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Documenting Student Learning in Career-Technical Programs for Accreditation: Meeting External and Internal Needs

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One of the challenges of the accreditation process is portraying clearly and thoroughly the variety of assessment efforts that are occurring on most any given college campus, across all levels—institutional, program/department, and individual course/classroom—and in a way that helps the college address meaningful improvement goals at the same time. This paper presents an overview of how one Washington community college has attempted to address this challenge, particularly in the context of one specific technical-professional program.

Dyed in the Wool: Creating an Effective Culture of Assessment at the Community College

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The organizational culture of Shoreline Community College exhibits a strong shared value of gathering and using assessment data throughout the institution. Assessment activities and data serve as the basis for decision making at all levels and in all areas of the college, from instructors' individual choices of teaching methods to college-wide choices about mission, strategic planning and allocation of funds. This article traces the development of that culture, and identifies key organizational practices and characteristics underlying the college's lasting commitment to assessment theory and practice. Key practices include faculty hiring and faculty development strategies, the program planning and analysis process, heavy reliance on assessment data for making budget decisions, and providing structural recognition and rewards for quality work in assessment.

Accountability is More than 'Accounting': Promoting and Sustaining Institutional Assessment-as-Learning

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From its inception in 1989-90, the State of Washington postsecondary outcomes assessment initiative has emphasized institutional improvement efforts related to student learning. In recent years, however, there has been a growing emphasis on formal state accountability—first performance budgeting and now a performance reporting process—as well as a shift in emphasis of the regional accreditation agency away from inputs and toward outcomes. These three distinct but related efforts—assessment, accountability, and accreditation—have

often involved many of the same individuals on a given campus, and in many cases have become conflated in people's minds. One particular problem has been that external accountability efforts have influenced campus, and especially faculty, perceptions of both assessment and accreditation activities, and generally not in positive ways. In recent years the outcomes assessment initiative in Washington has reflected an ongoing struggle to find a productive synthesis of these three arenas and move beyond the notion that simply generating the right numbers will resolve questions of accountability and satisfy accreditation demands. In this introductory article I hope to provide an historical context for the work to date, suggest that such a synthesis requires a fundamental focus on the principles of "assessment-as-learning," and then briefly sketch what some of those key principles are based on our experience in Washington state.

Assessing Outcomes Assessment Efforts: The View From 30,000 Feet

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This article describes the experience of Skagit Valley College in addressing program-level learning outcomes assessment. The college's endeavors over the years have been motivated by statewide outcomes assessment initiatives and funding, the college's General Education reform efforts, Title III grant activities and funding, and a specific recommendation as part of the college's ten-year accreditation visit. Most recently the college was invited to participate in the League for Innovation in the Community Colleges' 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project. The activities and requirements related to this project have encouraged a merging of these various activities into a more comprehensive assessment effort. The evaluation plan for the college as part of this grant has provided the framework for "assessing our assessment," created opportunities to take advantage of multiple external and internal perspectives, and encouraged a broader view of our assessment efforts.

Assessment of Student Learning: How Two Paths Forge into One

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This article speaks to the history, struggles and successes of assessment work done at Tacoma Community College (TCC). Background information as to assessment work in Washington state and information regarding the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation process as it pertains to Washington two-year colleges is discussed. It is therefore vital to discuss how TCC defines "student learning outcomes" and how faculty have been involved in, informed of, or isolated from this assessment work and how this work connects to the college's institutional effectiveness plan as well as to accreditation. The article features a description of how the "loop" has been closed and the effects the information has had on the college. This article will also demonstrate the state and national work that TCC has accomplished and the partnerships that have been formed with other institutions as a result of this work.

Assessing Student Services Outcomes in the Community College

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This article delineates the philosophy and practical steps involved in doing outcomes assessment in the student services areas. Student services, like instruction, benefit by using outcomes assessment as a tool to fine-tune their craft of delivering quality services to students. While outcomes assessment is a logical next step for instructional faculty in that they are engaged in the evaluation of student performance as part of their teaching, student services practitioners have traditionally not had to observe or account for student outcomes of the services they provide. Several assessment models are discussed, but special attention is placed on Nichols's (1991) outcomes assessment template. The merit of this model for assessment is that it is simple to use and allows the professional maximum latitude in articulating student outcomes. This article also features a discussion on the best ways to communicate the importance of doing outcomes assessment in student services. In order for this process to be successful, practitioners must view their service as being flexible and dynamic, realize that they are at liberty to articulate their own outcomes, and that the results of assessment will inform them what they need to do in order to improve their services.