Preliminary Analysis of Assessment Survey Data
Prepared by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee on June 4, 2021

Introduction

On May 12, 2020, Dr. Michael Baltzley, Associate Provost for Academic Effectiveness, presented to the Faculty Senate a proposal to standardize the academic calendar to create a concrete assessment day each term. This proposal grew out of a recognized exigency: faculty need for more dedicated time to engage in assessment activities. What became clear during the discussion at Faculty Senate, however, is that the time and needs of all divisions is not the same, and faculty expressed concern at the loss of instructional time in an otherwise already tight quarter system. Responsive to this feedback, Dr. Baltzley withdrew the proposal.

It remained clear to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC, henceforth) that in order to improve our assessment practices as a university, we needed to begin by gathering as much data as we could from faculty about their perception, practices, and needs surrounding assessment.

This report offers the following:
- A brief discussion of the results of each part of the survey
- Some initial recommendations
- A timeline for next steps

Method

In collaboration with Dr. Michael Baltzley, Associate Provost for Academic Effectiveness, the FSEC developed a series of questions designed to collect data on the current assessment practices of our academic programs as well as capture challenges, needs, and feedback to refine our assessment culture as a university.

The survey was conducted between March 29, 2021 and May 1, 2021. The survey was distributed to division chairs to forward to their department chairs (or assessment coordinators), program coordinators (IDS, General Education, Honors) and the chair of graduate studies to forward to graduate program coordinators.

Results

According to the departments/programs listed on the commencement page, there are 40 majors/programs (this includes Interdisciplinary Studies but not Honors or General Education). There are 8 graduate programs. This list may not be comprehensive, but

one immediate struggle we faced was finding a complete list of the departments and programs on our campus.

There were a total of 23 responses from departments or programs. Based on our best effort to calculate the number of majors/programs on our campus, this is approximately a 48% response rate to our survey.

Discussion of Survey Results

1. **What are the questions that your department is trying to answer with your current assessment practices?**

There is considerable diversity here, but there are some trends. These include:
- Using assessment data to justify hires, update curriculum, and best serve students
- Preparation of students for the job market
- Ways to streamline the assessment process or cultivate faculty buy-in within the department
- Meeting external professional standards or requirements
- Alignment to program mission/goals and appropriateness of learning outcomes
- Student learning of program material and, relatedly, teaching effectiveness

2. **What kind of information do you think the university is trying to gather with current assessment practices?**

A few trends are readily apparent here. It is clear that some programs genuinely do not have a clear understanding of what they believe the university is seeking to do with assessment. Some examples:
- "Only information that looks good or has the appearance of alignment for accreditation"
- "I don't know."
- "Who knows. Really, their practices appear to be a moving target. Aside from passing accreditation, I have no clear view of what they are doing."

Others show a range of beliefs about the university's assessment practices, for example:
- "Program self-view (including similarity to other programs and perceived level of quality) and alignment of course, program, and undergraduate learning outcomes."
- "Program Accountability: The university wants to know that programs are engaged in reflective continuous improvement efforts."
- "Broader information about the types of assessments happening in programs and the types of outcomes across the university."

3. **What are your current assessment practices? Please briefly describe the process or measures used.**

Similar to question 2, there is a lot of diversity in the assessment practices used, but we also see some larger themes in the kinds of activities, majors/programs are engaged in:
- Looking at individual courses
- Engaging with external bodies (e.g., accreditors, alumni, community partners)
- Assessing designated capstone courses
- Rotation sequence to examine a select number of program learning outcomes at a time
- Analysis of grade distribution

There is also diversity in the data points being used by programs. For example, some programs seem to be focused on "assessment of individual courses" whereas others draw from several data sets, for example: "employer assessments, employee/graduate assessments; student reflections and assessment; faculty reflections and course review; review of accreditation." This suggests that programs are at different places with their overall assessment protocols. There is also a notable difference in the assessment work happening in the pre-professional programs--in terms of the extensiveness of the design and the amount of data used--as compared to other academic programs.

