

(Re)creating Faculty Authority in Institutional Assessment

Institutional Context

- Salt Lake Community College is a comprehensive open access community college, with certificates and associate's degrees in transfer, applied, and trades areas of study.
- Seven campuses in both urban and suburban locations.
- Emerging Hispanic Serving Institution status
- 2023 – 24 population of 36,000+ credit-seeking students
 - Average age of 25
 - 47% first generation
 - 33% people of color
 - 24% Latino/a identifying

Accreditation Context

- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) has two standards pertaining to faculty authority over curriculum and instruction:
 - 1.C.5 The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs
 - 2.B.1 Within the context of its mission and values, the institution adheres to the principles of academic freedom and independence that protect its constituencies from inappropriate internal and external influences, pressures, and harassment

Authority is Key to Agency

Agency in assessment is the intersection of two key elements:

1. **Authority:** faculty's autonomy and jurisdiction in designing, implementing, and evaluating assessment practices within their courses and programs
2. **Knowledge:** faculty's familiarity and confidence with assessment practices and the research that supports these practices

Faculty who have authority but no knowledge may simply let administration make decisions. Faculty who have knowledge but no authority may feel disempowered by the process and opt out of participation, despite their expertise

Barriers to Faculty Authority

- Assessment policies and practices have often been guided by the necessity to fulfill accrediting body requirements rather than by an internal motivation to enhance student learning
- Faculty frequently feel that assessment simply fulfills a compliance mechanism and is disconnected from the work of teaching and learning. They, therefore, cede the authority accreditors require them to have to administrators working with accreditation requirements or institutional research

Faculty Governance Structure

- Faculty Association
 - Addresses issues of workload, compensation, and working conditions
 - Voluntary membership for all faculty
- Faculty Senate
 - Addresses issues of teaching, research, professional development, and service
 - Academic units are represented by senators elected from full-time faculty
 - Standing committees work on specific topics such as curriculum, student affairs, and academic freedom

Challenges in Assessment

- Central governance of institutional assessment was split and inconsistent
 - Administrative support of assessment work was limited to a single coordinator-level position housed in Institutional Effectiveness, largely focused on compliance and accreditation
 - Faculty governance was limited to a standing committee of Faculty Senate, where leadership was limited to a current senator, leaving few eligible for the position and chairs frequently rotating off when their senate terms ended
- Frequently changing assessment protocols at all levels due to changes in state requirements, accreditation standard revisions, and internal pressure to use normative methods
- Faculty resistance and burnout due to changing protocols and lack of connection back to pedagogy

Changes to Improve Faculty Authority

- Learning Outcomes Assessment office
 - Under new leadership, has adopted an anti-authoritative role at the college, after several years of a more compliance/accountability model of assessment.
 - Offers support and resources but no mandatory methods or
 - Moved into Academic Affairs where the director has a direct reporting line to the Provost, just as the President of Faculty Senate does
- New structure for faculty governance over assessment through the Learning Assessment Advisory Committee (LAAC)
 - Moved out of Faculty Senate to a college-wide scope to allow for more flexibility in leadership
 - Created an Associate Director of Learning Outcomes Assessment position for a current faculty member to co-chair the committee on a three-year term

Initial Results

- Successes
 - Improved consistency of leadership and meetings
 - Clarified the scope of the Learning Outcomes Assessment office and the responsibilities of program leads and faculty
 - Increased opportunities for faculty professional development around curriculum and assessment, particularly program-level assessment work
 - Drafted comprehensive college-wide policy on assessment practices and expectations at all levels (course, program, institution)
- Areas of continued work
 - Recruitment of faculty members remains an area of concern
 - Defining the responsibilities of LAAC members beyond specific committee tasks and work within academic units