Powerful Data: The Benefits of Direct Assessments in Student Affairs

Nathan Lindsay, Aimee Hourigan, & Jenn Smist

March 27, 2012   NASPA Webinar

Assessment, Evaluation and Research Knowledge Community

- If you are not a member of the Knowledge Community, consider joining!

- Our next webinar - "We've Heard Your Voice": Sharing Data and Action Steps with Students – will be Tuesday, April 24 from 2-3 pm EST.

- Nominations for the new Assessment Innovation Award are due Friday, March 30. For more information go to http://naspa.org/kc/saaer/awards.cfm

Presentation Overview

- Historically, assessment in student affairs has often used indirect assessment

- Recently, there has been a profession-wide call to include more direct assessments in student affairs

- This presentation will go over three separate programs at UNCW that have used direct assessments

Presentation Objectives

As a result of attending this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe what direct assessments are
- Identify several key principles related to direct assessments
- Learn about three programs at UNCW that used direct assessments, which can then be compared and adapted for use at their own institutions

Presentation Objectives (cont.)

Participants in this session will have the opportunity to:

- Receive information on how such initiatives can be effectively designed, implemented, assessed, and applied.
- Ask questions and share best practices about direct assessments

I understand the differences between direct and indirect assessment.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
6. Don't Know/Not Applicable

Which of the following is most likely to be a direct assessment?

1. Needs Assessment
2. Satisfaction Survey
3. Quiz given after a Workshop
4. Focus Group
5. None of the Above
6. Not Sure

Indirect assessment

- A primary goal of assessment is to deliver truthful and clear information that can be used to inform and improve outcomes (Walvoord, 2004).
- Indirect assessments partially address this objective
  - We use these as a means to gain knowledge of students' perspectives.
  - The accuracy of the data is sometimes suspect, because the information is self-reported.

Direct Assessment

- Direct assessments are a good way to observe very tangible evidence of assessment outcomes

- Suskie (2009) defines direct assessments as:
    - Using "structured, predetermined response options that can be summarized into meaningful numbers and analyzed statistically"

Direct Assessment

- Direct assessments indicate what participants actually know or are able to do.
- Direct assessment can take many forms:
  - Quizzes
  - Commercial tests
  - Rubrics
  - Portfolios
- All direct assessments share a common element of demonstrating the students' learning.
- Direct assessments are preferable for accountability and accreditation.

Indirect vs. Direct

- Indirect assessments often provide a snapshot of students' perspectives on various programs
- Direct assessments, however, are a means by which students can demonstrate the knowledge they have obtained.
  - For example, indirect assessments might ask students whether they think they learned certain principles at a workshop, whereas a direct assessment would test them on these principles.

My institution uses a sufficient number of direct assessments.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
6. Don't Know/Not Applicable

I am aware of an area or program at my institution where I could incorporate direct assessment.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
6. Don't Know/Not Applicable

UNCW Direct Assessment Programs

Three student affairs offices have conducted large direct assessment initiatives:

- Housing and Residence Life
- CROSSROADS
  - Substance abuse prevention and education
- Leadership UNCW
  - Provides opportunities to become engaged, ethical citizens by promoting inclusivity and self-empowerment

Direct Assessment #1: Housing and Residence Life

- The Residence Life staff used a series of direct learning outcome assessments (i.e., quizzes) to gauge learning on a variety of training topics including:
  - Crisis response, programming knowledge, diversity education, and student conduct procedures.

- RAs were given a 20 question test—four separate times—before, during, and after their training.

- The object of providing multiple post-tests was to gauge the RA's retention of vital knowledge surrounding the training topics throughout the year.

Direct Assessment #1: Housing and Residence Life Results

- The following results were observed

  - RA's scored an average of 9.8 points higher from pre-test to the initial post test

  - The second and third post-test results were slightly lower but consistent
    - Indicating a relatively strong retention of information

Direct Assessment #1: Housing and Residence Life Results

- Results (cont.):
  - RA's from various staffs were scoring low from the beginning of the year to end of the year on a consistent group of questions

  - Returning staff members scored significantly higher on the pre-test (+12.6 on average), but the average difference on all post-tests was very similar between the two groups.