4. **Our program faculty feel that our Program Learning Outcomes reflect what we teach in the classroom**
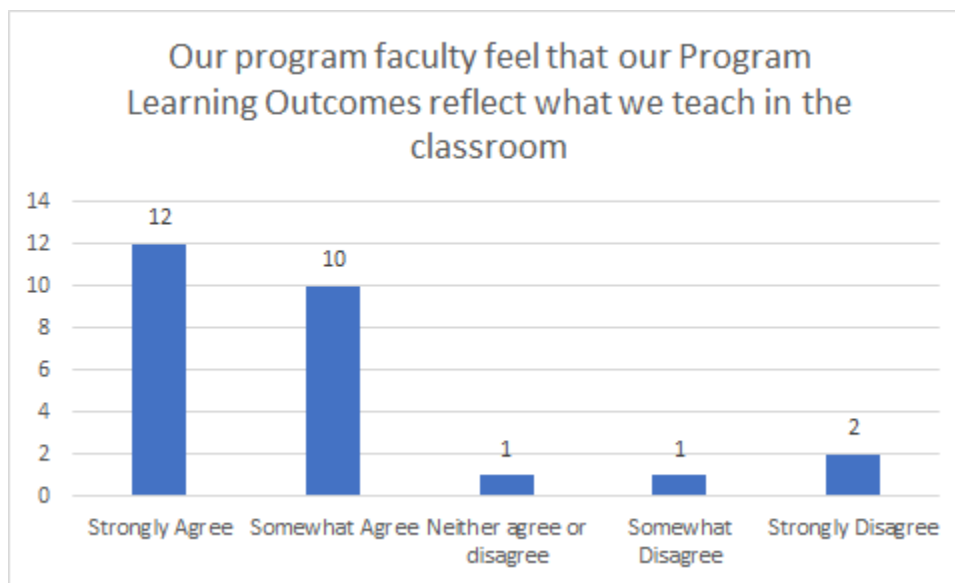

85% of programs strongly agree or agree that program learning outcomes reflect that is taught in the classroom

5. **Our program faculty use assessment data about student learning to make changes to our curriculum**

Our program faculty use assessment data about student learning to make changes to our curriculum
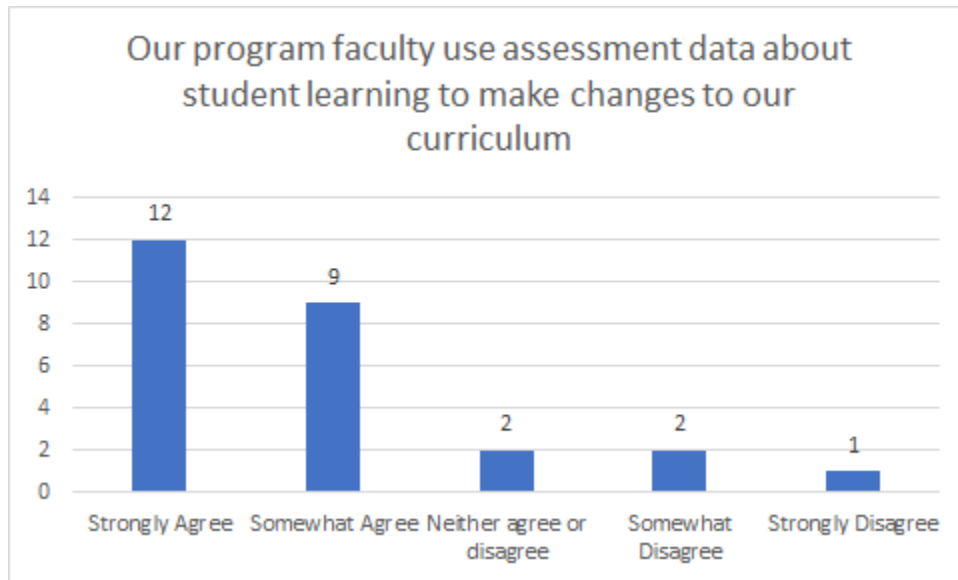
81% of programs strongly agree or agree that assessment data is currently being used to make changes to curriculum

6. **How often do your program faculty engage in conversations about student learning with all of the faculty in the program?**

