Summary: Improvements in Programs, Services, and Quality Linked to Assessment

Introduction

Since 2003, the Division of Student Affairs has conducted assessments of both operational effectiveness and student learning in all of its departments and units. Assessments have become progressively more sophisticated in methods and execution—including cross-departmental and whole-Division student learning outcomes in key areas—and are now being used to monitor achievement of the goals and objectives of the Division’s strategic plan, which is closely tied to the University’s larger plan.

Over the past three academic years, assessment data have driven important improvements in Student Affairs programs, services, and quality, including the replacement of programs that did not show evidence of efficacy. In some cases, assessment data have influenced departmental priorities. Examples are provided in the list that follows.

Examples

- **Program improvements to increase student success in job searches and graduate school applications**: Every institution of higher education is being held accountable by students and their families, elected officials, and the public for preparing graduates for success—and especially for securing good employment or admission to graduate school after graduation. University Career Services has responded to that challenge by strengthening programs that help students present themselves effectively in the job search or as candidates for admission to graduate school. By conducting routine information sessions about potential employers before students were interviewed by those employers, Career Services increased the proportion of students judged by employers as likely to move forward in the interview process from 47% to 67%—an increase of 45%. To improve the effectiveness of students’ resumes, Career Services developed a resume rubric that gives students better guidance in preparing resumes and assures consistency in staff evaluations of the
draft resumes; assessment of the efficacy of this new process is underway. Similarly, Career Services was dissatisfied with low response rates in a traditional survey of students’ progression through the steps of application to graduate school; this led to revision of the Graduate and Professional School Planning program, including development of an “Essay Effectiveness Checklist” and more frequent (and routine) follow-up with students during the application process.

- **Improved career planning**: University Career Services learned through assessment that while students learned the steps in the career development process and in meeting their goals, students’ overall engagement with the career development process did not meet expectations. Career Services therefore made significant revisions in career counseling, including refocusing counseling sessions, a redesigned process of developing and evaluating career plans, and improved activities and worksheets. These improvements have increased student engagement with career planning as measured by indicators such as their submission of assessment data—now at 80% of eligible students.

- **Improved access to services**

  - The Counseling and Testing Center learned from utilization data that 41% of students did not return to CTC after their initial visit to complete the required paperwork and an hour-long counseling assessment; CTC also discovered that most initial visits were being done by unlicensed trainees—so more than two out of five who came to CTC for counseling did not get that service and were seen only once, by an unlicensed trainee. Further, CTC found that unlicensed trainees were responsible for triage of 90% of students who sought emergency services and that there were long delays (as much as 30 days) between a student’s initial request for counseling and the first appointment. In response to these findings, CTC instituted a stepped-care model of service in Fall 2010, including longer initial consultations done by senior, licensed staff; increasing the availability of group therapy sessions, and adding psychoeducational skill-building workshops; CTC also restructured its training program and added a full-time Coordinator of Client Advocacy to assist with referrals. Initially, wait list numbers declined, but times between first contact and initial consultation, though much shorter than in the previous model, remained higher than CTC regarded as...
acceptable. Accordingly, a walk-in system for same-day initial consultation was implemented in Spring 2012. Taken together, these changes have increased the volume of students requesting services (and receiving them) by more than 100%.

- The **Student Health Clinic**, in a careful review of utilization, learned that students’ access to same-day appointments was limited by certain patterns of provider scheduling. By opening up more same-day appointment slots for all providers and changing the distribution of those appointments during the day, the Clinic was able to increase utilization by 30% and improve student satisfaction. After these improvements, the Clinic noticed the need for earlier care for students who had more urgent same-day problems; accordingly, the Clinic designed and implemented a same-day triage system to improve service, allowing students with more urgent complaints to be seen sooner.

