Definition of culture

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology_of_culture

Sociologically, it refers to the ways of thinking, the ways of acting, and the material objects that together shapes people's way of life.

Elements of culture include

- Symbols and language
- Values and beliefs
- Norms and values
- Behaviors and actions
- Artifacts and objects

Definition of Culture of Assessment

A culture of assessment is a set of pervasive actions and behaviors by staff across an organization (e.g., unit, division, etc.) that focus on the collection, analysis, and use of data to make decisions regarding the accountability and improvement of programs and services. (Henning, 2014, in press).

A culture of evidence refers to a commitment among student affairs professionals to use hard data to show how the programs they offer, the processes they implement, and the services they provide are effective and contribute significantly to an institutions ability to reach its stated goals and fulfill it's mission (Culp & Dungy, 2012, p. 5).

Characteristics

Schuh

1. Recognition that assessment is a commitment of accountability to our stakeholders but also a commitment to continuous improvement.
2. A commitment to student affairs practice that we called positive restlessness and a commitment to continuous innovation.
3. Institutions with a culture of assessment are self-critical.
4. There is data-driven decision making.
5. Assessment needs to be conducted across the institution.
6. Multiple forms of assessment contribute to a culture of assessment.
7. Learning outcomes need to be identified and measured.
8. While someone needs to be in charge, all student affairs staff members should pitch in when it comes to assessment.
9. Results are communicated and acted upon.
10. Discretionary resources are used to seed assessment projects.
11. Assessment findings are rewarded with resources.
12. Formal events are used to celebrate and discuss assessment results

The 3x5 Plan For Making Student Affairs Assessment Work

3 Domains x 5 Components per domain

Foundation for assessment

1. **Mission centered** – all assessment should be aligned with divisional mission
2. **Goal grounded** – goals should be the driving force for assessment
3. **Outcome directed** – specific outcomes provide a specific roadmap for achievement of goals
4. **Culture specific** – assessment activities should be consistent with the culture of the institution and division
5. **Literature based** – assessment activities should be rooted in research and theory

Implementation of assessment

1. **Combine accountability with continuous improvement** – purposes of assessment should be both accountability and improvement
2. **Embedded** – assessment activities should be embedded in programs and services rather than an afterthought or “add-on” process
3. **Collaborative** – assessment activities should be collaborative processes between departments and individuals, they should not be the responsibility of just one or a few people
4. **Transparent** – assessment results and processes should be shared with stakeholders
5. **Ongoing and never ending** – assessment is cyclical and continuous, not one-time activities

Support for assessment

1. **Vocal and unyielding leadership** – divisional leadership must continually tout the value and need for assessment and not bow to pressure when staff resist
2. **Championed across the division** – there should be a champion to continually rally staff to engage in assessment
3. **Strong Infrastructure** – process and practices must scaffold assessment activities
4. **Continuous capacity building** – staff need to develop, hone, and maintain the skills and knowledge to perform assessment
5. **Robust resources** – A variety of resources are need to support assessment activities

References

Culp, M. M. (2012). Starting the culture of evidence journey. In Culp & Dungy (Eds), *Building a Culture of Evidence in Student Affairs: A Guide for Leaders and Practitioners*. Washington, D. C.: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Schuh, J. (2013). Developing a culture of assessment in student affairs. In, Schuh, J. (Ed.), *New Directions in Student Services 2013*(142), pp. 89-98.

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