How often do your program faculty engage in conversations about student learning with all of the faculty in the program?
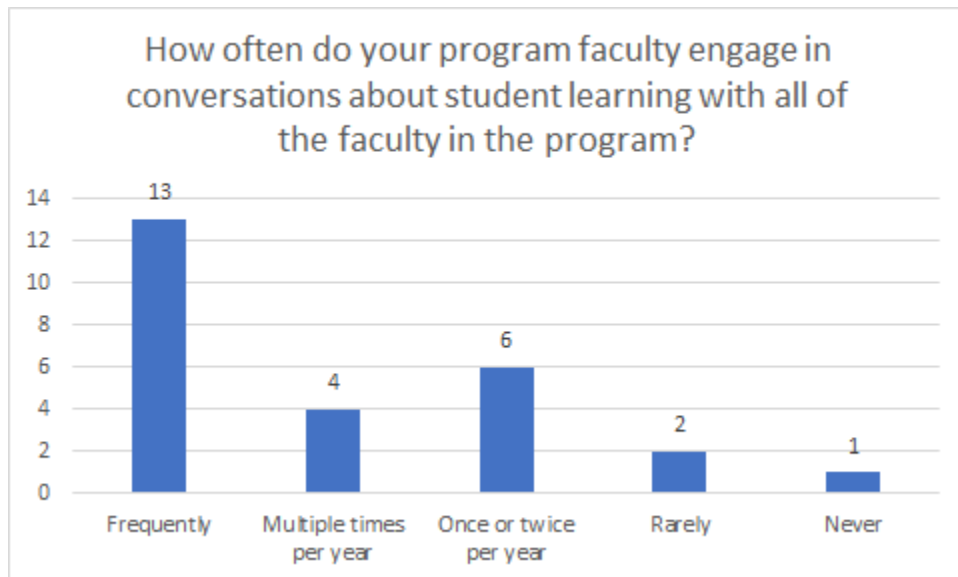
65% of programs talk about students learning with all faculty in the program at least multiple times per year. It is clear to us that our faculty are regularly engaged in assessment a large amount of the time.

7. **Who leads the assessment process in your program? (check all that apply)**

Role	Number	Percent
Department Head	7	27%
Department Head & Division Chair	2	8%
Department head and faculty without course release	6	23%
Division chair and faculty without course release	2	8%
Faculty with course release	2	8%
Faculty without course release	3	12%
Program Coordinator	3	12%
Other	1	4%

Department heads with (31%) or without (27%) additional assistance are leading program assessment. A major theme across sections was the number of times that faculty mentioned the need for support (particularly, course release time) to engage in this work. It seems that, often, but not always, this work is being performed by a single person on top of their other responsibilities.

8. **What has been your experience working with TK20?**

Overwhelmingly, the survey results reveal that faculty find TK20 to be a barrier to completing their assessment work. For example:
- "TK20 is not a good system. It is so unwieldy it adds time to the assessment process."
- "Very frustrating, time consuming, and not-intuitive."
- "Wretched, it is one of the least usable units of software I am forced to use at WOU."

Beyond feedback about its usability, there are other concerns expressed as well including that:

- "The "template forms" don't match up with what actually has to be input in the system, which leads to double the work."
- "The reports stored there are not accessible to all members of the department. This results in some departments having to store multiple copies in different places instead of having a master copy."

9. **What problems or barriers are you facing with the current assessment process?**

These responses also have considerable range, but we've grouped them into what appear to be similar issues.
- Unsure of what data the university wants or how it will be used
- Need support in the form of release time, compensation, or additional faculty to do the work
- Concerns around faculty buy-in and lack of NTT involvement
- Issues with TK20/reporting is time consuming
- Inconsistency with the assessment template
- Feeling like there is no follow-up after entering assessments into TK20
- Assessment requests seem to change every few years

10. **What resources (e.g. time, money, tools) are needed within your unit to support doing assessment?**

By far, the greatest response to this question was a need for more time and support in the form of release time--especially given that this work is so often identified as being predominantly done by a single individual, often the department chair--or compensation to account for the increased workload.

11. **How much time is needed to complete assessment? When in the year would it be best to engage in assessment?**

This question is perhaps most illuminating to the assessment lives of faculty. Depending on the program, faculty are engaged in assessment activities throughout the year with many noting that "Assessment is a year-round process."

Some survey participants were able to quantify the time assessment takes them, ranging from as low as 20 to as high as 40 hours. This is considerable labor being done, again, typically performed predominantly by a single individual with a program.

