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Improving Academic Quality through Outcomes Assessment and Active Learning Strategies – A Model for Effective Institutional Change

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Outcomes Assessment and Active Learning Strategies – a Model for Effective Institutional Change

Mary C. Hassinger, Ph. D. & Theresa R. Moore, Ph.D.
Stephens College & Viterbo University
SOTL Commons
March 12, 2009
• Case study
• Overview of the project
• Summary of findings
• Implications for SOTL work
The Case

Midwest University is small, comprehensive, Catholic liberal arts university with an undergraduate student enrollment of approximately 2000 and 100 full time faculty. There are numerous programs within the university that rely on long term, adjunct faculty. Midwest University had its last accreditation visit in the Fall of 1998. Among other issues, the university was strongly advised to “ramp up” its culture of assessment.
What measures could the university take at the institutional level to initiate change that would not only satisfy the next accreditation visit, but also be amenable to the faculty and help to build an environment that values a SOTL culture?
What motivated us?


• "it is apparent that there is not yet a strong assessment culture in place at Viterbo…"
Ingredients for successful academic change

Never ask faculty to implement a change which faculty believe they are unprepared professionally to carry out

Faculty self-confidence is essential to gaining...commitment

Directed and focused faculty development has been a significant ingredient...in preparing...faculty...to successfully implement academic change

Permanent and significant changes usually require the acquisition of new resources

USDE Aid for Institutional Development Programs (Title III)

- Programs support improvements in educational quality, management and financial stability at qualifying postsecondary institutions.

- Funding is focused on institutions that enroll large proportions of minority and financially disadvantaged students with low per-student expenditures.

- Five-year development grants

- Funds may be used for faculty development, administrative management, development and improvement of academic programs, joint use of facilities, and student services.

http://www.ed.gov/programs/iduestitle3a/index.html
Goals of the Title III Project

- Goal 1: increase the use of outcomes based assessment in courses and programs to measure and improve student learning;

- Goal 2: increase the use of active learning strategies and technologies to effect learner-centered instruction.
“Becoming Learner Centered” Project Concept

The ability of faculty to translate broad program goals into course specific goals is another assessment success factor – Diamond (1998)

A thoughtful development of assessment encourages faculty to align expected learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment – Palomba and Banta (1999)
Viterbo University Assessment Framework

- Competency growth plans within programs
- Intended student learning outcomes for program
- Curriculum map
- Course embedded assessments
- Direct and indirect assessment methods
- Criteria identified with rubrics when necessary
- Instructional design supports outcome achievement
Faculty Development

- New faculty development personnel
- In-house training institutes, workshops, and retreats
- Summer work stipends
- Conference travel funds
- Faculty coaches
- Resource library and website
**Project planning and grant writing**

- **Key section:** Activities and implementation strategy

### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY AND TIMETABLE FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. NAME OF APPLICANT INSTITUTION:</th>
<th>2. ACTIVITY TITLE: Improving Academic Quality through Outcomes Assessment and Active Learning Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td>Viterbo University</td>
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<th>3. SPECIFIC TASKS</th>
<th>4. PRIMARY PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>5. METHODS INVOLVED</th>
<th>6. TANGIBLE RESULTS</th>
<th>7. TIMEFRAME</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(Year 3 continued)</strong> Train Cohort 3 faculty on learning outcomes and assessment strategies</td>
<td>Outcomes Assessment Specialist, Instructional Design Specialist, Faculty Coaches</td>
<td>Use protocol to deliver summer institute training; Faculty Coaches conduct ongoing small group meetings with Cohort 3</td>
<td>Cohort 3 faculty trained on learning outcomes and assessment</td>
<td>5/06 6/06</td>
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<td>Design Cohort 3 learning outcomes and assessment</td>
<td>Cohort 3, Instructional Design Specialist, Faculty Coaches</td>
<td>Trained faculty design learning outcomes and assessment for classroom and virtual environments</td>
<td>Learning outcomes and assessment designed and ready to pilot</td>
<td>6/06 8/06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train Cohort 2 faculty on active learning strategies</td>
<td>Outcomes Assessment Specialist, Instructional Design Specialist, Faculty Coaches</td>
<td>Use protocol to deliver training workshops; faculty coaches conduct ongoing small group meetings with Cohort 2 faculty</td>
<td>Cohort 2 faculty trained on active learning strategies</td>
<td>6/06 6/06</td>
</tr>
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<td>Select and train Cohort 2 subset for online active learning development</td>
<td>Activity Director, Instructional Design Specialist, Faculty Coaches</td>
<td>Subset of Cohort 2 faculty selected; receive training focusing on active learning strategies using online technologies</td>
<td>Subset faculty trained for active learning strategies using online technologies</td>
<td>6/06 6/06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop active learning strategies</td>
<td>Cohort 2, Instructional Design Specialist, Faculty Coaches</td>
<td>Trained faculty design active learning strategies for classroom and virtual environments</td>
<td>Active learning strategies designed and ready to pilot</td>
<td>6/06 9/06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate plans and strategies for full implementation of Cohort 1 program assessment plans</td>
<td>Institutional Researcher, Activity Director, Task Force, Cohort 1 faculty</td>
<td>Plans, responsibilities, and timelines are reviewed</td>
<td>Program assessment plans are evaluated, modified and approved for implementing</td>
<td>7/06 9/06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 4</strong> Pilot learning outcomes and assessment incorporating active learning strategies</td>
<td>Cohort 2 faculty, Instructional Design Specialist, Faculty Coaches</td>
<td>Cohort 2 programs pilot learner-centered outcomes assessment; on-going Cohort group sharing facilitated by Faculty Coaches</td>
<td>Assessment data for Cohort 2 courses is collected; student learning improves</td>
<td>10/06 5/07</td>
</tr>
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Budget considerations

