Ten Curriculum Assessment Tools Every Dean Needs: 10. Student course evaluations that are worth the trouble

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Theological school deans are not just theological leaders for their institution, they must be EDUCATIONAL leaders. That is, they must implement sound educational practices related to curriculum, instruction, supervision, assessment, and administration. There is a variety of ways to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum, and there are several levels of assessment (program-level, course-level, student testing, student projects, etc.). While faculty members can focus on course-level and individual student learning assessment, academic deans need to focus on program-level assessment in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's curricular course of study. Here are ten basic curriculum assessment tools every academic dean needs, nine are covered in previous posts:

Outcomes alignment worksheet
Syllabus assessment worksheet
Curriculum maps
Program-level rubrics
Alumni survey
Grade Distribution report
Program retention and completion rate worksheets
Entering student profile
Graduating class profile
Student course evaluations

In this final entry of the series we review:

10. Student course evaluations that are worth the trouble

Student course evaluations, a form of indirect assessment, can be a meaningful component of a school's formative assessment of its curriculum. Unfortunately, most course evaluation tools do not provide sufficiently meaningful data to be helpful. One evidence may be how difficult it is for most schools to collect meaningful data from the evaluations. Another is how students tend to see them as a chore, resulting in cursory responses and a low rate of return. Further, in most cases, the data collected rarely is analyzed at depth or used to prompt pedagogical actions for improvement in teaching and learning.

Two approaches can help make course evaluations worth the trouble for students and for deans. First, a better-designed course evaluation tool, and second, a procedure that helps ensure a higher response rate.

1. A well-designed student course evaluation tool

An effective student course evaluation tool will provide data and feedback that is meaningful. That is, the information from student feedback should address issues of pedagogy that are

relevant, measurable, and actionable. For example, the mythical Central Generic Theological Seminary gathers the following clusters of information on its student course evaluations:

(1) Student profile information
(2) Feedback on program-level goals
(3) Feedback on instruction and pedagogy
(4) Feedback on instructor effectiveness
(5) Feedback on the relevance of the course to the practice of ministry
(6) Feedback on program and learning integration.

In order to make these clusters meaningful, the instrument focuses on instructional effectiveness and curricular program goals, not on what students "like" or "enjoyed." Additionally, the clusters of items are co-factored to yield meaningful interpretation. See the attached "Anatomy of a Student Course Evaluation Tool" which shows how the instrument is structured by clusters and for co-factor analysis.

Download Anatomy of student evaluation

Once the student evaluations are collected (CGTS uses its learning management system (LMS) for its course evaluations) the dean prepares an aggregate report for the Faculty. The aggregate report includes a comparison of selected items over the course of several semesters. The comparison focuses on areas targeted for improvement based on the student evaluations. Here are some examples:

In Example 1 the dean compares student responses to degree program goal 1.A across two semesters. Additionally, the report compares two related items by gender.

GOAL: *1.A Be able to articulate a call to ministry….*

⇨ In spring 2010 only 39% Strongly Agreed that the course helped them address vocational concerns. In spring 2009 it was only 38% and in fall of 2009 it was 36% (Item 21).

⇨ 30% Strongly Agreed the course helped them address issues related to calling (item 35) (up from 14% in spring 2009).

⇨ Only 34% Strongly Agree that the course helped broaden their global perspective (though this is an increase from fall 2009 at 24%). Combined agree items: 73% (higher than the spring 2009 report of 61% and fall 2009 report of 58%) (Item 34). This is a very weak area in response to the stated ATS degree goal related to globalization.

⇨ The breakout by gender of items 21 and 35 relate to calling is:

Strongly Agree/Agree responses for vocation and calling:	Fall 2009		Spring 2010	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
21. The course helped address my vocational concerns:	56%	72%	67% ↑	83% ↑
35. This course helped me address issues related to my calling:	59%	66%	67% ↑	73% ↑

In Example 2 the dean highlights three instructional items related to coursework (knowledge, principles, skills) and compares the responses over three semesters. This report item shows improvement in the most recent semester indicating that the interventions faculty members applied in their courses to address these issues are having a positive effect.

ITEMS RELATED TO COURSEWORK

⇨ Only 7% of students reported that compared to other courses of equal weight the amount of work was "Much more." In spring of 2009 62% rated the amount of work in their courses as "The same" as in comparable credit courses, while only 24% did in fall 2009 (Item 6).

⇨ 57% of students report completing 100% of the required reading (Item 3), which is an increase from fall 2009 at 50%.

⇨ Indicators are higher for students reporting progress in gaining (items 9, 10, 11):

	Spring 2009		Fall 2009		Spring 2010	
	Considerable Progress	Considerable + Much Progress	Considerable Progress	Considerable + Much Progress	Considerable Progress	Considerable + Much Progress
9. Factual knowledge:	42%	80%	43% ↑	76% ↓	55% ↑	86% ↑
10. Basic principles:	40%	79%	37% ↓	76% ↓	47% ↑	86% ↑
	Strongly Agree	Strongly agree + Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly agree + Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly agree + Agree
11. Ministerial skills:	40%	81%	41% ↑	81%	45% ↑	87% ↑

In Example 3 the dean compares a cluster of items related to instruction over three semesters. This feedback becomes important for the Faculty of CGTS in helping it realize the need to be more overt in applying pedagogical strategies that help students be more aware of the course learning objectives and to create learning experiences that yield a higher response from students about achieving the course outcomes. As a result of this feedback, the dean led the Faculty in applying teaching and learning practices to increase the effectiveness of these items.

ITEMS RELATED TO INSTRUCTION

⇨ In spring 2009 less than half (47%) of students Strongly Agreed that standards for student evaluation were clearly specified and reasonably implemented. For fall 2009 that number is lower at 44% (Item 19). Combined agreement in spring 2009 was 89%, and in fall 2009 it was 87% in spring 2010 it is 88% a small improvement.

⇨ In terms of clarity of course objectives and methodology the comparisons with spring and fall of 2009 for Strongly Agree are:

	Spring 2009	Fall 2009	Spring 2010
13. Objectives and requirements were clearly indicated at beginning of course	60%	52%	55%
14. The course was effective in accomplishing the objectives stated in the syllabus	58%	51%	52%
18. The teaching methodologies were appropriate for helping me achieve the course objectives	51%	48%	51%

You can download a copy of the student course assessment questionnaire here

2. A rigorous procedure for assessment

The second strategy employed by CGTS is the implementation of policies and procedures that help ensure a high rate of return on student course evaluations. The school's policy makes completion of the student course evaluation part of the course completion requirements. Students who do not complete the course evaluation do not receive a grade for the course. Additionally, the school has put in place the procedures to help ensure this indirect assessment data set is part of the formative assessment plan.

A Student Course Evaluation Sample Here is a sample of student course evaluation questions with questions that cover the various clusters for co-factor analysis. Download Student Course Evaluation sample

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2016/08/ten-curriculum-assessment-tools-every-dean-needs-10-student-course-evaluations-that-are-worth-the-trouble/