12. **What assessment questions are of most interest to your department?**

Survey participants are most interested in similar information from their assessment questions. Our programs might be different, but our goals are so often the same:
- Are students learning?

- How can we measure their learning throughout the process, not just at the end?
- Are they able to get jobs after graduation and are they well prepared for those jobs?

13. What type or form of assessment would you find most helpful to do?

The areas that interest faculty the most also speak to the kinds of assessment they find most helpful:
- More information from graduates/alumni to help guide curriculum changes so our programs are competitive and cutting edge
- The level of assessment already required by external accreditors
- More ability to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data
- Viewing more actual student work

Some programs did identify that their current assessment practices are working well for them, and so didn't identify other kinds or forms of assessment that they'd like to pursue at this time.

14. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: I would be interested in attending professional development workshops on how to do assessment within my unit


65% of respondents would be interested or somewhat interested in attending professional development workshops on how to do assessment.

15. When would be the best time in the year for these workshops to take place?

Answers to this question ranged. FSEC posits this is because faculty are engaged in assessment at different times of the year, so their need for workshops or other forms of professional development support varies.

16. Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: Instead of annual program assessment reports and a 7-year program review, I would find it more helpful to engage in a process that includes both learning outcome assessment and program review on a 3- or 4-year cycle.

Instead of annual program assessment reports and a 7-year program review, I would find it more helpful to engage in a process that includes both learning outcome assessment and program review on a 3- or 4-year cycle.
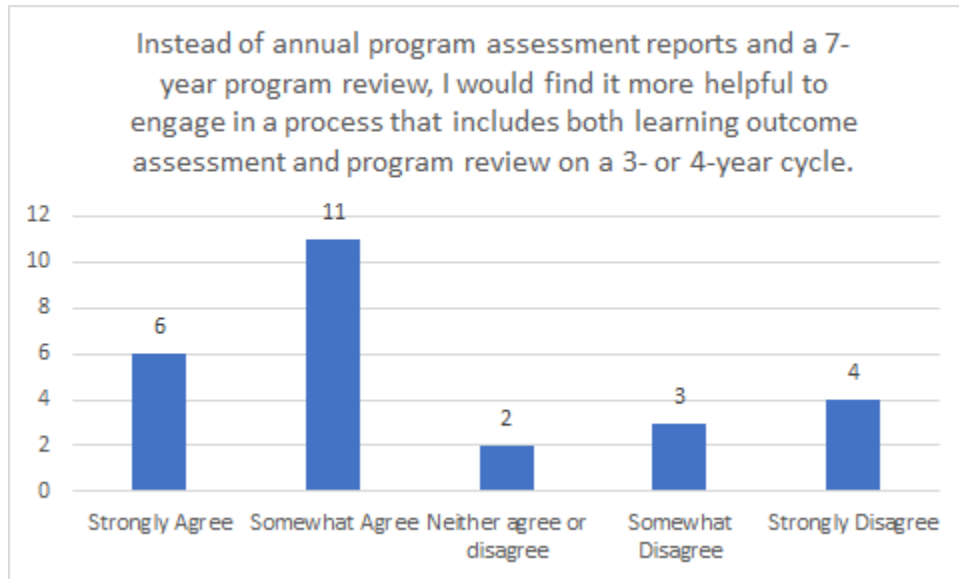
65% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they would find it more helpful to do a program review and assessment of learning outcomes on a 3-4 year cycle.

