Educational Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE
Tips & Strategies

Assessment Series, Part V
Program Performance

…and herein lies the finale….

In the spring we began our series on Assessment. We have examined theory and purpose as well as have examined two combinations of assessment types—Informal/Formative, and Formal/Summative. Last month we took a good look at instructor performance data--if you missed any of these editions, you can find them at http://www.soc.mil/swcs/esc.html. Thi month we will tackle the HOT task of discussing how to assess PROGRAM PERFORMANCE.

Before we start, would you feel cheapened if I told you that the last 4 monthes have been a lead-in to this month's article? The key to program performance---and when I say PROGRAM, I could mean at a micro or at a macro-level--a module in a course, a phase of a course, or an entire course itself—the process is the same. You collect data; you discuss data, and then you make revisions based on data. The key to all this---DATA. The point is to make informed decisions.

The What: The Big 5 of Data

There are 5 data points that should be considered in evaluating your course.

Student Performance Data	Comes from specific results of the Individual Student Assessment Plan (ISAP). Look at student scores for this course and over time; note any trends? Are there significant differences between or among instructors grading practices?
Instructor Performance Data (observations)	As discussed last month, assessing instructor performance is important as the instructor is the #1 variable in an educational environment. Leadership should collect data throughout the course to determine what, if any, professional development is needed and if this is an *everyone* or a *someone* situation.
Instructor Feedback Survey Data	The instructors should be given a survey at the end of the course as well. Even though you may discuss changes or issues, there is a certain power to quantify the data and chart it. Instructors unhappy about technology or prep time? It should come out in the survey and be tracked as a trend over time. People tend to listen more when there is a chart that shows negative reviews over time.
Student Survey Data (course)	The student should give feedback on the course as well as on the instructors. This usually occurs on the End-of-Course Critique (EOCC). Again, is there a pattern that emerges with ratings or write-in comments? Can any of this data be used in support of any of the other 3 data points? Is there a trend that can be determined from past course data?
Student Survey Data (instructor)	

If you don't have these data points, contact the ESC; we can assist you with getting these established.

The ESC provides support for the uniform application of USAJFKSWCS educational processes across the Institution to include:

-Support to Curriculum & Instruction [Courses and Instructors];

-Support to Leadership & Professional Development Initiatives;

-Support to the development and implementation of program evaluation and assessment systems; and

-Support to the design and implementation of SOF Career Pathways.

For more information, contact Mr. Geoff Jones at jonesgeo@soc.mil

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The How: The PIC

The PIC, or Post-Instructional Conference, fits into the entire Accountable Instruction System (AIS) and is the opportunity to discuss and make discussions regarding data. There are small, informal PICs that are held after a course or phase of instruction, and then there are large, mack-daddy PICs that are conducted formally and used to identify trends and revisions needed. The PIC is a discussion—a meeting where leadership and instructors come together to DISCUSS the data points. It is ***not*** a brief---a one-way report. It is ***not*** a hot-wash or AAR. It is a **discussion** of the data and a conversation regarding why we think things are like they are, supported by the data, and what we should do about it.

Programmatic changes should always be made based on conversations and decision around data. Not by the G.I.F. [Good Idea Fairy] who may flit around sprinkling fairy dust. In my short ten years at the schoolhouse, I have seen my share of fairy dust----we need abandon the days of unilateral decision making and have the perspective to collect the data and have the hard discussions.

The"So What": Analysis

The big thinking piece of this whole process is the analysis. Analysis, again, is based on the data. There are always factors to discuss and antedoctal information that will play into this process, but the true power of the PIC is in the critical thinking skills of the participants. Don't stovepipe the 5 data points. Use them across categories to triangulate an pinpoint issues.

Wrapping Up Assessment

Assessment is not an easy task, and mining data is not fun to the normal human. However, assessment is the crux of any program of instruction. If you, as the instructor, cannot determine if your teaching has positively affected your learners, then you are not doing your job. Moreover, if you, as an instructional leader, cannot determine if your program is effective, then you are not performing your job either.

Pulling it all together

Let's say you work with a course that has a research paper requirement. The ISAP data (student grades) are all A's in 4 of the 5 classes. Students in the one class that has a reasonable range of grades complain on their EOCCs that their instructor grades too harshly. That instructor is one of your most seasoned guys and gets stellar ratings otherwise. His instructor performance ratings are always high. In preparing for the PIC, you note that this has been a trend for the last 2 classes. You present the data and open the floor for discussion. What you discover is that 4 of 5 instructors don't use the rubric for the paper because it is confusing. The issue isn't necessarily that 1 guy, nor is it the paper. The rubric needs to be cleaned up and everyone needs some training on how to use it. You implement the changes and make a note to revisit this data after the next iteration of the course.

Assessment discussions can start with gut feelings, but we should never succumb to making changes because we ***think*** XYZ will be better than XYA, or because we ***heard*** that do-dads were better than doe-dads, or because we should ***try*** M&7 just to see what happens. In education and training, assessment discussions should start with the data and lead into the analysis. Document and store your data so that as you pass by this place, your predecessors can see the data and the decision processes used and be that much more ready to make informed decisions.

Assessment runs the gamut from how we assess our students (Student Performance) to how students assess our courses and instructors (EOCC) to the feedback our instructors provide (Instructor Feedback Surveys), to the feedback we provide our instructions (Instructor Performance Feedback).