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Assessing Student Learning: Growing the Culture, Cultivating Buy-In, Improving Quality

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Assessing Student Learning: Growing the Culture, Cultivating Buy-In, Improving Quality



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Introduction

All institutions face the common challenge of developing, conducting, and maintaining high quality, purposeful, and relevant student learning assessment processes and protocols.

In 2012 Minnesota State University, Mankato created the *University Assessment Coordinator* position as a reassigned faculty line. This position initially focused on strengthening linkages between institutional, academic, and co-curricular/service program assessment needs through the development of training opportunities, program assessment of learning model development, reporting assistance, data interpretation, and information integration.

This presentation highlights how the process and position was structured, challenges identified and addressed, and successes that emerged from the process.

What is an Assessment Coordinator?

The *University Assessment Coordinator* position was created to provide a direct link between university administration and academic and co-curricular programs to improve the rate of participation and quality of student learning assessment. This position existed in the past on the campus as a part-time course-released faculty position. Over time, it was determined that there was a need to further support the position, and the Faculty Union and Administration agreed that a full-time, course-released faculty member would be the best, most effective approach.

A campus-wide call to fill this position was submitted to all faculty members. Key duties and responsibilities for this position included:

- Provide support and serve as a resource for individual departments & programs requesting assistance with assessing student academic achievement,
- Review and provide written feedback to departments & programs on submitted assessment reports,
- Collaborate with appropriate stakeholders to develop & provide regular assessment related faculty/staff professional development opportunities,
- Work with colleges to support college-level assessment activities,
- Work with sub-meet committees to assess with development, implementation, and assessment of institutional student learning outcomes,
- Support the reporting of student learning assessment results to meeting Higher Learning Commission accreditation requirements.

Administrators and faculty members worked together to develop position description and interview candidates during the Fall 2012 semester, and the Assessment Coordinator position was filled at the end of that term and began in January, 2013. To support institutional needs and allow this position to mature and prosper, the initial assignment was for three consecutive years with the possibility of three additional reassigned years to follow.

Assessing Student Learning : The Response Plan

The new University Assessment Coordinator was provided opportunities to attend professional assessment development trainings. At the same time, the new coordinator in conjunction with the Associate Vice President of Institutional Research, Planning, and Development reviewed how student learning assessment was conducted at the individual, program/department, and university levels.

Concerns identified:

- Only about 58% of all academic programs were submitting annual student learning assessment reports regularly,
- Student learning was not being consistently measured among all co-curricular or service programs/units,
- There was a lack of consistency and uniformity in reporting processes and practices,
- While real efforts had recently been made to provide timely feedback on the reports submitted, faculty members continued to express concern that in the past, too little assessment feedback information had been provided,
- Many members of the faculty community questioned the relevancy and utility of assessing student learning and submitting reports,
- Overall, there was a generally negative attitude toward this process across a broad constellation of stakeholders.

Once concerns were recognized, University Assessment Coordinator developed multiple responses:

- Professional development "certificate" trainings were created. Focused on curriculum/course-level and program/department-level assessment, These were held face-to-face and through the use of teleconferencing (to link to other institutional sites), and spanned 5-6 sessions. Upon completion, participants received a certificate of completion.
- The University Assessment Coordinator contacted all Department Chairs and Deans offering to provide program/department-level trainings on assessment issues and concerns. The Assessment Coordinator and the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning met with program/department members in small groups to answer questions, provided additional information.
- Specific (hard date) reporting deadlines established. The deadline was moved from the end of the spring term (when faculty members are typically very busy to October 15th of each year - predictable and expected deadlines were key to grounding the process and creating predictable report-out expectations.
- A new feedback rubric and reporting template was developed and implemented. This increased the opportunity to collect more consistent information for reporting purposes, provided more useful information for programs/departments, and encourage constructive feedback.
- Annual SLO Assessment Award (named "Pathways Award") created. This award focuses on recognizing programs/departments/units that excelled in effectively collecting, interpreting, and applying data findings.
- Created "Assessment 911 Response" to assist those working on an assessment question quickly.
- Using Desire 2 Learn platform, assessment certificate programs available online and can be used face-to-face, hybrid, or online.
- Recorded and posted "How To" videos to university site to provide online information and assistance.

The Results

Several findings suggest that the University Assessment Coordinator model developed on the Minnesota State University campus has been successful, for example:

- The level of submitting student learning assessment annual reports increased from 58% in 2013 across all academic programs to 88% by May 2014 (75% currently for AY 2014-2015).
- Student support services/co-curricular constituents more active and participating in student learning assessment,
- Student learning assessment plan and report templates were redeveloped and placed on the website for easy access. Faculty members shared that they found this information very useful and accessible. Also stated that they appreciated the flexibility associated with the template while at the same time, understood the need for uniformity in the report to meet other report-out expectations.
- Nearly 50 faculty members completed at least one of the assessment certificate training opportunities, and many completed both.
- Shifting the report turn in deadline from the end of the spring term to the middle of October helped Department Chairs by increasing the likelihood that annual data was completed and analyzed and findings could be vetted through programs/departments.
- The new feedback rubric was well received. This response focused both on quantitatively measuring student learning assessment across multiple areas, but included space where each report received a qualitative response to the strengths of the document and areas where areas of concern may be addressed. This was found to be especially important as it provides the Assessment Coordinator to expand on reasons why a score was given, provide further explanation about an expectation, and invite the author(s) to contact the coordinator with further questions of concerns.
- The annual student learning assessment award (*Pathways Award*) was received positively. The Assessment Coordinator provides data identifying programs/departments that provided very high quality reports and show significant focus on assessing student learning to a faculty/administration committee, who decide award winners. Because there were several examples of high quality work, it was decided to create one top honor and multiple honorable mention assessment awards.
- The "Assessment 911" concept was well received. Initially seen as humorous (but memorable) by many, faculty members working on assessment projects quickly found it very helpful to have someone immediately available when questions were fresh most relevant.