17. **Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: Instead of the loss of an instructional day, I would support an asynchronous, online learning day for my class to free up a day for working with colleagues on assessment.**
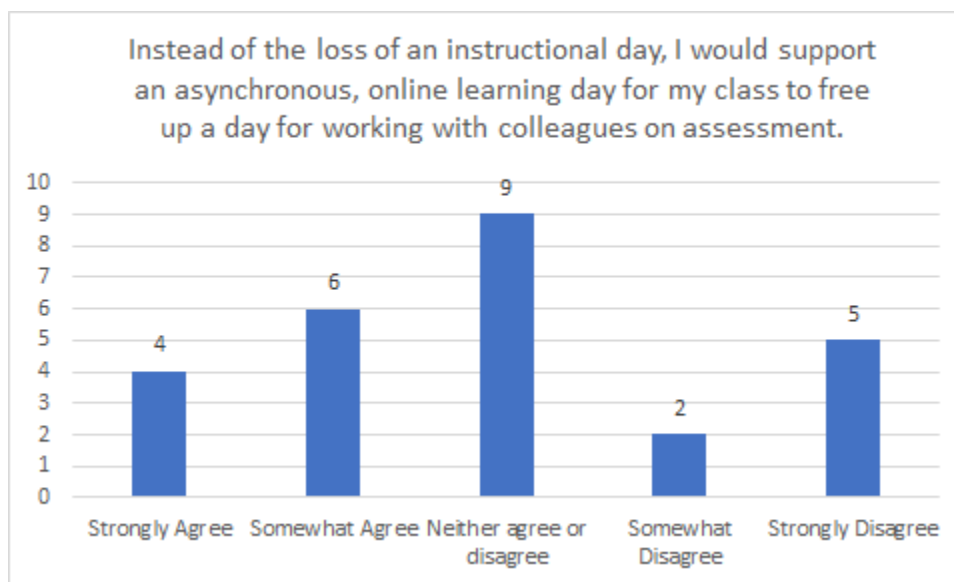
The majority of respondents (35%) don't have an opinion on replacing a day of instruction with an asynchronous day. 38% agree or strongly agree with this option and 26% disagree or strongly disagree with this option. In the qualitative comments, two programs noted that asynchronous days require time to prep and this would create more work, not less.

Initial Recommendations

While a more nuanced analysis of this data is needed, in looking at the immediate patterns that emerged, FSEC recommends these initial first steps:

Explore Alternatives to TK20
It is clear that TK20 is a barrier to faculty engaging in this work (although faculty that have completed one of the TK20 trainings do note that is incredibly helpful). We recommend researching alternative assessment software that might be more user-friendly, automate more of the process, and allow for easier sharing of assessment reports.

If TK20 is our only option, then we recommend exploring and investing in ways to make it easier for faculty to deal with the interface, including making sure that the assessment template matches what is presented in TK20 as well as automatically generating the previous year's report so that faculty can reflect on what they did and make adjustments.

Offer Assessment Professional Development Trainings Every Term
Given that faculty in each program are not engaging in assessment at the same time or in the same ways, it would be advantageous to have training and support available each term, including the summer, to support faculty. It might be beneficial to create a Google Form allowing programs to self-identify when they are engaged in assessment to better allow Dr. Baltzley to know the focused group he might want to check-in with to see if there is particular support they need.

Research Ways of Providing Faculty Support
Overwhelming, faculty note the need for more time, particularly in the form of course release or stipend. While we understand the difficulty of making this suggestion during a time of financial crisis, we also know that engaging in meaningful assessment is important to the healthy growth of our university as well as expected by our accreditors. Faculty note that this work often falls on a single individual, usually the department chair, who is already overburdened with the labor of that position.

Part of providing faculty support might mean treating programs differently than we do now. It is clear that some of our pre-professional programs engage in extensive assessment to meet rigorous external accreditation standards, and they find it extremely frustrating to have to duplicate their work for university assessment. Working out a pathway for these programs to show how their external assessment meets or aligns with the questions being asked by the university would allow these programs to work more efficiently, as well as recognize and respect the work they do to maintain these programs for our students.

Articulate the Goals of University Assessment
It is clear to FSEC that, as a university, we don't have a good understanding of our assessment landscape. Faculty know what they are focused on in their programs, but they don't necessarily know what the university is interested in finding out. This uncertainty has most definitely been exacerbated by the Article 15 rubric, leading many to question what the university really values and wants from these program analyses. We think it would be beneficial to clarify assessment in a few ways:
- What are the goals of university assessment?
- What does the university do with assessment data after receiving it from programs?
- How does university assessment connect to the other kinds of assessment happening on our campus?

Next Steps

This report is only a first step, not an end point, on the journey of refining our assessment practices as a university. We'd like to invite Dr. Baltzley to return to the Faculty Senate in Fall 2021 with:

- A detailed analysis of the assessment survey data & larger discussion about assessment at Faculty Senate or a separate forum
- A response to some of the recommendations made here
- Additional recommendations for moving forward

It's our hope that, at that time, we can begin the work of improving assessment on our campus with additional updates in either winter or spring term on the work that has been done.