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Ten curriculum assessment tools every dean needs. Part 4: Using Program-Level Assessment Rubrics

Israel Galindo, *Columbia Theological Seminary*

Blog Series: Theological School Deans
February 01, 2016
Tags: curriculum design and assessment | student learning | assessing learning | rubrics

Theological school deans are not just theological leaders for their institution, they must be EDUCATIONAL leaders. That is, they must implement sound educational practices related to curriculum, instruction, supervision, assessment, and administration. While faculty members can focus on course-level and individual student learning assessment, academic deans need to implement program-level assessment in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's curricular course of study. There is a variety of ways to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum, and there are several levels of assessment (program-level, course-level, student testing, student projects, etc.). Here are ten basic curriculum assessment tools every academic dean needs:

Outcomes alignment worksheet
Syllabus assessment worksheet
Curriculum maps
Program-level rubrics
Alumni survey
Program retention and completion rate worksheets
Grade Distribution report
Entering student profile
Graduating class profile
Student course evaluations

In this series we will review these ten assessment tools every dean needs. This month:

4. Using Program-Level Assessment Rubrics

Using program-level assessment rubrics for direct assessment provides the ability to evaluate the quality of student learning outcomes across the span of the curricular program of study. Applying a program-level rubric will provide a more uniform understanding, and standard, for student work in the curriculum. While individual courses may still use instructor-designed rubrics for individual courses, the program-level rubrics can help integrate evidence of learning in student work across the curriculum. The rubrics can also help faculty members sharpen their own individual course rubrics as they compare them to a standard. Further, instructors can align the student assignments rubrics in their courses with the program level rubrics. A standardized critical evaluation of student work provides a more accurate measure of student learning than indirect assessment methods.

Here is one approach to using program-level rubrics for direct assessment. This example is from the mythical Central Generic Theological Seminary (CGTS). At that seminary the Faculty identified four common types of student work used throughout the curriculum (they discovered this using a methods curriculum map). Most course assignments in the curriculum fell under

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301 West Wabash Ave, Crawfordsville, IN 47933
(765) 361-6047 (800) 655-7177 fax (765) 361-6051
Fully Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and Located at Wabash College

one of the four types of student-produced work.

Once the Faculty identified the four categories of student work, it was able to create program-level rubrics for each type. Creating one rubric for each "type" of student work is more efficient than trying to manage multiple individual instructor-created rubrics from assignments in courses across the curriculum. Once the rubrics were produced, the Faculty was also able to use embedded learning outcomes based on the rubrics in every individual course. Embedded learning outcomes helped ensure integration in the course of study (the curriculum), and provided the ability to apply a more standardized metric for student performance throughout the curriculum.

THE FOUR TYPES OF STUDENT WORK

CGTS identified four types of student work products in the M.Div. curriculum. The four types are:

1. Reflection papers.

In these products students are required to demonstrate skill and capacity in critical and theological reflection by: (1) demonstrating theological reflection; (2) demonstrating self understanding related to formation, identity and calling; and (3) reflecting on ministry praxis experiences as a way to derive meaningful learning and insights about competency in ministry practice and to identify areas for improvement.

2. Interpretation papers and products.

In these products students are required to demonstrate skill and understanding in the application of interpretation by: (1) interpreting biblical and historical texts; (2) interpreting ministry context; (3) interpreting and integrating academic cognate area discipline specific skills, ethos, and knowledge.

3. Academic research papers and products.

In these products students are required to demonstrate skill and understanding in the application of academic research skills by producing rigorous academic research papers such as journal articles, monographs, exegetical papers, essays, and book projects.

4. Performance and praxis products.

In these products students are required to give evidence of skill and competence in the application of knowledge through demonstration, practice, or performance. Performance can take many forms and may use a variety of media: live classroom performance, preaching in context, job-ministry performance in supervised ministry context, graphic and media arts products, performance in practicum courses or seminars, etc. For this student product the seminary may collect and archive recordings of performances, but will need also to collect

narrative assessment reports of such performances.

USING PROGRAM-LEVEL ASSESSMENT RUBRICS

For the purpose of assessing degree program-level learning outcomes CGTS uses the four rubrics and applies them to each type of student work product. The four assessment rubrics identify course-embedded general program learning outcomes and provide a standardized interpretive qualitative scoring scale. The general program level assessment rubrics are applied at the conclusion of every academic year. The evaluative comments from the rubrics, as well as the quantitative summary, become the source of an evaluation report. The report, in turn, becomes the basis for refinement in teaching-learning strategies and curriculum design as needed.

Here are links to the four general program assessment rubrics as designed by CGTS:

1. Download (A) Reflection Assessment Rubric
2. Download (B) Interpretation Assessment Rubric
3. Download (C) Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Rubric
4. Download (D) Performance Learning Outcomes Assessment Rubric

https://wabash.center/2016/02/ten-curriculum-assessment-tools-every-dean-needs-part-4-using-program-level-assessment-rubrics/

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