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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



The Dean and Educational Effectiveness

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Deans in theological schools face increasing demands to demonstrate educational effectiveness from accrediting agencies and constituents. For many theological schools, and for new deans, this can seem like an imposing challenge. Demonstrating educational effectiveness falls to the office of the dean in most schools, highlighting again, that theological school deans need to be EDUCATIONAL leaders in their contexts, not just scholars, teachers, and administrators. For many deans, this requires new ways of thinking and the development of new skills and capacities.

Educational effectiveness is simply providing evidence about the extent to which the school accomplishes its stated mission and goals. As such, educational effectiveness has less to do with activities (what we do) and more to do with outcomes (the demonstrable results of what we do). What evidences educational effectiveness is as multifaceted and complex as the enterprise of the school. One way to assess, and demonstrate, educational effectiveness is to identify the critical functions of the institution and its enterprise, then to identify the metrics that count for evidence. Identifying a specific cluster of meaningful metrics can help the dean focus on what is most important. This cluster of metrics can help the organization focus on the questions "What is most important to pay attention to that helps us know we're accomplishing what we want?"

Common Mistakes to Avoid

When developing and using metrics, avoid these common mistakes:

Creating metrics for the sake of just having metrics. Metrics are tools to be used.
Formulating too many metrics, resulting in data tracking with little action.

Lack of follow up. Metrics and assessment yield accountability. They solicit decision and action.

Identifying and tracking metrics that do not lead to actions. This is just compiling trivia.

Keeping metrics isolated from other critical indicators. Meaningful metrics tend to integrate with other critical factors (trends, comparison with peer schools, etc).

Below is a sample list of metrics that can provide the cluster of items one can choose for demonstrating educational effectiveness. The metrics are identified by categories for convenience, but the nature and complexity of an educational institution means that many metrics will integrate with those in other categories. Not all metrics are of equal weight, and all metrics are assessed in comparison to what they measure.

Sample Matriculation Metrics

FTE: ATS, internal, total for all programs, by degree program, end-of-year trend comparisons, percentage increase or decrease, compared with head count.

Entering class FTE yield

Entering class as percentage of student body

Entering class profile: by degree program, race, gender, geography, age. Trend analysis, comparison with peer schools.

Graduates as percentage of student body

Graduation class profile: by degree program, race, gender, debt, percentage placed, plans for ministry

Student/Faculty ratio

Average classroom enrollment

Tuition revenue as percentage of budget

Retention rate

Graduation rate

Failure to complete program tracking (dismissals, drops, factors)

Sample Academic Programs Metrics

Academic programs as percentage of enrollment

Graduates by programs (trends)

Enrollment in concentrations by percentages

Student/Faculty ratio (avg class size, impact of degree programs on classroom enrollment)
Comparative trend and impact of online and classroom courses

Faculty course load

Ratio of adjunctive-taught courses to faculty-taught courses

Length of time to finish programs of study

Grade distribution reports

GPA (by gender, by age profile)

Credits taken per term (average, trend, by student profile)

Number/percentage of courses canceled due to lack of enrollment (trend, ratio)

Reported satisfaction with programs by current students; by alumni.

Metrics provide insight into the performance of the seminary, its mission, its challenges, and its needs. They should provide honest assessment, be consistent in their application, facilitate interpretation and decisions, lead to action, and provide a means for accountability.

For a sample worksheet on metrics request from Israel Galindo at atigalindo@btsr.edu.

Israel Galindo is Dean and Professor of Christian Formation and Leadership at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. He participated in the first Wabash Center colloquy for theological school deans. He will co-lead the 2013 Wabash Colloquy for Theological School Deans with Dr. Rebbecca Slough.

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