



WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

*STUDENT AFFAIRS
ASSESSMENT & RESEARCH*

**PROGRAM REVIEW 2013
SITE TEAM REPORT**



Division Leader: Dr. Jan Winniford, Vice President for Student Affairs

Unit Leader: Dr. Brett Perozzi, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs

Department Leader: Ms. Jessica Oyler, Director, Assessment & Research

Site Review Team:

Dr. Erin Bentrim - Director, Assessment & Planning, Old Dominion University

Dr. Gail Niklason - Director, Institutional Effectiveness, Weber State University

Ms. Ruth Stubbs - Director, Education Access & Outreach, Weber State University

Site Visit Dates:

October 10-11, 2013

INTRODUCTION

As tuition and fees continue to escalate, students, parents, and legislators are requesting evidence that students are learning what they should be learning. As consumers of a “product”, external constituents are demanding proof of a return on their investment. Divisions of Student Affairs are not exempt from these calls for accountability. Yet, there is a dangerous misconception on campuses that evidence-based outcomes generally do not apply to student affairs educators. However, external pressures related to accountability do have great bearing on student affairs departments. In addition, regional accrediting agencies require evidence of quality learning as an overall component of institutional effectiveness.

Internal pressures to demonstrate effectiveness exist as well. Competition for program dollars, questions of quality and service, and an impetus for improvement emphasize the necessity of reflecting on and understanding of student learning. Obviously, declining resources and increased competition affect all facets of academia and the co-curricular is no exception. Budgetary constraints and mandates for program enhancement affect all constituents in the university community.

In order for student affairs educators to be competitive for scarce resources, they must be able to provide empirical evidence of positive impact on student learning and development. In other words, it is necessary to have a sound rationale for “proving departmental worth”. This type of “results-based budgeting” approach is becoming more and more common on campuses. Assessment is a tool that evolves continuously and appropriately managing and directing such a fluid process can be time-consuming and challenging. Efficient and multi-pronged approaches like program reviews are essential. Program reviews are multi-purpose in that they provide evidence of effectiveness, define improvement possibilities, and justify management of resources. Results can clarify the best approaches to enhancing student learning and development while simultaneously satisfying the call for increased ownership and responsibility of program outcomes.

The Division of Student Affairs at Weber State University recognizes the merits and importance of the program review. This is apparent in the design of the process, the support of the division leadership, and from the discussion with staff who have undergone this process. The Assessment and Research office has carefully designed and supported each unit in their review efforts.

The Assessment and Research office at WSU has a history of gathering data since the mid-1990s. However, it was not until 2006 that a serious effort to be intentional about assessment occurred. A Student Learning Outcomes Task Force was created and purposeful examination of the impact of programs and services on students was undertaken. In 2008, a full-time assessment coordinator was hired. The program review process was initiated at that time along with other more advanced methods of assessment and research. The review team applauds the obvious understanding and support from the leadership that student affairs educators must be intentional in their efforts to provide empirically sound evidence of their impact on student learning outcomes and the worth of programs and services

This report has been compiled from interviews with multiple stakeholders. In addition, the site team review handbook provided by Weber State, the 8th edition of the *Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education*, and the Assessment & Research website were all used as additional resources.



Weber State University Mission Statement

Weber State University provides associate, baccalaureate and master degree programs in liberal arts, sciences, technical and professional fields. Encouraging freedom of expression and valuing diversity, the university provides excellent educational experiences for students through extensive personal contact among faculty, staff and students in and out of the classroom. Through academic programs, research, artistic expression, public service and community based learning, the university serves as an educational, cultural and economic leader for the region.

Student Affairs Mission Statement

The Division of Student Affairs promotes student learning, well being and success through comprehensive services and programs provided in an inclusive environment. Student Affairs serves the needs of a diverse student population by offering educational experiences, leadership opportunities, and academic support which advances the social, intellectual, cultural, and civic development of students.

