

College of Fine Arts 2009-10 Assessment Report

Overview

The culture of assessment continues to grow within the College of Fine Arts. I base this assertion on (a) the number of process refinements and (b) numerous outcomes that have defined new programs, informed program improvement, or affirmed program effectiveness. While notable progress has been made, the University Assessment Steering Committee pointed out opportunities exist for strengthening assessment. These will be addressed in the responses to collegiate review questions that follow.

What activities have the college undertaken to help departments with assessment?

Associate Dean Jim Hopfensperger served as the chair of the CFA Assessment Committee, meeting collectively and individually with departmental/school assessment personnel throughout the academic year. He encouraged and assisted the units, sharing best practices across the college and monitoring progress at various stages of plan implementation.

Dean Merrion met with unit chairs and directors to underscore the value and strategic use of assessment data as they relate to retention outcomes, progress toward degree, alumni satisfaction and success, program review, re-accreditation, co-curricular activities, and most directly, curricular improvement.

The dean's office also provided a modest stipend to faculty in the Department of Dance to advance its assessment plan during summer 2009.

Based on the department reports, what strengths and opportunities for improvement exist within the college with respect to assessment?

One concern cited by the UASC was the lack of closing the assessment loop between documentation and action. This year there is ample evidence of closing the assessment loop. In the Department of Dance, for example, curriculum change, staffing change, scheduling revisions, and rethinking the program admission process all occurred due to assessment-based decisions. The data convincingly illustrated need for specific changes and action steps are underway.

Another example occurred in the Department of Theatre. Significant overhaul of the programs took place as all Bachelor of Arts degrees were eliminated and Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees were added. Cumulative assessment data guided the nature, number, sequence, and relationship of courses in a substantial way. Two substantial actions have taken place: The new programs have been approved and a revision of the assessment plan for better alignment has occurred.

The UASC also suggested some faculty members may be fearful of inadequate assessment results. That condition does not seem to be present in the review of Trac-Dat reports and their narrative reflections among any CFA unit. In the Frostic School of Art (as well as the Department of Dance), for instance, faculty retreats were focused on assessment results. Frank, constructive and healthy discussion of

outcomes took place. Reminded by the Korean proverb, *Talk does not cook the rice*, Art faculty, for instance, addressed specific strategies to improve the exit portfolio of BA students.

In the School of Music, a four-year assessment cycle was used to capture profiles of students at various facets of performance development. All evidence affirmed desired outcomes were achieved. However, opportunities exist to strengthen our assessment work:

- All of the units need designated faculty time to address assessment work carefully. While retreats offer condensed and focused attention on an annual or biennial basis, the departments and schools approach assessment as a continuous activity. It requires frequent data gathering, analysis, and reflection. In some units, need for specific training of faculty is required (and available at discipline-specific conferences.) More faculty need to be engaged in assessment work, as well.
- Some assessment plans primarily focus on what the programs currently deliver. As the arts industry evolves, however, there are opportunities to look beyond measuring and evaluating what we currently do. Rather, what skills, knowledge and behaviors do arts professionals need beyond the current curricula on campus? To remain distinctive and competitive, this question needs to be explored to integrate more expansive and forward thinking, allow for curricular experimentation, and incorporate co-curricular experience. For example, as we pursue more service learning in agencies and organizations and as students gain professional immersion experience during their degree programs, we will be challenged to identify the rubrics through external lenses, i.e., our professional partners.

What assistance to the college would be helpful to address the opportunities for improvement identified above?

The following assistance might enhance success in the College of Fine Arts:

- Assessment grants to departments for specific training
- Additional assigned time for assessment chairs
- Travel support to observe best practices at institutions with proven success
- Research support to explore and/or devise improved instruments
- Conference support to acquire more facility in disciplinary assessment practices
- Guidance from the university's office of service learning for assessment of off-campus learning