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Task Force on Statewide Assessment
***Program Assessment from the Lens of a Department Chair: A
Journey from Compliance to Engagement***
**Dr. James Dottin, Business Administration Department
Chair, Middlesex Community College**
October 16, 2018

As promised, we are providing you a recap of the Question & Answer session led by Dr. James Dottin after his presentation on "Program Assessment from the Lens of a Department Chair: A Journey from Compliance to Engagement." This document includes the answers he gave during the session, and his answers to the questions he didn't have time to answer during the session.

Why did Dr. Dottin take a leadership role with the work of assessment for his department?

Dr. Dottin wanted to restore the Business Administration's reputation that it once held on campus but had been lost due to complacency. As a result, the department was viewed as having fallen into a downward versus upward spiral.

What conditions existed to support this work?

- Leadership support, i.e., the CAO and the Dean of Assessment
- Institutional Student Learning Outcomes
- The Program Review process

What do department chairs need to implement a culture of assessment within their department?

- To be assured of support by authentic campus leadership
- Informal and formal recognition by campus leadership
- Campus leadership (i.e., the CAO, director of assessment, and dean) who understand the approaches and tools of assessment

Why would faculty engage in assessment with their department chair?

Faculty saw that it created value for them (i.e., improved teaching) and for their students (i.e., increased learning outcomes).

Why don't faculty engage in assessment?

They don't want to be exposed for their lack of knowledge, training, or competence in teaching (Note: This is why the DHE has been encouraging institutions to consider engaging with someone like the Association for College and University Educators [ACUE] or The Faculty Guild because we know that most faculty were never trained how to teach. They were trained in a field of study. Thus, their lack of prowess in teaching is understandable and can be addressed and improved).

Also, as you should focus on those faculty who have moderate or high interest in assessment, you should leave those with low or no interest to their own devices and hope they observe and follow the active engagement of their fellow faculty members.

What concrete steps can be taken to advance and deepen the work of assessment on campus?

- Identify and actively engage department chairs with moderate or high interest in assessment who can serve as role models for others
- Within the department, chairs should similarly focus on faculty with moderate to high interest in assessment to create a critical mass with which the department chair can work to move this work forward
- Identify committed and well-respected faculty to serve as a faculty assessment fellow who can become an evangelist (Note: non-religious) within the institution with their fellow faculty members
- Remember, this is "high-touch" work that requires personal involvement; one-on-one and face-to-face

How do you link student learning outcomes and course assignments?

- Conduct a faculty survey to create faculty-developed program student learning outcomes
- Adopt program student learning outcomes
- Develop a program curriculum map with faculty to discern where there are gaps between the departmental view about what the faculty wish to have happen with students for their courses/program and student learning versus what may actually be happening
- Have faculty share assignments with fellow faculty members. The department chair should be willing to share theirs first.

- Obtain training for faculty in scoring using a rubric and assignment design to strengthen their skills and knowledge
- Provide incentives both financial and non-financial

How do you engage DCE faculty?

- Invite them to department meetings
- Invite them to professional development workshops held within and/or for the department
- Communicate (i.e., phone, talk and email) with them; one-on-one and face-to-face whenever possible
- Remember that the department chair is viewed by DCE faculty as having formal authority (i.e., because the department chair determines who gets what courses and when) that can be leveraged

What recommendations do you have for department chairs who are embarking on this work in a less than functional department?

It is important to have an over-arching or strategic vision for their department. The Program Review process can also be an excellent starting point.

How did you shift the culture within your department?

First, refer to the Critical Events nos. 1-6 from the presentation. That really describes "the journey" that was undertaken. In addition, there were several elements utilized to shift the department's culture including:

- Formulate an over-arching or strategic vision for the department
- Recognize this work will take time (i.e., have patience); perhaps years given the reality (in community college) that there are only six department meetings per academic year in which to work on this topic
- Maintain a high level of personal commitment to change
- Identify and leverage faculty with moderate or high level of interest in assessment to create a critical mass
- Engage the adjunct faculty
- Bring the full-time and part-time faculty together to participate, learn, and do
- Do as much hands-on as possible one-on-one and face-to-face
- Maintain a consistent approach to this work. It is not "one and done." There was and remains some element of assessment on every department meeting agenda.

What did you use to “prime the pump?”

- First action was to conduct a survey of faculty to identify their top three goals for the program. That work product was utilized to create the program student learning outcomes
- Second was the curriculum mapping exercise that identified gaps between what was expected and what was reality. That caused faculty to begin to explore how do we address the gaps.

What are the benefits for faculty to doing the work of assessment?

- Enrichment of their skills through self-reflection, peer learning, and practical application
- Enables the department faculty to meet the learning outcome needs of the students, and hopefully, improve the ability of students to persist and to successfully transition into the workforce or transfer to a four-year institution.
- Learning from other faculty through sharing and strengthening of their assignments and sharing their teaching challenges and successes.