Student Affairs Assessment and Research

Mission Statement

The Weber State University Research and Assessment Department promotes culture of assessment by consulting with departments, units, and organizations within the division of Student Affairs. Through consulting, the department serves to encourage data based decision making while guiding and informing program evaluation and assessment of student learning and development.

Unit Mission, Goals, and Outcomes

The unit has a mission and overarching goals/outcomes statements which are consistent with and which support the University and Division mission statements and goals.

The unit does have a mission and goals that reflect the purpose of the work in the office. It speaks to the goals of the office and provides a clear description of the services provided.

Recommendation 1

Create a clear and intentional linkage to the division mission statement. It is somewhat implicit, but it could be more aligned to specifically portray how the office supports the university mission and the division mission. Benchmarking mission statements of similar offices in the field is suggested.

Recommendation 2

Add goals related to helping units explore how to collect and use data in more meaningful ways as well as a plan for incorporating a stronger research function within the office.

Programs and Services

The unit provides a set of core programs/services that are central to and consistent with the unit's mission and goals. These programs/services are responsive to the needs of the unit's constituents, are cost effective and, when appropriate, are supported by other units or agencies both within and outside the University.

The unit has six primary functions that have served the office well over the past few years. As the program grows and becomes more advanced in nature, these may need to be revisited. The assessment staff is very responsive to the needs of the staff constituents when they request assistance. All felt overwhelming supported and expressed that they were provided services in ways that were meaningful and in “non-assessment” language. Although they were very positive, it seemed evident to the committee that there is a lack of ownership of the process. (The section on **Leadership and Staffing** addresses this issue more thoroughly).

One concern that was expressed is that assessment seems to happen in silos rather than a comprehensive process across the division. Staff didn't seem to

know what others were doing and how they all fit into the division to accomplish the mission. They are very much interested in seeing how data and assessment ties them together. Several did share a few stories of how they used the results internally and even had an interest in more in-depth analyses using inferential statistics. The fact that they expressed there was a lack of communication can actually be viewed in a positive fashion since they are interested in learning more about the process. They understand the culture is important and want to know why and how they can improve.

The charge of this program review is not to provide commentary on strategic planning, yet assessment and research is naturally intertwined. Part of the lack of ownership in the assessment process and program is because several units are not represented in the division's plan. The committee's philosophy is that if a unit cannot find themselves in the division mission or goals, then the plan is flawed or the unit is not relevant to the division and/or university since there is no alignment to show a purposeful impact on student success. As a result, the staff feel like their assessment efforts may not matter.

Overall, it seems like the units create goals and plans in isolation at a programmatic level. There is no clear linkage between a program, the mission of the department or the division or even why they have certain programs. The connection between baseline, annual reports, goals, 6-column models, and assessment were not evident in conversations.

Recommendation 1

The division needs time to work as a team and not in silos. The assessment and research office is encouraged to provide guidance and feedback in a group setting with less of a 1:1 approach so staff can understand the larger picture and support each other as the assessment program matures. Holding an "open house" where staff can drop-in to ask questions on projects or other things encourages accountability from the staff as well as an opportunity to hear from others about similar questions and issues.

Recommendation 2

Since the staff is struggling with "getting the big picture" creating diagrams or other visual tools showing the relationships and linkages would be warranted. In addition, the committee recommends creating an assessment plan and an assessment calendar (for the division as well as university-wide). We did not see evidence of an intentional or thematic assessment process in place to give structure. For example, mapping student learning outcomes in accordance with a specific division goals(s) each year makes assessment more manageable and meaningful. Each year, units could focus on assessing

programs and services in 1-3 learning domains. In other words, encourage staff to assess with relevance and intentionality.