- Overall budget: $1.78 million over five years
  - Stipends: 32%
  - Personnel: 28%
  - Equipment, Technology, and Supplies: 37%
  - Travel: 3%

- Conservative planning: carryover funds helped to cover additional stipends, new technology initiatives, other unforeseen developments
Accomplishments

- 94% of faculty reviewed and refined piloted learning outcomes and assessment strategies
- 105% faculty submitted active learning pilot plans
- 41 undergraduate program assessment plans submitted by five Schools; 71% reference courses from their curriculum in the plan
- 20% of faculty have designed technology-based active learning strategies for courses
- Assessment reporting via Nuventive™ TracDat
- Student electronic portfolios
Accomplishments related to SOTL

• Faculty dissemination – 15 presentations at national and international assessment or teaching and learning conferences in 2007-2008

• Annual “demonstration fairs”
Some example SOTL projects...

*Increasing Knowledge and Empathy of Family Issues Using Cooperative Learning Groups (Social Work)*

*Engaging Students in Introductory Biology Classes through the Use of Clickers (Biology)*

*Assessing Ethics Education in a Capstone Course (Accounting)*

*Learning by Doing: Using PowerLab Data Acquisition Units to Help Students Learn Research Skills (Psychology)*
Demonstration fairs show the value of a local SOTL culture

www.viterbo.edu/academic/titleiii/faculty/events/demofaire_jan08.html
NSSE Data

- Level of academic challenge (LAC), active and collaborative learning (ACL), and student-faculty interaction (SFI) all improved between 2006 and 2007 for VU score relative to NSSE Top 50% Mean score.

- 2007 LAC at senior level exceeds 2007 NSSE Top 50% mean score by 1.4%.

- 2007 ACL at senior level exceeds 2007 NSSE Top 50% mean score by 8.4%.
Viterbo NSSE results

2007 Level of Academic Challenge by Comparison Groups

- Viterbo U
- Catholic C & U
- Benchmark Schools
- NSSE 2007

Comparison groups: FIRST YEAR, SENIORS
Viterbo NSSE results

2007 Active & Collaborative Learning by Comparison Groups
Assessment

- 94.0% of full-time faculty revised syllabi to reflect a **correlation between learning outcomes and assessment strategies**
Number of participants = 67
Number of active learning projects = 95
68.0% of faculty report being highly committed to incorporating more active learning techniques into the class.

Commitment to ACTIVE LEARNING beyond the Grant period
Faculty self rating of extent of their learning through the project

- 45.00% moderate to high
- 38.00% very high
“Faculty...have embraced the challenge of assessing student learning. With courage and extraordinary good will, they have been willing to ask the difficult questions... This two-pronged approach—developing insights about learning based on data and involving students more meaningfully in their learning—is rapidly transforming Viterbo into a learning-centered institution.”

(Dr. Mary Huba, Assessment Specialist)
Faculty chairpersons were unanimous in their agreement that the Title III grant has had a positive impact on the Viterbo campus, especially related to the issue of assessment and creating a common language on campus for talking about assessment related issues.

(Susan Hatfield, Ph.D., Winona State University Assessment Director, 2007 External Evaluator)