- The **Office of African American Student Services and Programs (OAASSP)** works to support academic progression and increase rates of retention, completion, and graduation for African American students. Assessments of student learning and operational effectiveness conducted over the period 2007-2012 almost universally showed achievement of desired outcomes and achievement of intended effectiveness metrics. But the numbers of students participating in these programs and services was small when compared with the size of the population of African American students enrolled at Georgia State; the available data did not clearly demonstrate that the Office was in fact improving academic progression, retention, or graduation for a significant number of African American students. Overall, data did not show that there was any large-scale impact on the student body as a whole. Therefore, OAASSP changed its approach and instituted a cohort model to reach a broader proportion of African American students who had particular need for the programs and services offered by the Office. To assess the effectiveness of its work and the degree to which its programs and services affect academic progression, OAASSP has changed its assessment plans and sharpened its focus on students’ progression through the University. In support of those
changes, the Office is working with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to better capture data about the patterns of student progression and the effects of OAASSP’s interventions and interactions with students in the chosen cohort.

- **Improvements in student participation and engagement**

  - The Office of Educational Opportunity and TRIO Programs, which was not satisfied with the level of students’ participation in a web-based financial literacy course, changed the software used and required students to participate if they wanted to maintain privileges in the Department’s computer lab. Although 2012/2013 assessment data are not yet collated, staff observations suggest much higher rates of participation in the new financial literacy course.

  - Recreational Services has increased daily and total usage of the Recreation Center between 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 by hosting more special events and new Intramural events.

- **Improvements in service quality**

  - The Office of Disability Services, having observed a consistent decline in students’ satisfaction with services between fall and spring semesters over the period 2009-2012, took steps to address those findings—improving the testing environment (better noise abatement) and expanding academic coaching. More important, Disability Services also revised its assessments to focus on service quality rather than simply satisfaction; new data are pending.

  - University Housing, after evaluating its existing guest check-in and check-out system, determined that it was ineffective. To correct that problem, Housing installed a new software system and improved the process of checking-in and checking-out. Since those changes were made in Fall 2012, detailed assessment data are not yet available—but staff observations strongly suggest that a much higher proportion of check-outs are being captured, guests are more easily identifiable, and students who host guests are being held more accountable.
- The Office of Civic Engagement found that as many as 15% of service opportunities offered on Fridays to students in Freshman Learning Communities (FLC) were unpopular and unfulfilling to participants. OCE changed the community service component of the FLC program by offering the same service projects during the week rather than just on Friday and partnered with more agencies to address a greater range of social justice issues in the greater Atlanta area. Repeat surveys showed higher student satisfaction with both the programs and their scheduling.

- **Strengthening student conduct process:** The Office of the Dean of Students, after several years’ success in achieving a desired student learning outcome related to violations of the student code of conduct, changed the focus of the required reflective essay to prompt students to say what they will do differently in the future. The Office is currently redesigning the assessment plan to accommodate the change in focus, and will be instituting a new program, “Be the Change,” that incorporates both required community service and a reflection paper. In addition, the Office has changed the language in another question on the required reflective essay to focus on career opportunities rather than career goals because of a decline of 5% in the proportion of students who recognized that their violation of the student code of conduct affected their career goals—because what affects an immediate career opportunity, such as a particular job after graduation, does not necessarily affect the overall career goal.

- **Intercultural competency:** Assessment data showing that previous programs were not effective in increasing students’ intercultural awareness led University Career Services to discontinue those programs and replace them with an innovative Culture and Career Readiness Certificate Program (CCRC) program that assists students who have studied abroad in effectively presenting their experiences on their resumes and in interviews.

- **Reduced energy consumption and costs:** The Facilities unit within University Housing is working to reduce energy consumption within the residence halls/apartments on campus and incorporate more sustainable practices with the overall goal of saving money and demonstrating excellence in facilities practice. The following initiatives were implemented: (1) installing a water economizer, (2)
changing to CFL light bulbs, (3) energy reduction during peak hours, and (4) student programming to influence student behavior and culture in the residence halls. Using data gathered from a power usage dashboard, Housing can demonstrate there has been a steady decrease in power consumption and electric bills over the course of four years. Efforts to shift patterns of student behavior toward sustainability continue and have resulted in the creation of a student Green Team that develops campus programming and provides recommendations to Facilities for ways to reduce energy and water consumption.