

Chapter II: TRUMAN STATE UNIVERSITY'S ASSESSMENT PROGRAM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Truman State University is Missouri's statewide public liberal arts and sciences university. Truman is a highly selective, primarily undergraduate institution serving mostly traditional students in a residential setting, with an enrollment of over 5,900 and a faculty of approximately 400. The University has been accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools since 1914; its academic programs are also accredited by a number of professional organizations and agencies.

Since it began approximately twenty-nine years ago, the assessment program at Truman has had the following purposes:

- * to measure the results of the teaching-learning process, other than through grades;
- * to gather critical information on students' growth and development;
- * to ensure the integrity of the degrees awarded;
- * to measure students' preparedness to succeed in their fields of professional concentration;
- * to focus institutional attention on quality rather than quantity as an indicator of student success.

HISTORY

Since academic year 1972-73, Truman has used multiple achievement and attitudinal instruments to measure student outcomes. Over twenty-five years of data are now available for comparative and longitudinal study, for the institution as a whole, or by the categories of division, discipline, and individual student.

An early institutional focus was on the "value-added" concept. Student growth in general knowledge was measured by establishing a baseline at freshman entry and then retesting at the end of the sophomore year. The College Outcome Measures Program (COMP) Objective Test, (since replaced by the Academic Profile) and, later, the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) were administered in a test/retest model (see "Components," below). Discipline-related knowledge was measured by a "senior test" using the Praxis (National Teachers Exam), the Major Field Achievement Tests (MFAT) when available, or other nationally normed instruments.

The value-added approach helped to shift the focus from traditional input measures of a university's quality--entrance scores of incoming students and credentials of faculty--to student learning. Truman recognized that high potential freshmen and active, productive faculty do not automatically ensure successful teaching and learning. The value-added approach helped address the question of the University's actual impact on students and their development.

EVOLUTION

Truman underwent two fundamental changes in institutional mission in the space of fifteen years, with each change requiring an intensive assessment effort. In the early 1970's, Truman transformed itself from a teachers college into a multipurpose regional university. Then, in 1985, the Missouri state legislature designated Truman as the state's public liberal arts and sciences institution; as a result, the University reduced its undergraduate degree programs from 100 in 1985 to a low of 39 in 1993, concentrating resources on those programs that were fundamental to the new mission. Today the University has 43 undergraduate degree programs. At the same time, Truman raised its admissions standards (so that Truman is now "highly selective") and lowered the student-to-faculty ratio from 21:1 to a current 15.22:1.

The early establishment of an assessment culture at Truman enabled the institution to monitor the impact of each of these mission changes on its continued effectiveness. The intent in every assessment initiative was institutional improvement by confirming "what works" (and what does not) relative to current institutional intent.

Over time, the assessment focus at Truman has continued to expand beyond outcomes to processes. That is, while we still want to know where students "end up," we have become increasingly interested in knowing how they got there. Students are increasingly involved as active partners in the teaching-learning process, and faculty often function as "enablers" rather than "transmitters."

COMPONENTS

The contemporary assessment program at Truman includes a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods:

Senior tests are required for every discipline. Where available, these are externally developed, nationally normed instruments. Where these do not exist, Truman's discipline faculty have developed local instruments or use non-discipline specific external measures (such as the GRE General Test). A student's graduation does not depend on the results of the senior test. The primary value is in evaluating the curriculum in the major field and identifying areas that might need revision.

Discipline-specific senior tests include the Major Field Achievement Test (MFAT) in each of fourteen majors, the MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Proficiency Tests, the Mosby AssessTest for Nursing, and the Area Concentration Achievement Tests (ACAT) for Justice Systems. (For a complete list, see the Appendix.)

SURVEYS: All fall-entry first-time freshmen complete the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey during Freshman Week. Students in Freshman Week courses take the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ). These same students then retake the CSEQ in their Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar (JINS) course, typically two years later. The CSEQ is replacing the Institutional Student Survey (ISS), which was administered to freshmen for the last time in Fall 1999. However, some juniors still take the ISS; these students are from the final group who took the ISS as freshmen. The locally developed Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) is administered to every graduating senior. Completion of the GSQ is a graduation requirement.

Present practice includes administration of an Alumni Survey every three years, followed by an Employer Survey. The latter is sent to those employers whom alumni have given us permission to contact. In the near future, these instruments and the methodology of their administration will be revised and a companion survey of Graduate Schools will be developed and pilot-tested. In the past few years, the proportion of graduating seniors directly entering graduate school has hovered around 36% and Truman would greatly benefit from additional methods (other than self-report/anecdote) of assessing their preparedness.

Truman also participates in the Higher Education Research Institute's triennial survey of faculty and administrators. This survey provides information about workload, teaching practices, job satisfaction, and professional activities of faculty and administrators. Faculty attitudes and values, perception of the institutional climate, and interactions with students and colleagues are also measured.

OTHER: Qualitative assessment tools include the Sophomore Writing Experience, portfolio, capstone experience, and interviews.

The Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE) was piloted in 1989-90 and is now a requirement for all Truman students. The SWE assesses student writing and includes a three-hour on-demand writing sample, student self-assessment, and a faculty-student conference focusing on the student's strengths and areas of growth. The SWE is a prerequisite for enrollment in the JINS course.

The portfolio is a sampling of a student's work, representing the student's intellectual growth at Truman, inside and outside the classroom. The process of reviewing one's work in assembling the portfolio is itself a learning tool, since it encourages self-reflection. Portfolios are then reviewed and evaluated by faculty who use the evaluation process, with its dependence on intensive cross-disciplinary discussion as a

tool for their professional development. Though the immediate benefit is to the student, the University also learns much from the student portfolios, which complement and illuminate the data collected through quantitative approaches. This is potentially one of the most useful of Truman's qualitative assessment tools, responding as it does to our assumption that "assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time" (AAHE Assessment Forum, p. 2).

The capstone is a culminating experience in each academic discipline. While the nature of the experience varies among majors, each requires students to reflect on their growth in knowledge (both disciplinary and interdisciplinary), skills, and attitudes over the preceding several years and to demonstrate how they have integrated their learning experiences into a successful and satisfying whole. In addition to helping the learner achieve a kind of closure, the capstone experience also enhances continuous quality improvement in the curriculum of each degree program.

A pilot program of student interviews was initiated in 1992-93 by the Faculty Advisory Committee on Assessment. One hundred juniors selected at random were each interviewed by a student-faculty team and asked several open-ended questions about their learning experiences in and out of class in an attempt to identify what worked--and what did not--from the student's perspective. This program has subsequently been repeated each spring in Truman's search for additional feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process at the University both in and out of the classroom.

THE FUTURE

Truman continues to focus assessment on broad "higher order outcomes." One consequence of this focus is a de-emphasis on the old dualities of academic/nonacademic and curricular vs. extra-curricular, replacing them with a broadened focus on assessing the interdependence and mutual reinforcement of the totality of a student's experiences as an active learner, both in and out of the classroom.

In 1993-94, Truman completed a thorough "assessment of assessment," intended to determine which of the current efforts were working well and which were not. Faculty and staff reviewed all of the existing methods and mechanisms to measure the appropriateness of all the efforts and to analyze the use being made of the results. The goal of this inventory and analysis was to make certain that Truman's assessment program actually fits the current needs, since

"... to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information

will be used, and by whom" (AAHE Assessment Forum, p. 3).

This review resulted in several specific changes. First, the Institutional Student Survey was revised to include a range of new items relating to self-perceptions of growth; the design of the Graduating Student Questionnaire was then revised to incorporate identical questions. Second, Truman has re-instituted a summer workshop for faculty from every academic division, in which recent assessment results are shared and their impact on long-range curricular (and co-curricular) planning are considered.

As assessment continues to improve, Truman will continue its pattern of evaluation and evolution, which prompted Peter Ewell of NCHEMS to say about Truman, "Since that time [November 1991], I know of no other American institution of higher education that has so consciously, so single-mindedly, and so successfully changed so much."

The Assessment Committee continues each year to evaluate the various components of the assessment program to help ensure its efficacy.

APPENDIX

SENIOR TESTS AT TRUMAN AS OF SPRING 2001

MFAT (Major Field Achievement Test)

in Accounting
Biology
Business Administration (Finance, Management, and Marketing)
Chemistry
Computer Science
Economics
History
Mathematics
Music
Physics
Political Science
Psychology
Sociology/Anthropology

Mosby AssessTest

in Nursing

CHES (Certified Health Education Specialist) Exam

in Health Science

MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Proficiency Tests

in Spanish

Praxis II Exam: Content Knowledge

in French
German

GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) General Test

in Art
Art History
Agricultural Science
Classics
Communication
Communication Disorders
English
Exercise Science
Philosophy and Religion
Russian
Theatre

LSAT (Law School Admission Test)

in Communication
English

ACAT (The Area Concentration Achievement Tests)

in Art-Visual Communication
Justice Systems

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University

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MAJOR TESTING/SURVEY SERVICES

AP	Higher Education Assessment Education Testing Services Princeton, NJ 08541 (609) 951-6508
CAAP	American College Testing Program P.O. Box 168 Iowa City, Iowa 52243 (319) 337-1053
CSEQ & NSSE	College Student Experience Questionnaire (or) National Survey of Student Engagement Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning Indiana University Ashton Aley Hall, Suite 102 1913 East Seventh Street Bloomington, IN 47405-7510 (812) 856-5825 (CSEQ) (812) 856-5824 (NSSE)
Faculty Survey & CIRP	Higher Education Research Institute UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies 3005 Moore Hall/Mailbox 951521 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521 (310) 825-1925
MFAT & GRE	Major Field Achievement Tests (or) Graduate Record Examinations Educational Testing Service Princeton, NJ 08541 (609) 921-9000
LSAT	Law School Admission Test Law School Admissions Council Newtown, PA (215) 968-1001