Recommendation 3

Due to some challenges on campus related to partner offices, the director often willingly took on additional roles and responsibilities outside of the division of Student Affairs. Directors were sometimes hesitant to ask for assistance due to the perceived campus workload. The committee recommends that outside responsibilities be turned back over to the appropriate partner offices since it appears issues have been resolved. The committee also suggests utilizing assessment staff (delegation is key) so they have a more sufficient workload and an understanding of the role their job plays in the organization.

Leadership and Staffing

The unit has a sufficient number of well qualified employees (professional, support, student) to effectively provide the core programs/services offered by the unit. Employees have clear and current job responsibilities. Employees are oriented to their roles, receive appropriate leadership and supervision, are provided with ongoing professional development opportunities, and are regularly evaluated.

It was obvious to the team throughout the two-day visit that the Director of Assessment & Research is a great strength to the program, is enthusiastic, and knowledgeable about her job. She is engaged in the field at a national level and in professional development activities that allow her to stay current on research, theories, and practices that affect her responsibilities. There has been a visible growth toward a culture of assessment in the division due to her guidance and leadership. The director is qualified to manage assessment activities and timelines, has a clear understanding of technology, and promotes a positive environment that allows for student learning and program improvement.

Due to the growth and strength of the program over the last five years, it became evident to the committee that it is necessary for the assessment and research program to operate at a more “advanced” level to continue to strengthen the culture of assessment to a culture of evidence in the division. One concern was the sporadic “ownership” and comprehension of why staff members need to assess. While a few people understood the purpose of assessment and the meaningful impact, many others seemed to think they did it because the director told them to do it. Rather than a true comprehension of the process, they felt the

director was a “service-provider” who gave them what they needed and told them what to do. One individual felt that if this particular director were no longer in the position, the culture would die altogether. These comments are fairly typical in a newer assessment program and show the need for a movement “out of the weeds” and for a passing of the baton to the staff.

One theme the committee ascertained from the visit was that the Student Affairs Management Council (SAMC) is not involved with assessment leadership on a regular basis. The director primarily works 1:1 with the other directors and SAMC is not integrated into the process. Feedback given was that circumventing the organizational structure can cause inconsistencies between the guidance SAMC is giving their units and what assessment and research is telling the units. Although working directly with staff is useful, this can be frustrating to the staff and to SAMC. In addition, staff members expressed inconsistent expectations between directors. SAMC expressed an interest in learning more about assessment so they can help be consistent with staff expectations and directions.

Recommendation 1

Provide capacity building opportunities with SAMC. There is desire for education on assessment. Starting with an “Assessment 101” workshop is highly encouraged.

Recommendation 2

The assessment committee is underutilized. Update the charge of the assessment committee so they can serve as liaisons and educators to units. This could be accomplished in a cross-functional management style or each person could represent his or her unit. The committee could be a powerful human resource to the assessment office and they can help build an assessment program that is undergirded and owned by each unit rather than the assessment staff.

Recommendation 3

As previously stated, the director has created a strong assessment program. One theme that came through quite often though is that the director IS the assessment program. This is not always healthy when trying to establish a long-term assessment culture. The director is very skilled and the division should take advantage of this by encouraging her to spend her time and talents on more advanced opportunities and techniques to grow the assessment program. The committee recommends evaluating job responsibilities.

Recommendation 4

Include the Davis campus as an integral part of the assessment program.

Financial Resources and Budget

The unit has a well-defined and participatory budget planning process. This process results in sufficient resources to meet the unit's core programs/services, staffing, facility, equipment, and technology needs.

The value that the division leadership places on the assessment and research office is evidenced by providing the tools and resources needed to create a strong program. Financial resources and systems are in place and seem to be wisely used. Long-range planning to allow for growth or other changes is evident.

No Recommendations

Facilities, Equipment and Technology

The unit has safe, accessible, and current physical facilities, equipment, and technological resources to support its core programs/services and personnel.

The unit has the space needed to accomplish its mission. Equipment is on a three-year replacement cycle and technology is updated and in place.

