

IMPLEMENTING OUTCOME ASSESSMENT PROCESSES: AN EXAMPLE - RETROSPECTIVE, UPDATE AND LESSONS LEARNED

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ABSTRACT

Numerous continuous quality improvement processes have been applied to business schools in response to complaints from employers about the lack of preparedness of students graduating from business schools.

Even though much has been written and said on the subject in the interim, Marks, Beckman and Lacey (2000) issued a recent call for help in applying outcome assessment to marketing education. This paper responds by retrospectively discussing the school's experience and its further steps in implementing outcome assessment.

This paper does not attempt to review the abundant literature on outcome assessment in higher education, choosing instead to more directly focus on the case example. Suffice it to say that many competency outcomes have been identified as pertinent for business (marketing) graduates. Hartley, Cross, and Rudelius (2000) present an excellent review of assessment issues as they might be applied to marketing education.

AN EXAMPLE – RETROSPECTIVE AND UPDATE

This application of outcome assessment occurred in a recently AACSB accredited, smaller business school in a traditionally liberal arts oriented, private, denominationally affiliated university. It participated in the AACSB candidacy process.

Student Outcomes

The school strives to equip all of its students with knowledge and skills commonly expected of business graduates emphasizing the development of both competence and character.

Assessment Process

Various assessment tools have been designed to provide feedback from stakeholders as part of the process. The school has benefited greatly from the peer comparison and longitudinal data from the EBI benchmarking program.

The school also developed a curriculum map, identifying the degree to which each course contributes to the achievement of each outcome.

This tool has been very helpful in guiding course re-design.

The school has gathered extensive data from its "satisfaction-measures" outcome assessment process, discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper. The school relies on course assignment based means of assessing "actual" outcome achievement rather than using standardized tests or an assessment center approach.

Assessment in the Marketing Curriculum

The outcomes are linked to marketing course objectives, learning activities/assessments and grading criteria.

Lessons Learned

The following list summarizes the lessons that have been learned from the school's experience with implementing assessment to date:

- Outcome assessment is a long-term, significant commitment with valuable payoffs.
- Clarifying a school's mission, core values, and distinctiveness and using them to drive the selection of outcomes is necessary.
- The major strength of the outcome assessment process is the school's commitment to openly sharing the feedback and using the results.
- Follow-up exploration into the reasons for low ratings is necessary prior to forming solutions.
- Selecting 2 or 3 "burning" issues to address each year in the school's strategic initiatives.
- Maximize the assessment payoff by carefully designing course assignments.
- Administering exit surveys in the capstone course produces high response rates.
- The pass-along survey to employers of alumni has provided some helpful insights, but response rates have been very low. Response rates from mentors and internship supervisors have been much higher.

What's Next

There are several next steps for the school as it continues to refine its outcome assessment.

(Exhibits and instruments available on request.)