

General Education & Beyond: Northeastern State University

HLC Assessment Academy Cohort 2010-2014

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Northeastern State University (NSU), is a regional Oklahoma university of approximately 9,000 students, located in Tahlequah, the Capital of the Cherokee Nation. Beginning in 2010, NSU engaged in a bottom-up and top-down review of its assessment infrastructure and protocols. All stakeholders were asked to commit and share responsibility in the refinement and enhancement of the assessment of student learning. Both the NSU Faculty Council and the NSU administration were firmly committed to the value-added process of efficient proximal and distal evaluation of student success.

Initially, two major projects were identified. The first thoroughly assessed NSU's new General Education curriculum, compared the results to the previous curriculum and requiring Student Learning Objectives (SLO's) and Student Learning Outcomes (also SLO's) in the syllabi and courses of the new General Education Curriculum. The second project was designed to assess the construct validity of NSU's mission and core values, including the overall, value-added learning outcomes of the University. However, as the first project's research design was implemented, the need to evaluate the alignment of the current student learning outcomes from course to program to degree became apparent. The second project was redesigned to accomplish this task.

First Project

This project was originally designed to assess the efficacy of NSU's new General Education curriculum as well as compare the results to the previous curriculum. The modified ETS Proficiency Profile with nine added NSU-specific questions and the NSSE provided moderately meaningful results, with trend lines continuing to show improvement by each semester as well as an overall enhancement over the previous curriculum. The true test of the project involved the implementation of Student Learning Objectives & Outcomes in every General Education course. This will have been fully accomplished by Fall, 2014. The process was completed only through the joint efforts of the Academy Team, upper administration, two faculty committees (General Education & Student learning assessment), Learning Coordinators in each academic college, a new advising model & modifications of the Capstone course. Current findings demonstrate creative rubrics among many faculty for assessing objectives as well outcomes routinely demonstrating fulfillment of objectives. To date, all but one outcome (ceiling effect) have demonstrated statistically significant improvements in the General Education courses as assessed relative to the objective. Obviously, this process will continue as will CQI.

Second Project

The implementation of project 1 involved a review of student learning assessment at the course and program levels. This review revealed that course and program assessment did not necessarily align to desired outcomes. Additionally, there was no measurable connection

between courses, programs, and the ultimate goal: the baccalaureate degree. In other words, assessment of student learning was compartmentalized by course or major. The results were not considered in terms of correlated to competencies expected of a baccalaureate degree holder, regardless of major. The following steps have been initiated to address this concern:

- Student learning coordinators. Faculty have been identified in each academic college assist in developing or modifying student learning outcomes, assessment strategies, and/or analysis of assessment data for course or program improvement.
- Restructuring of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The CTL emphasizes student learning & assessment & offers professional development for faculty, department chairs and administrative leadership in outcome and assessment design.
- Degrees of Excellence. The faculty have developed degree outcomes for all baccalaureate degrees at NSU. They reflect the outcomes expected by regional, national and global employers and are intended to assess student learning progressively throughout the degree. The degree outcomes include:
 - Critical inquiry
 - Integrative knowledge
 - Specialized knowledge in the major; and the
 - Capstone Experience

An implementation strategy is being designed and should be initiated in the Fall 2015.

Value-added Effect of the Academy

- Enhancing and leveraging assessment programs & processes for the member university which are needed (if not required), but may not have been done otherwise
- Providing a well-mentored & cohort information-rich infrastructure which can lead to creative objectives, valid assessment tools, outcomes, feedback, change & CQI (gyring)
- By restricting the nature of the initial Academy project, positive outcomes may be obtained which inevitably lead to generalizing the assessment process; in NSU's case to University-wide core values.

Overall Effect of the Academy for NSU

The work with the Academy contributed to improvement of student learning at NSU by:

- Comparing the previous and current General Education requirements through quantitative, qualitative, personal growth and development analyses.
- Enhancing the culture of assessment at NSU by embedding effective and efficient student learning outcomes and their measurement in all courses, programs, and degrees.
- Significantly and measurably enhancing student learning as measured by selected, monitored & modified outcome based assessment.

- By ever-closer approximating core University values, better preparing graduates for the current and future economic conditions, job market and regional, State and global arenas in order to enhance their value, productivity and service to changing world values and opportunities.