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The Dean and Program Assessment: A Portable Enrollment Infographic

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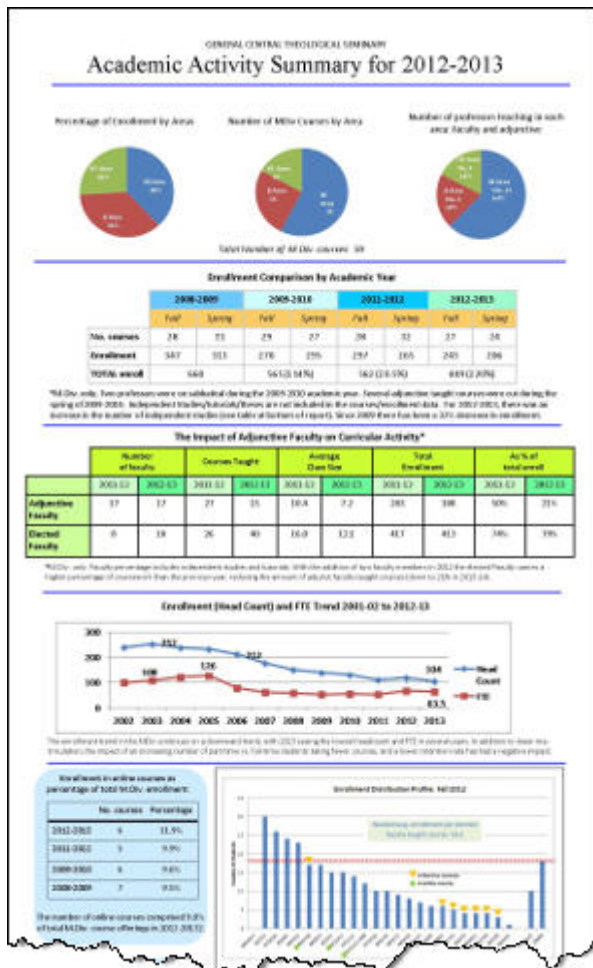May 12, 2014
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At this time of the year, semester's end, while Faculty wistfully anticipate taking advantage of the three best things about teaching (June, July, and August), many deans are turning their attention to wrapping up the academic year. End-of-term activities take up much of the dean's time: aggregating course evaluations, determining academic awards, prodding Faculty committees to wrap up their work, making a final review of the budget, conducting faculty and personnel reviews, signing diplomas, putting the final touches on commencement programs, reviewing next year's catalog, and desperately trying to finalize fall's teaching schedules. Amidst all those activities, there is the ongoing necessity of curriculum assessment.

The formative assessment of academic programs is one of the fundamental tasks of deans. Faculty members tend primarily to focus on course-level assessment (course exams, student grades, student achievement of learning, student feedback on course evaluations) and their experience of the teaching and learning process. Most students focus primarily on interest, course completion (getting a good grade), making progress toward a degree, or personal satisfaction. Deans must focus on the "big picture," working with program-level metrics often out of the scope (and interest) of others in the institution. Big picture program issues include attention to enrollment, which can,

- Determine program viability
- Inform program impact on faculty work load (course distribution load, administrative load, student advising load, etc.)

- Inform decisions about recruitment
- Give evidence of demonstrable program effectiveness
- Help interpret how enrollment impacts budget
- Plot metrics related to student FTE
- Highlight student body profiles (diversity, economic, recruitment).

A PORTABLE ENROLLMENT INFOGRAPHIC

Here is a handy "portable" infographic that can be helpful in interpreting program-level assessments. The infographic is a "one pager" which shows key metrics of program effectiveness related to student enrollment. While student enrollment is only one key metric, it is a significant one that impacts the educational program on many levels. Communicating effectively the ways enrollment affects the larger programmatic and institutional issues can help faculty members make informed decisions about program-level issues. Download pdf version here..

This sample is from the fictional General Central Theological Seminary's MDiv degree program. This is a small theological school (and, getting smaller). It has a range of degree

programs (MDiv, DMin, MTS) with four concentrations within the MDiv. It continues to develop its online course offerings and is just beginning to assess the impact on the student profile, faculty teaching load, and its impact on enrollment. This infographic is "portable" in that you can duplicate the sample format and representative metrics as one way to practice program-level formative assessment. The one-page format helps to visually summarize the data and help interpret the program to faculty, administration, and trustees. The key metrics, tracked annually, are:

- Percentage of enrollment by academic discipline areas (Biblical, Historical-Theological, and Practical Theology Studies)
- The number of courses offered in each academic discipline area (with the total number of courses offered).
- The number of faculty members teaching in each academic area (elected and adjunct combined).
- Enrollment comparison by academic years (you should track a range of three to four years). The infographic plots enrollment by fall and spring terms.
- Enrollment as head count and FTE trend (long range). Allows tracking enrollment trend five years and longer.
- Enrollment in online courses as percentage of total MDiv enrollment
- Enrollment in independent studies as percentage of total MDiv enrollment
- Course enrollment distribution profile
- Degree programs enrollment profile: MDiv, DMin, MTS, certificate
- Enrollment within the MDiv concentration (a concentration will cease to be viable if it drops below 5%)
- Enrollment in MDiv dual degree programs.

Depending on your context you may use additional metrics. For example:

- Track a five year trend of the number of students graduating per year in comparison with the number of entering students
- Track the program completion rate for each program (how long it takes a student to complete a course of study)
- Track the failure-to-complete (retention) rate for each program.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The programmatic metrics you use to assess the effectiveness of your program will be the basis of your analysis and interpretation. In this sample infographic, the dean may highlight the following:

1. The impact of the decline of enrollment related to the number of courses offered
2. The impact of the decline in enrollment related to the number of elective adjunct-taught courses
3. The anticipated consequences of continued decline in student enrollment and its impact on: (1) faculty teaching load; (2) academic budget; (3) program vialbility

4. The number of faculty members in a particular discipline area and: (1) the number of courses required in the course of study; (2) the percentage of students taking courses in one academic area in ratio to others
5. The impact of online courses and independent studies on: (1) total annual enrollment; (2) on competing classroom courses; (3) on faculty teaching load; (4) on faculty development.
6. The impact of the range of degree programs on: (1) total annual enrollment; (2) faculty teaching load; (3) recruitment; (4) program viability.

With this analysis in hand the dean and the faculty can make informed decisions about key program-level matters related to course distribution, faculty FTE teaching load, which programs to develop and which to phase out, student recruitment strategies, etc.

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2014/05/the-dean-and-program-assessment-a-portable-enrollment-infographic/