LEVERAGING INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHS TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

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Introduction

Presenters

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Office of Programs and Academic Assessment (OPAA)

The Institution

- Large, Public, Research Intensive
- 15 Colleges
- 399 General Education Courses

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History of General Education at UIC

- General Education Program revised between 2003 and 2007
- New program implemented in Fall 2007
- Opportunity to begin a General Education Assessment Program

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General Education at UIC

- Identifies 6 broad areas of knowledge (Categories) based on the kinds of experiences that a liberally educated person should have.

General Education Categories
1. Analyzing the Natural World
2. Exploring World Cultures
3. Understanding the Creative Arts
4. Understanding the Individual and Society
5. Understanding the Past
6. Understanding U.S. Society

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General Education at UIC (cont.)

General Education Learning Outcomes

- Each General Education Category specifies 4 – 7 learning outcomes students should achieve as a result of liberal education at UIC.

- Each General Education Course must specify one or more outcomes in one or more categories the course will teach.

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Assessment of the General Education Program

OPAA charged with designing and coordinating a process to assess the new General Education Program

- Our office encountered many barriers in accomplishing these tasks

- Our strategy was to leverage our institutional strengths to address these barriers.

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Barriers to Implementing General Education Assessment Process

1. The **large size of the** UIC General Education **Program**

2. **Faculty's lack of awareness** of the new General Education Program

3. **Misgivings about the purpose** of General Education Assessment

4. **Low response to request** to complete General Education Assessment

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Institutional Strengths

1. A strong and committed **General Education Assessment Committee**

2. Strong institutional support from the **Provost's Office**

3. Good **departmental leadership** from the department heads (DH) and directors of undergraduate studies (DUS)

4. **General Education instructors** devoted to students' learning

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Barrier 1: Large Size of General Education Program

Key Questions:

- What approach would be most appropriate to conduct General Education assessment given the wide scope of the program?

- How can we engage instructors from 53 different departments with a 2 person assessment office?

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Barrier 1: Leveraging Institutional Strengths

General Education Assessment Committee
- Each disciplinary area is unique; need flexibility in methods to use for assessment.
- One campus-wide project to assess General Education across all disciplinary areas is not practical.
  Recommendation: Conduct pilot project.
  Result = individual faculty do teach and assess outcomes in different ways.
- Solution: Develop a course-based assessment approach to allow for flexibility.

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UIC Form to Collect Course-Based Assessment Information

https://tk20.uic.edu

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Barrier 2: Lack of Awareness of the New General Education Program

Key Questions:

- Without knowing General Education, how can faculty connect teaching to learning outcomes?

- Without this connection, how can General Education assessment be valid?

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Barrier 2: Leveraging Institutional Strengths

General Education Assessment Committee
- Identify information pamphlet distributed earlier from Provost's Office.
  Recommendation: Redistribute pamphlets and create information sheets for General Education instructors.

General Education Instructors
- Feedback helped ID best time to distribute information sheets (at the beginning of semester).
- Solution: Work with **Provost's Office** to redistribute pamphlets; create information sheets for instructors to be distributed at beginning of semester.

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Information Sheet for General Education Instructors

- Purpose of assessing General Education Program
- Specific categories and learning outcomes approved for the course
- Questions instructors will be asked to address in the assessment form
- Time frame for completing the assessment process

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Barrier 3: Misgivings Regarding the Purpose of General Education Assessment

Key Questions:

- How can we expect faculty to engage in a process they do not trust?
- How can we help faculty understand we do not have ulterior motives for conducting assessment?

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Barrier 3: Leveraging Institutional Strengths

Support from Provost's Office
- Vice Provost began to send memos to department leadership and faculty who will be involved in assessment to clarify purpose.

Departmental Leadership
- OPAA holds meetings with Department Head or Director of Undergraduate Studies to clarify purpose and encourage them to talk to instructors.

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Barrier 4: Low Response to Request to Complete Assessment Form

Key Questions:

- How can assessment be valid if response rate is low?

- How can we improve our process to increase response rate?

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Barrier 4: Leveraging Institutional Strengths

Departmental Leadership
- DHs and DUSs help us identify instructors to complete assessment, inform instructors of the requirement, and provide accountability to ensure it gets done.
  - Update to Department from OPAA on status of completion near due date.

Faculty
- Individual interviews provide information to improve the collection form and process.

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Current General Education Assessment Process

1. Select Sample
2. Vice Provost sends memo to DH/DUS
3. OPAA meets with departmental leadership
4. Vice Provost sends memo to instructors
5. OPAA sends instructors information sheet
6. OPAA provides support to faculty
7. Instructors complete assessment form at the end of the semester
8. OPAA provides update to DH/DUS on completion status
9. OPAA generates reports based on results of assessment
10. Afterwards, OPAA seeks feedback from instructors

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General Education Reporting

Different audiences need different types of reports:

General Education Instructors

•Get ideas for teaching/assessing their own courses

•Information provided has not gone into a "black hole"

Administrators/GenEd Assessment Committee

•Feedback for decision making, strategic planning, budgeting, policy building, etc.

External Audiences

•Transparency

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General Education Reports

General Education Comprehensive Report

All information collected in the general education assessment forms

Audience: administrators

General Education Summary Report

Information from each section of the form summarized

Audience: administrators, general education assessment committee

General Education Newsletter

User-friendly information highlights the general education program, best practices, and individual general education categories

Audience: general education instructors, external audiences

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Lessons Learned

Reach out to the Resources at your Institution
"It takes a village…"
Engage in Reflective Thinking
Your process is always subject to change and improvement. Need to assess the assessment.
Be a Good Listener
Positive and negative comments are both helpful.
Be Flexible
Constant need to adapt to environment, which may change based on conditions beyond your control.

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Questions?

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Using this Strategy at your Institution

The most important requirement to utilize this strategy is to know your barriers to creating a general education assessment process, as well as your institutional strengths!

We have discussed our major barriers and strengths, but there are many more examples, both from our institution and others:

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Sharing

To help our institution and others improve their processes, we encourage you to share your institutional barriers and strengths.

More Examples of Barriers
- Reduction of faculty/staff due to decrease in budgets/economic downturn.
- Others from audience…

More Examples of Strengths
- Institutional purchase of a web-based system to collect/store assessment information.
- Others from audience…

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