

On Assessment

By Don Sutherland

In preparing an annual report on assessment, in this case academic assessment, I provide a cover note to the report. That report can feature a range of developments, highlight potential suggestions for enhanced assessment, and occasionally offer a reminder why assessment matters. The short description of the importance of assessment is provided below:

Assessment is indispensable to all of the activities of an institution of higher education. Assessment provides information that faculty, administrators, staff, and senior leadership use to develop strategy, implement program and curricular changes, and measure progress toward student learning outcomes and student support outcomes.

The faculty own the academic assessment process at Lehman College. They devise assessment plans, design assessment activities, carry out assessment projects, report on and share the results from their annual assessment initiatives. They use the results from these projects to drive student achievement and increase the returns on pedagogical, research, and student support efforts. Academic assessment is integral to Lehman College's entire academic enterprise (all five schools, all programs, all departments, General Education and the interdisciplinary learning process).

The Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (OIRPA) facilitates the effort by offering deans, faculty, and others involved in academic assessment with support in designing assessment plans, assistance in hosting their assessment artifacts on Watermark Insight's Taskstream Assessment Management System, and data to inform assessment activities and/or place assessment outcomes into a larger context.

In coming years, the combination of the College's mission, the realities of its changing student body, and its aspirations for playing a larger role in shaping the socioeconomic destiny of the Bronx will place new demands on its assessment activities. This new context could make it necessary for assessment to cut across programs and disciplines to a much larger extent than it does today, involve multiple years in cases to identify and assess potential trends, incorporate forward-looking scenarios for expected outcomes from changes in curricula and pedagogy into assessment plans, and scale up the sharing of assessment outcomes, insights, and practices across all areas of the College. Even as the College's assessment scale and scope evolves, the core attributes of assessment (quality, relevance, timeliness) in promoting student achievement, teaching excellence, and program/institutional improvement will remain central to academic assessment at Lehman College.

Toward that end, the development of a strategic plan for academic assessment could be useful. Such a plan would be linked to Lehman College's mission, vision, strategic goals, and the strategic goals of its schools and programs. It would be developed by a team of faculty from each of the five schools, those providing teaching in General Education, and support from the deans and contributions from offices including the Office of the Provost and OIRPA. Such a strategic plan would contain key performance measures and it would reaffirm the principles,

data sources, and major elements of effective assessment in a supporting document. That plan would also be assessed on a periodic basis and revised as appropriate.