WABASH CENTER
For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

The Dean and Program Assessment: A portable graduation profile

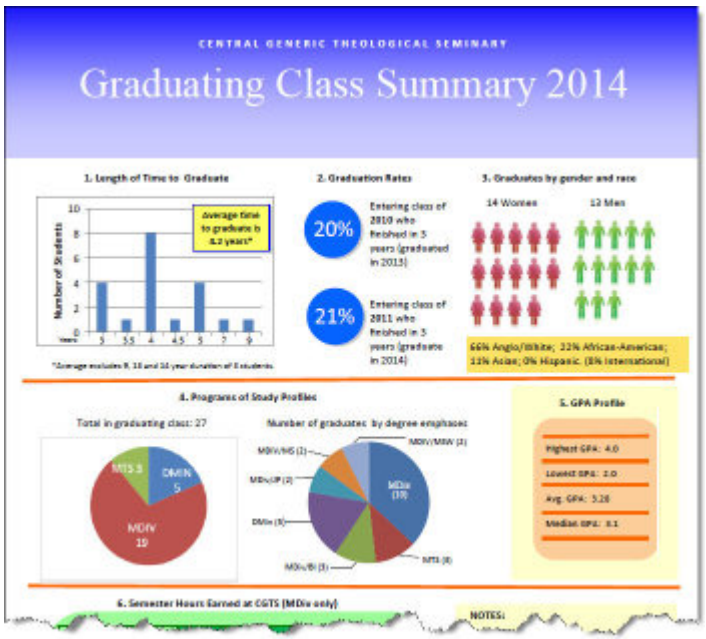
Israel Galindo, *Columbia Theological Seminary*

Blog Series: Theological School Deans
May 13, 2014
Tags: assessment | curriculum design and assessment | assessing students

The formative assessment of academic programs is one of the fundamental tasks of deans. Deans must focus on the "big picture," working with program-level metrics often out of the scope (and interest) of others in the institution. Big picture program issues include attention to the school's student body graduation profile. One example of a "big picture" program issue is tracking the graduation class profile. This formative assessment practice provides critical information about program effectiveness and can provide comparative data to identify shifts and trends that impact the curriculum, the student body, and concerns the faculty may want to address.

Along with other key metrics, the graduation profile can help the dean and faculty,

- Determine program viability
- Inform program impact on faculty work load (course distribution load, administrative load, student advising load, etc.)
- Inform decisions about recruitment
- Give evidence of demonstrable program effectiveness
- Help interpret how enrollment impacts budget
- Plot metrics related to student FTE
- Identify shifting student body profiles (diversity, economic, recruitment).



A PORTABLE GRADUATION PROFILE INFOGRAPHIC

Here is a handy "portable" graduation profile infographic that can be helpful in interpreting program-level assessments. The infographic is a "one pager" which shows key metrics of program effectiveness related to program completion. Student program completion is a significant metric that identifies factors which impact the educational program on many levels. Communicating effectively the ways program completion affects the larger programmatic and institutional issues can help faculty members make informed decisions about program-level issues. Using the annual graduation as a marker event is a good point of reference for formative assessment. You can download a pdf verion here.

This sample is from the fictional Central Generic Theological Seminary's graduating class. This is a small theological school with a range of degree programs (MDiv, DMin, MTS) and several concentrations within the MDiv. This infographic is "portable" in that you can duplicate the sample format and representative metrics as one way to practice program-level formative assessment. The one-page format helps to visually summarize the data and help interpret the program to Faculty, administration, and trustees. The key metrics, tracked annually, are:

1. The length of time to graduate
2. Graduation rates
3. Graduating class gender and race profile
4. Graduation by programs of study
5. Student GPA in the graduating class
6. The number of semester hours earned at the seminary

Interpreting the Data

This one-page infographic highlight selective metrics the dean can use to interpret important programmatic issues. Let's review how each can be interpreted to inform program-level decisions, from curriculum matters to recruitment actions.

Data sets **1. Length of time to graduate,** and **2. Graduation rates** identify a matter of concern that needs to be investigated further as to its cause. The MDiv is identified as a three year degree program in this school's Catalog, yet, the average time to graduate for this class is 4.7 years. Only about 20% of students are able to finish in three years (data set 2. Graduation rates). The dean should lead the faculty to identify the causes of this as it is detrimental to students and a liability for program viability. Further investigation can reveal a number of causes:

- A course rotation schedule that is detrimental to helping students make progress in the course of study
- A negative impact of faculty sabbatical schedules
- The lack of accessibility to courses due to locked-in schedules, a lack of online and other format course options, or, conflicting course schedules for core courses
- A shifting student profile in which over half the student body are part time.
- A complicated program structure with too many "moving parts" (too many sequenced components, too many prerequisites, too many non-academic requirements)
- The negative impact of reduced or diminishing financial aid
- A large number of required credit hours for the program.

Data set **3. Graduates by gender and race** shows that this school remains predominantly white, but the earnest efforts to work toward a diverse student body is starting to show results with a 33% minority students in the graduating class. Further study can reveal insights about the rate of completion between genders, and, rate of completion among minority students.

Data set **4. Programs of study profile** is helpful in tracking the viability of different degree programs and of concentrations within the MDiv. For a small school, guarding against program proliferation is important as it impacts several areas, including faculty work load and the ability of students in concentrations to make progress in their programs of study.

The information in data set **5. GPA profile** is important, but additional information is needed to interpret its significance. For example, this data will be more meaningful as comparative data over five years. One-time "snapshot" data like this is interesting, but relatively meaningless without comparison. In this snapshot the numbers to give attention to are the median and average GPA.

Data set **6. Semester hours earned** is an example of one of those key metrics the dean needs to track, but will tend to be of little interest to most others in the system (other than the CFO, perhaps). This data provides important budget and programmatic information. This school's MDiv degree requires 90 semester hours, yet most students do not take the full 90 semester hours due to a variety of reasons, including transfer of credits. For the current graduating

class one student yielded tuition revenue for only 57 semester hours while the average for all MDiv students was 77.6. Because the dean and Faculty have been tracking this metric they were able to make programmatic changes resulting in a 34.7% increase in credits taken at the school over the previous year.

Finally, the last bullet point under "Notes" box is an important piece of data. This small school's graduating class comprises 22% of the total student body in its spring semester. This means the school needs to replace more than 22% of its student body in the fall. Given that this small school has a small endowment and is tuition-driven, it must take into consideration that its incoming class numbers must not merely replace the graduating 22%, but must take in a sufficient entering class to offset part-time students' impact on FTE, anticipated recidivism and failure-to-complete students. For budget planning, calculating the anticipated actual number of credits students will take of the 90 semester hours required of the MDiv over a three year span is very useful.

Assessing the "big picture" of the school's programs of study, evaluating the impact of the student body profile, and monitoring the relationship between the curriculum and the school's educational budget are essential tasks of deans. A simplified and concise infographic can help effectively communicate and interpret key information to faculty, administration, and trustees.

https://wabash.center/2014/05/the-dean-and-program-assessment-a-portable-graduation-profile/

Published by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion
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