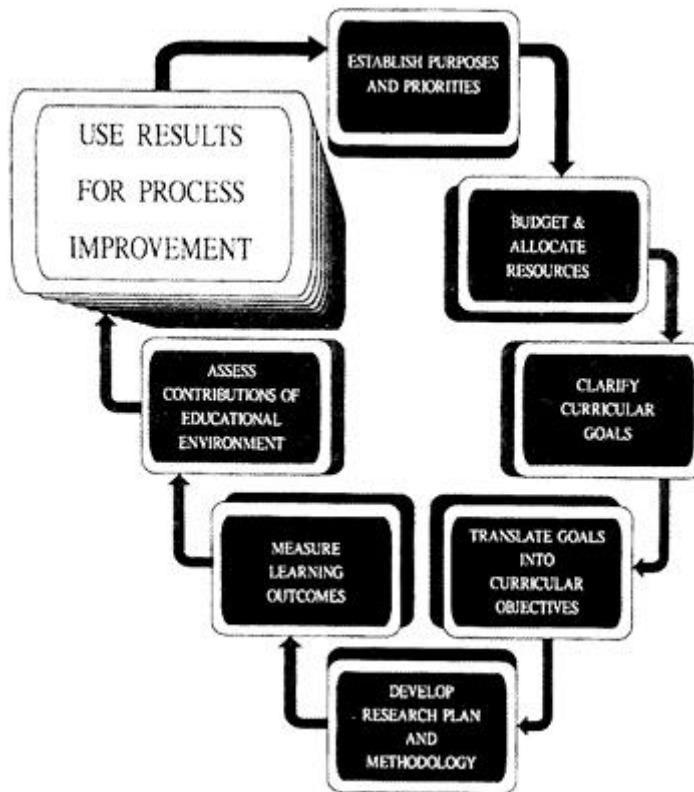


Assessment for the New Curriculum: A Guide for Professional Accounting Programs

Chapter 11 Using Assessment Results for Program Improvement



This brief chapter suggests approaches for reporting using assessment results.

The plan for dissemination and use of results should specify how they will be used to achieve the purposes initially identified, for example, program planning and monitoring, curriculum improvement, resource-seeking, marketing, or public accountability. Audiences for reporting should also be identified, for example, the department chair, curriculum committee, other faculty, employers and the general public.

11.1 Reporting Assessment Findings

Presentation of results is an important consideration in obtaining a favorable response. Assessment scholars point out that

Within higher education, researchers must walk a fine line between turning off their audience by being too simplistic (Jacobi and others, 1987, p. 71).

Characteristics of reports that influence decision making include the following:

- Reports begin with a brief summary of the essential findings
- The questions addressed are clearly linked to real policy decisions
- At least some questions in each report consider the costs affecting policy
- Policy questions form the central organizing theme
- Evaluation methodology is played down

- Backup narrative for the executive summary is "chunked" into easily located, brief segments throughout the report
- Only simple statistics are presented
- Where jargon is used, it is the practitioners', not the evaluators'
- Concrete recommendations for action are based on *specific* findings (DeLoria and Brookins, 1984, cited in Jacobi and others, 1987, pp. 70–71)

Occasions for presentation and discussion of results should be set aside. In particular, the department chair should arrange to include results in ongoing discussions of curriculum and related issues (Jacobi, Astin, and Ayala, 1987). If the assessment has been organized around faculty needs, concerns, and questions, the results will be awaited with interest.

Presentation of numerical results can often be made more tangible by the inclusion of graphics to illustrate and vivify numerical information. Case studies and excerpted narrative comments from assessment participants will also vitalize the presentation.

11.2 Use of Results

As noted frequently in this document, the ultimate criterion for judging the success of the assessment program is whether the results are used to improve student learning. Faculty are most likely to use results if the assessment is initially designed to address problems or decisions related to students, curriculum, and/or instruction.

If faculty have been fully involved in designing and implementing the assessment program, they will be interested in the results and receptive to discussing their implications, even if changes are needed. If the program is working as it should, faculty will frequently be heard referring to assessment results, especially when making decisions about curricular and instructional issues. The faculty should be able to answer the question: How are results of assessment incorporated into the academic programs for continuous improvement?

Assessment frequently generates "fringe benefits" for the program such as improved testing, greater instructional variety, enhanced collegiality and stronger departmental focus on the curriculum. In short, it is not an end in itself but a means to an end: The enhancement of learning and the vitality of the program.