Supporting a Culture for Assessment in Co-Curricular Programs

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Perhaps North Dakota’s most recognizable cultural contribution?
Elements of Culture

- Language
- Religion
- Customs and traditions
- Social organization
- Form of government
- Economic systems
- Art and literature

If we are talking about supporting a culture of assessment, it might be helpful to consider how these seven elements of culture can be applied to assessment!
1. Language – North Dakota

Although North Dakota is associated with Norwegian language because of popular culture, German is actually the most-spoken language (2.5%) behind English.
"Uff-Da!"
"Yah, y’betch yah"
"Would you like a pop with your lunch today?"
"What’s the deal?"
"Awww, Geez!"
"You’re darn tootin’!"
Assessment Language

• It really is its own language!
• Different agencies, authors, institutions all have different uses and definitions of these words
Language Strategy

• Develop campus-wide definitions of the key assessment words you want to use.
• Avoid arguments about how to define words! It’s not right or wrong, it’s just how your institution has defined those terms.
• Keep it simple – avoid excessive obfuscation!
Sample Assessment Glossaries

Cal Poly, for example:
http://www.academicprograms.calpoly.edu/content/assessment-glossary

Also see the HLC Accreditation glossary:
If you want to talk assessment, you have to be speaking the same language!
2. Religion – North Dakota

- 77% Christian
  - 28% Mainline Protestant (predominantly Lutheran)
  - 26% Catholic
  - 20% Unaffiliated
- 3% Non-Christian faiths (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, other world religions)
Hockey as the Dominant Religion
The Assessment Religion: What message do we preach about assessment?

We know assessment has multiple purposes, BUT

• “We assess because the accreditor makes us”
  – This usually carries little weight with academic programs, and even LESS with co-curricular programs!

VS.

• “We assess because it will help improve how we serve our students”
The Assessment Religion: What do we believe about how students learn and how learning can be represented or measured?

• Assessment does not demand a positivist approach to learning and measurement
  – I use “assessable,” not “measurable,” because measurement implies a quantitative, positivist view on learning

• Open to quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods assessment approaches as long as they are appropriately rigorous
The Assessment Religion: To what extent do we allow differences in opinion?

Shall the heretics be cast out?

• What works in one program area, for one learning outcome, may not apply in another program area for another learning outcome! Be open to different approaches and beliefs about assessment
  – As long as they are honestly seeking to understand student learning and doing something about it, isn’t that enough?

• Build collaborations between departments and program areas to do collaborative assessments
  – Health and Wellness Collaborative Assessment
3. Customs and Traditions – North Dakota

Rich Native American traditions
Other customs and traditions in North Dakota:

• Opening of deer season is a holiday for some
• Acting like it isn’t cold
• Pretending you understand “lefs” and “lutefisk”
Assessment Customs and Traditions

• Assessment should become a custom in co-curricular programs
• “It ain’t over until it’s assessed!” – why can’t that become your tradition?
Intentionality

• Require proposals for new programs include a description for how the program will be assessed

• All programs should be viewed as having a beginning, a middle, and an end – no program should exist in perpetuity and assessment should be the mechanism to inform the journey

• Our focus is on educating and developing students – programs are a device to get there, not the end in themselves
Reporting

- Integrate the reporting of assessment into other existing reports
- Have a routine time for receiving reports on a regular basis
- For example:
  - Fall: Submit planned major activities and associated assessments for the year
  - End of spring: Submit assessment results and reflections – what does this suggest for next year?
Feedback

- Offer feedback to support improvement of assessment over time
- Three elements of feedback:
  1. Appreciation
  2. Coaching
  3. Evaluation
4. Social Organizations – North Dakota

Fargo-Moorhead Curling Club
Curling by yourself: Not particularly interesting
Curing with a team: Can be great fun!
Many, many others!
Assessment as the Social Norm

• Do colleagues expect each other to be engaging in assessment?

• Start with a core group and support them to work as liaisons or members of an assessment committee – can then become advocates for assessment or resources

• A blitz “Assessment Academy” to develop assessment skills in a 2-day assessment training event creates an assessment cohort
  – Growing expertise in assessment supports it as a social activity
Support Collaborative Assessment

• Bring together program areas that are addressing similar topics to do assessment together
• Can you have a shared survey with a similar set of core questions and then break it out into questions that are unique for each participating program area?
5. Form of Government – North Dakota

North Dakota’s electoral votes have only gone to four Democratic candidates:

– Grover Cleveland (1892 (ND’s vote was split))
– Woodrow Wilson (1912 and 1916)
– Franklin D. Roosevelt (1932, and 1936 but not 1940 (Wendell Willkie) or 1944 (Thomas E. Dewey))
– Lyndon B. Johnson (1964)
Assessment Governance

• A Student Affairs Assessment Committee (Or a “Co-curricular Assessment Committee”)
• Guidance and advice on how to support assessment
• Can provide feedback and support efforts to build an assessment culture
• Start with a coalition of the willing
• Assessment as a responsibility of professional educators, not as a bureaucratic requirement
6. Economic System – North Dakota

- Top exports:
  - Oil
  - Farm and construction equipment
  - Wheat
  - Corn
  - Natural gas
  - Malt, barley, soybeans, peas, sunflower seeds
Rewards of Assessment

• A job well done and personal satisfaction
• Share assessment results broadly and promote the work and value of co-curricular programs
• Offer an assessment award (based on the evaluations from the assessment committee)
• Senior leadership should talk about assessment and recognize those who are doing it well
Assessment as Part of your Job

• Can you include assessment as part of the job description?

• Assessment should not be “Other duties as assigned”

• Performance reviews for employees should expect assessment evidence to be included
  – “68 people attended my event!” should not be sufficient evidence of the quality of your program!
Shot from my backyard over about 20 minutes in January, 2017
The Beauty of Assessment

A well-done assessment project can produce a feeling of intense satisfaction and pleasure – knowing that your students grew, developed, learned, and improved as a result of your activities!

*Isn’t this why we got into education in the first place?*

Maybe assessment is already part of your culture and you just have to tap into it!