

Linking Academic and Unit Assessment

By Don Sutherland

Among the presentations at the recent [Assessment Network of New York](#) (ANNY) conference was a discussion concerning linked planning, budgeting, and assessment. Casey O'Brien, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, and Nicole Strevell-Childrose, Assistant Professor of History, at [Columbia-Greene Community College](#) made a presentation entitled "Linking Academic and Unit Assessment to Build an Institutional Report Card." They discussed the College's experience in developing and implementing an Excel-based mechanism for tying planning, budgeting, and assessment together.

Columbia-Greene Community College is part of the State University of New York (SUNY system). It is located in Hudson New York and has 2,118 undergraduate students. The College offers Associate's Degrees and certificates in a variety of areas including the arts, science, applied science, and occupational science.

Columbia-Greene's system has five goals: (1) linking academic and unit assessment; (2) assessment reporting via Microsoft Word and Excel; (3) Use of the data to develop an institutional report card; (4) tying assessment to budgeting; and, (5) embedding a culture of assessment.

All academic and non-academic units complete an assessment planning/reporting worksheet that is made available via Microsoft Excel. These worksheets contain such information as planned outcomes (objectives), assessment methods, standards and criteria against which the outcomes are measured, and the results. In addition, they ask for an action plan that details the effectiveness of past actions and what additional actions should be undertaken based on the semester's results. The worksheet also contains a budgeting and resource allocation section.

The budget component is particularly important under the new accreditation standards adopted by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). With Columbia-Greene's Periodic Review report coming due in 2018, the institution will prepare its report under the new standards. Standard VI treats planning, budgeting, and assessment as an integrated exercise.

Weaknesses in tying planning, budgeting, and assessment together have resulted in frequent citations under MSCHE Standards 2, 3, and 7. Across numerous campuses, data related to these activities tends to be partially or significantly compartmentalized, participating units lack a complete and coherent picture, assessment outcomes don't sufficiently inform planning and budgeting, and resources allocation are made in a fashion that is not always wholly consistent with strategic goals and objectives. For example, among the schools receiving Standard 7 citations from their 2014 self-study reports, 87% were requested to demonstrate that assessment activities are linked to planning and budgeting and/or used for resource allocation, academic, institutional or process improvement. The Columbia-Greene system should enable the school to conduct these three major activities in a more coherent and efficient fashion.

The end result of the completed worksheets is an institutional effectiveness report card. For the 2013-14 academic year, the report card was comprised of an introduction, and then broken into

sections based on the school's strategic goals ranging from offering a quality education to ensuring sound management. Each of these report cards will provide building blocks for the College's accreditation reporting. In turn, these robust building blocks should create time and resource efficiencies in generating the accreditation reports.