Improving Culture of Assessment

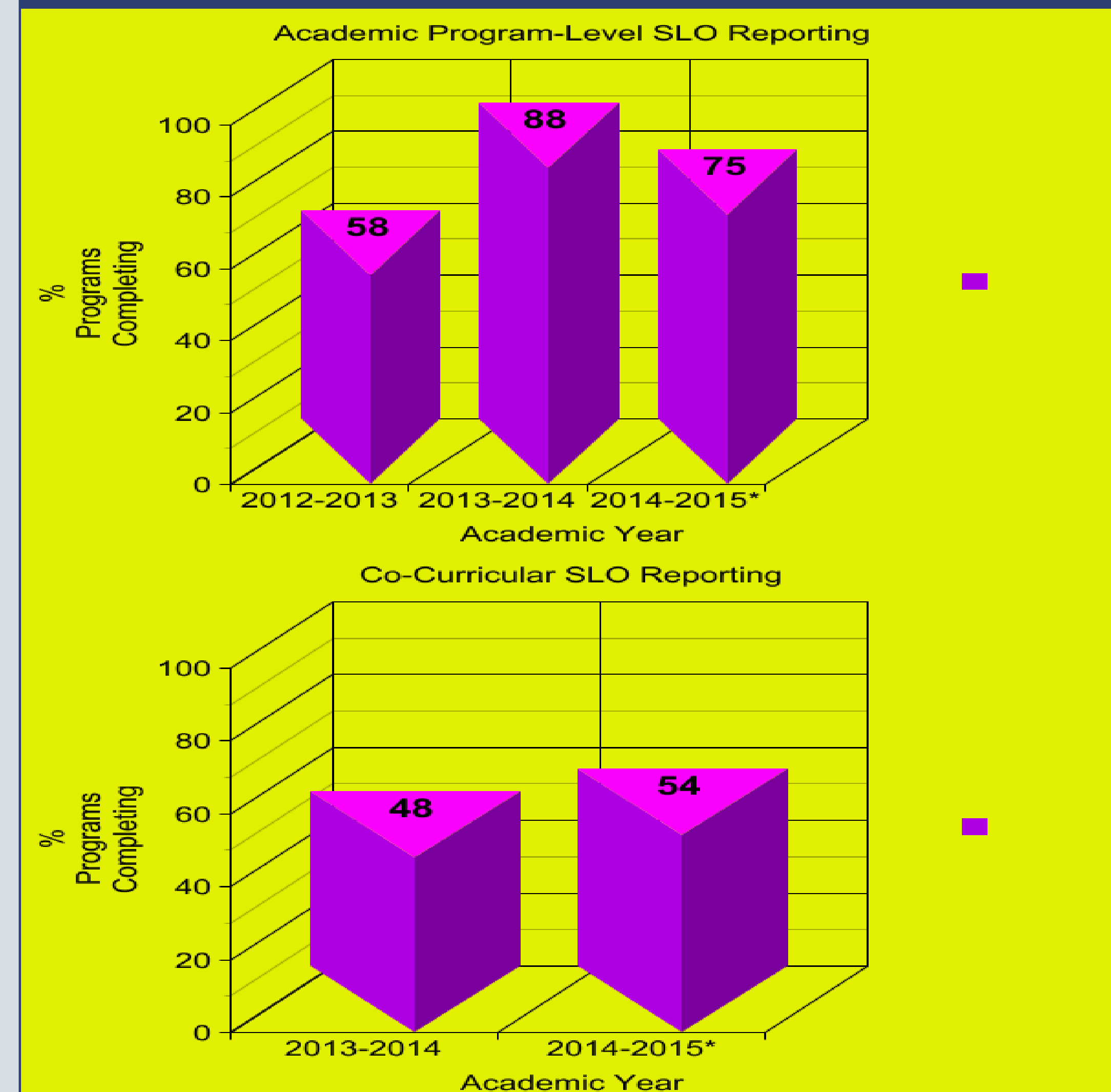
➤ "Culture of Assessment" on campus increased through:

- Creation of Assessment Coordinator position, held by a member of the faculty (not administrative),
- Focused assessment training opportunities,
- "Assessment 911" response,
- Assessment video tutorials,
- Increased buy-in by faculty and staff,
- Increased participation in the overall assessment processes among multiple constituents.

➤ Relevance as to why we need to assess student learning increased through:

- certificate programs, meetings with faculty and department chairs, Deans, and others.
- Trainings that addressed relevancy questions & How-To.
- Identification of how assessment enhances learning and quality of education.

Student Learning Outcome Successes



*Fall 2014/Spring 2015: Reports continue to be received.

Presenter Contact Information

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