No Recommendations

Ethical and Legal Responsibilities

The unit is aware of and compliant with statutory and professional ethical and legal standards which apply to the unit's core programs/services, personnel, facilities, equipment and technology.

The unit is compliant with ethical and legal standards as stated above. Student files are stored in a cloud storage solution available to everyone at the institution. They are not stored on computers. The staff adheres to FERPA guidelines and are also subject to a background check. When surveys are administered and data provided, student email addresses are not shared with department directors and coordinators. IRB procedures are in place and adhered to as necessary.

No Recommendations

Assessment and Evaluation

The unit has clearly defined and measurable core program/service and student learning outcomes which are consistent with the unit's mission and goal statements. These program/service and student learning outcomes are regularly assessed through both direct and indirect measures, and the results of assessment are shared among constituents and are used for decision making and planning.

The assessment and research office has a strong framework in place. As stated previously, the program is poised to become a comprehensive and more complex program in order to ward off stagnation. Although the assessment plan is not clearly articulated (at least to the staff responsible for assessment), there is documentation of achievement of goals and outcomes, which relate to the mission of the office.

One challenge is the dissemination and use of results. The office is not unique in this. Sharing results and the impact of these results often falls by the wayside. However, constituents do need to hear about decisions made or impact of programs on student that came about because of data they gathered.

Recommendation 1

Although there is an assessment report card in place, the committee feels that a negative connotation exists with the term "report card". It sets up a passing or failing mentality. Using a rubric to evaluate assessment plans provides objective feedback with a targeted product for success. Using the assessment team to play a role in the rubric feedback process would be a good way to increase capacity, to emphasize ownership, and can be quite efficient.

Recommendation 2

Results and use of the data must be shared. The committee heard a few stories of how units did use their results and successfully argued for an increased budget or staffing or other needs. Find these people and make them the cheerleaders. The committee also recommends creating a newsletter to be distributed (electronically) 2-4 times a year to the university community. One faculty member involved in the conversation had no idea what student affairs assessment did and the type of valuable work going on. Feature in the newsletter several units who have had successful assessment projects, share the results, and provided evidence of the impact on student success and retention.

Recommendation 3

The committee suggests creating a “share your success” program. This can be as simple as having a unit take 15 minutes in a group meeting to talk about their results and challenges faced.

Recommendation 4

Share results with students. This is one constituent area that is often forgotten. The committee suggests starting a “We heard your voice” campaign. Several successful methods include hanging professionally created posters containing data snippets gathered from a student survey and what changes were made on campus as a result of student feedback. Placing stats on university websites that students visit frequently is another technique. One more recent effort seen used has been to make this information part of the preview before a campus event like a movie.

Recommendation 5

The committee suggests integrating some qualitative assessment into the program. Using semi-structured focus groups for feedback can provide richness to the data and create a holistic picture of student success. Having student stories to share often appeals to external constituents. The committee suggests creating an electronic “Share a Story” drop box. As staff interact with students and discuss the impact of programs and services and what students have learned through the interaction with a particular office, document these discussions. Putting a “face” to the data can have a positive impact for the university as a whole.

Summary

The unit has clearly articulated what they learned through the self-study process including concrete recommendations for their individual programs and services. The unit has set priorities for improvement and refinement and has made recommendations of items for the review team to consider

The assessment and research office is very self-aware of opportunities and strengths for the office. They have done an excellent job of reflecting and contemplating long-term growth.

No recommendations

Conclusion

It has been a true pleasure to work on this program review. The assessment and research office is effective and is staffed by knowledgeable, reliable, and enthusiastic personnel. The office operates in a professional manner and is collaborative within the division as well as across campus.

The committee feels strongly that the office is performing above expectations mandated by CAS and is an integral part of Weber State University. It is the intention of the review committee to provide recommendations to strengthen and enhance an already strong assessment foundation.

We look forward to watching the assessment program grow and mature and reach its full potential.