Direct Assessment #1:
Housing and Residence Life Action Steps

- Outcomes from the direct assessment:
  - The Residence Life staff used this information to redesign and strengthen Resident Assistant training by:
    - Focusing on improving individual training sessions, and providing feedback to returning presenters
    - Creating more consistent messages between full departmental training sessions and individual staff training sessions
    - Choosing better methods of instruction in some areas of training.

Direct Assessment #1:
Housing and Residence Life Action Steps

- As a result of direct assessment, numerous improvements have been made in the RA training and retention process.

- The direct learning outcomes are being used again this year with the hopes of beginning some on-line training modules geared towards returning staff members in the future.

Direct Assessment #2: CROSSROADS Overview

- CROSSROADS is dedicated to a harm reduction approach. It uses assessment and collaboration with on and off-campus partners to address substance abuse from an environmental management perspective

- CROSSROADS hires students as peer educators to promote substance abuse prevention on campus through, educational programming, service, and outreach.

  - These students develop and execute comprehensive educational programs, facilitate presentations for classes, residence halls, and student organizations, advocate for a healthy campus environment, and act as a role model for other students.

Direct Assessment #2: CROSSROADS Assessments

- We evaluate the peer educators' achievement of these goals through:
  - A direct assessment of content knowledge and behavior change
  - Presentation rubrics
  - Self-reports and peer rating of their skills
  - Observation and focus groups.

Direct Assessment #2: CROSSROADS Results

- Findings Indicate:
    - Peer educators learned most of the material covered during training, but we identified specific areas that needed more attention
    - The average overall score was 70%, with individual averages ranging from 50% to 86%
    - The most frequently missed questions were related to campus norms statistics, which were reinforced in additional trainings throughout the year

Direct Assessment #2: CROSSROADS Action Steps

- After reviewing these data, the August 2010 peer educator training included a more in-depth training on drugs, as well as an interactive game to reinforce their knowledge.

- These learning activities supplement the training the peers receive through reading articles and developing programs.

Direct Assessment #2: CROSSROADS Rubrics

- A rubric is a "set of criteria and a scoring scale that is used to assess and evaluate students' work" (Cambell, Melenyzer, Nettles, & Wyman, 2000).

- Rubrics can:
  - ensure fidelity to intervention design
  - formalize expectations for behavior
  - evaluate the intended learning outcomes for peer educators.

- Assesses facilitation skills, body language, non-judgmental approach, and content knowledge

- Used to assist in training peer educators, provide immediate feedback to individual presenters and to evaluate and reflect on their growth over the semester.

Research on Rubrics – Reasons Why They Increase the Quality of Assessment

- Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson (2004)
  - Norm Expectations
    - Inform students what you're looking for
  - Opportunities to see how one has improved
  - Make ranking, ratings, and scores more meaningful
  - Help students identify their learning and development
- Suskie (2009)
  - Speed up evaluation process
  - Due to their multifaceted nature, can be uniquely developed to fit project needs
  - Easy, fair, and effective ways to conduct evaluations

CROSSROADS – Student Presentations

- One initiative of "*Changing a High Risk Drinking Culture Through the Lens of Gender*" was a first year seminar presentation
- Purpose of presentation:
  - discuss gender roles and how they contribute to high-risk drinking
  - change expectations about college life and alcohol use
  - increase the use of protective strategies
- Assessment of the presentation:
  - reduces key alcohol expectancies and reduces the typical increase of drinking among first-year students who received this presentation when compared to control
  - Rigorous experimental design over the last five years
- Trained peer educators co-present this intervention with professional staff.

