

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

Truman State University (formerly Northeast Missouri 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 6,200 and a faculty of nearly 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-five 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 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 COMP (College Outcome Measures Program) Objective Test, (since replaced by the Academic Profile) and, later, the CAAP (Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency) battery of tests were administered in a test/retest model (see "Components," below). Discipline related knowledge was measured by a "senior test" using the NTE (National Teachers Exam), the MFAT (Major Field Achievement Tests) 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 which were fundamental to the new mission. Today the University has 42 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 16:1.

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 process. 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:

TESTING: Half of Truman's entering freshmen are administered the Academic Profile (AP) from Educational Testing Services (ETS). The AP replaced the College Outcome Measures Program (COMP) Objective Test instrument. The other half of the freshmen are administered the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) battery of tests from ACT. The AP and the CAAP each focus on different components which are very useful. Together, both tests have been valuable assessment instruments. The initial

administration is during the Freshman Week orientation period; the second administration is at the end of the student's Sophomore year.

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 their strengths and areas of growth. The SWE is a prerequisite for enrollment in the junior-level English Composition II course.

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 which might need revision.

Discipline-specific senior tests include the Major Field Achievement Test (MFAT) in each of eleven majors, the AICPA Achievement Test for Accounting, 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. The locally-developed Institutional Student Survey (ISS) is administered each year; Sophomores and Juniors are surveyed. The Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ), also locally-developed, 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 risen to nearly 40%, 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 the workload, teaching practices, job satisfaction, and the professional activities of faculty and administrators. Faculty attitudes and values, the 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 portfolio is a collection of materials representative of the student's growth as a learner, inside and outside the classroom. The process of collecting one's own work is in itself a learning tool, since it encourages self-reflection. The results are then reviewed and scored by faculty.

Though the immediate benefit is to the student, the university also learns much from student portfolios, complementing and illuminating 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 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, curricular vs. extra-curricular, and to replace them with a broadened focus on assessing the interdependence and mutual reinforcement of all of a students' 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 will be shared and their impact on long-range curricular (and co-curricular) planning will be 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."

APPENDIX

SENIOR TESTS AT TRUMAN AS OF SPRING 1997

MFAT (Major Field Achievement Test)

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

AICPA (American Institute for Certified Public Accountants) Achievement Test for Accounting Graduates

Mosby AssessTest for Nursing

MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Proficiency Tests for French, German, and Spanish

GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) General Test

for Art

Art History

Agricultural Science

Classics

Communication (Journalism and Speech)

Communication Disorders

English

Exercise Science

Health

Philosophy and Religion

Theatre

GRE Subject Examination

for Sociology

ACAT (The Area Concentration Achievement Tests)

for Justice Systems

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MAJOR TESTING/SURVEY SERVICES

Academic Profile: Higher Education Assessment
Educational Testing Services
Princeton, NJ 08541 (609) 951-6508

CAAP American College Testing Program
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, Iowa 52243 (319) 337-1053

Faculty Survey &
Freshman Survey
(CIRP) Higher Education Research Institute
UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies
3005 Moore Hall/Mailbox 951521
Los Angeles, California 90095-1521 (310) 825-1925

MFAT
& GRE Major Field Achievement Tests (or)
Graduate Record Examinations
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, New Jersey 08541 (609) 921-9000