Assessment of Student Learning as a Driver to Departmental Development

Andrea Lassiter
Minnesota State University - Mankato, andrea.lassiter@mnsu.edu

Recommended Citation

Andi Lassiter

Assessment of Student Learning as a Driver to Departmental Development

Managing departmental resources, personnel staffing and development, and student learning needs, among all other duties can be challenging for academic leaders. At the intersection of these three responsibilities is an often-neglected area: broad departmental development. Certainly, seasoned chairpersons are able to negotiate many of these demands separately, and even can have a strong focus on individual faculty development, particularly for untenured faculty members. However, beyond individual faculty-member development needs, is the concern with moving a whole department forward as a high-performance team.

This session will move beyond a discussion of "what can be done to support individual faculty development" toward consideration of "how can we support broader, department growth". Consider the nature of differences in outcomes: individual faculty outcomes center on teaching effectiveness, scholarship/research, and service; whole departmental outcomes include criteria such as meeting student learning goals, graduation rates, and credit hour production. Higher-order development has the potential to create lasting culture change and can help a department attain its departmental-level goals. This session will focus on ways that chairpersons can offer departmental-level development initiatives.

A session on using assessment as a means of broader department culture change during the 2016 Academic Department Chairpersons conference prompted this proposal. Participant discussion in that session pointed out the challenge new chairs are faced with as they need to consider how to facilitate developmental growth and learning across individuals and within a team setting. Such a shift in levels of analysis can be tricky to navigate; yet, departments with a strong focus on development may do a better job on closing the loop on assessment of student learning. 'Closing the loop' refers to the difficulty in using assessment results to drive improvement, which has been a problem for many departments and institutions (Banta, 2009).

Content for this session will draw from the employee development literatures used in corporate human resource management fields (e.g., Noe, 2010; McCauley, 2006), and from team-based training literature in industrial-organizational psychology (Kozlowski & Salas, 2010). These sources outlines considerations for the development process and for leading team effectiveness. The session will present basic development planning process guidelines for chairs to consider:

- Opportunity: How does the department need to improve?
- Motivation: Are faculty willing to invest the time and energy to develop?
- Goal identification: What do we want to develop?
- Criteria: How will we know we are making progress?
- Actions: What is needed to be done to reach the development goal?
- Accountability: What is the timeframe and how can we keep others on track toward progress?

A brief case study and discussion questions will help prompt audience participation. Discussion will include a description of what our department has experienced in broader department-level development planning and goal attainment. Regular attention to development planning, with an eye toward student learning goals, can help a department keep efforts focused on their most central goals.

Ultimately this practice will lead to effective resource management by chairpersons and can help close the loop with assessment of student learning efforts.