CROSSROADS – The Rubric

- Rubric designed to:
  - Provide concrete feedback to presenters
  - Evaluate learning outcomes
  - Assist in training process

- Rubric includes assessment of the peer educators':
  - Facilitation skills
  - Body language
  - Non-judgmental approach
  - Content knowledge

- Ratings ranged from Poor to Great

Direct Assessment #2: CROSSROADS Rubric for Facilitation Skills

Poor	Good	Great
• Asks yes/no questions • Asks questions that are too long or too complicated • Doesn't wait for class to think/answer • Doesn't repeat students' answers • Speaks too quietly • Reads from outline	• Asks open-ended questions • Gives class time to think/answer • Re-phrases questions as needed • Repeats students' answers • Maintains audience's attention • Explains content (signs/symptoms, protective strategies, etc)	• Summarizes answers • Makes connections to other students' answers, video, previous discussion, etc • Asks relevant follow up questions • Asks follow-up questions which generate additional responses from audience • Engages audience by asking questions to explain content

CROSSROADS Findings

- New Presenters:
  - Building confidence and learning info
  - Developing brief intro to office (elevator speech)
  - Basic facilitation skills: repeating answers, giving audience time to think, where to stand
- Experienced Presenters:
  - Advanced facilitation skills: rephrasing questions, building on audience's answers, more in-depth discussion
  - Handling bigger challenges: unusual questions, talkative classes
  - Preparation & co-facilitating with newer peers

CROSSROADS – Benefits of the Rubric

- Immediately:
  - Prepare students to give and receive criticism
  - Provide written feedback to peer educators
  - Improve on-going training efforts and attend to specific areas that may need additional focus

- Long Term:
  - Assist peer educators in reflecting on their growth over the semester
  - Inform the training program
  - Affirm that students are improving their skills as a result of their experiences in this position

Rubrics: Challenges & Suggestions

- Developing your rubric will take time and many drafts.
  - Have experienced presenters review it
- Incorporate the rubric into the regular routine of the presentation.
  - Schedule observers for presentations
- Train the observers to ensure consistency.
- Prepare students for reflection and criticism.
  - Lead by example – start with them observing.
  - There will always be room for improvement.
- Scoring the rubrics takes extra time as well

Direct Assessment #3: Leadership UNCW Overview

- The Leadership UNCW program provides intentional learning opportunities for students to become engaged, ethical citizens by promoting inclusivity and self-empowerment.

- Incorporates collaboration among departments within Student Affairs and Academic Affairs

- Increases the depth and breadth of co-curricular leadership education opportunities available to UNCW students.

Direct Assessment #3: Leadership UNCW

- Students have the choice to participate in one of over 25 different leadership workshops, or in a defined series of workshops, to work towards earning one of nine Leadership UNCW certificates.

- Direct assessments have been implemented in the workshop evaluation process.

- In 2009-2010, each workshop evaluation asked two direct assessment questions to specifically address the learning outcomes and key concepts of the workshop.

Direct Assessment #3: Leadership UNCW Results

- Overall, these direct assessment questions yielded responses that closely aligned with the material presented in the workshop.

- The only variations appeared between workshops in which different facilitators were in charge.

- While students seemed to understand the key concepts of the workshop curriculum presented, it is possible that the delivery of the curriculum varied for different presenters.

Direct Assessment #3: Leadership UNCW Action Steps

■ These findings resulted in two goals for further improvement:

1. Address the minor inconsistencies in responses based on the presenter, to ensure that students are receiving a common message

2. Improve the dissemination and completion of evaluations in each workshop

I am aware of an area or program at my institution where I could incorporate direct assessment.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
6. Don't Know/Not Applicable

Sharing Best Practices…

- In what other ways have you conducted direct assessments on your campus?

- What are some possibilities that you have considered for other direct assessments?

- How can student affairs professionals be encouraged to conduct more direct assessments?

References

- Bresciani, M. J., Zelna, C. L., & Anderson, J. A. (2004). *Assessing student learning and development.* National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

- Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning.* San Franciso, CA. Jossey-Bass.

- Walvoord, B. E. (2004). *Assessment clear and simple.* San Franciso, CA. Jossey-Bass.