Analyzing Occupational Therapy Program Outcomes Across 3 Years: Closing the Loop
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Abstract
The Program Assessment Committee in the Department of Occupational Therapy (OT) completed an analysis of student learning outcomes collected across three years in 2016, 2017, and 2018; the program transitioned away from a course-level assessment to a rubric-level evaluation plan at the beginning of the assessment cycle in 2016. The process involved retrieving, aggregating, and comparing rubric-level assessment outcomes across the years and identifying meaningful patterns when available. Of all assessment items examined, one student learning outcome was unmet across three years with a remarkable, substantial decline that was sustained in the two most recent years. To investigate the identified pattern, a task force was formed involving the members of the assessment committee as well as current and past instructors of record (IORs) of the involved course. The process yielded positive outcomes in instructor awareness and preparedness, course re-design, and deepening and strengthening student learning experiences.

Background
In the era where the value of higher education is often questioned and challenged, ascertaining program effectiveness remains a priority; especially for OT programs where competition for prospective students is rising with the increasing number of programs and cost of tuition nationwide. According to the existing literature, while there is a repeated call for greater accountability in higher education, many educational institutions have difficulty with “closing the loop” and making change based on assessment to deepen and strengthen the learning process (Arcario et al., 2013; Banta & Blaich, 2010; Kuh et al., 2015). To effectively install call to action to better support students, faculty involvement is crucial as “...even the most beautifully collected and interpreted evidence will have no impact on students whatsoever unless it engages an institution’s faculty” (Banta & Blaich, 2010, p. 23).

Objectives
The aim of the task force was to (a) analyze student learning outcomes across three years, (b) identify meaningful patterns from aggregated data, and (c) effectively “close the loop” by involving faculty members and making appropriate recommendations to improve student outcomes.

Methodology
- **Phase 2** – Compared rubric-level assessment outcomes to identify meaningful patterns.
- **Phase 3** – Identified assessment items and corresponding courses where a significant trends were observed.
- **Phase 4** – Formed a task force involving the members of the assessment committee and current and past IORs in the identified course.
- **Phase 5** – Engaged in investigation and reflection as related to changes in course design, materials, instructional methods, assignments, and requirements across three years.

Outcomes
- **Current IOR** reviewed past syllabi and identified discrepancies that may have influenced student performance. Revisions were made in the syllabus and assignments – (i.e., required completion of self-assessments containing updated domains, increased frequency of quizzes, etc.).
- **Current IOR** reviewed course materials (textbooks and practice exams) and contacted the publishing company to determine any changes. The investigation revealed that the format of preparatory exams have changed due to new edition’s revised content. The current IOR requested for a desk copy of the most updated materials.
- **Based on the discussion with the publisher, current IOR** met with an instructional designer. The preparatory exams and grading were reorganized.

Discussion
- **When there are two or more IORs across a period of time, best practices for assessment include: collectively reviewing course content, developing a succession plan, maintaining consistency for continuation of course content, and monitoring typical student performance.**
- **Involving publishing company and instructional designer was essential in maximizing course content.**
- **Regular communication of the assessment plan to faculty improves course quality, process, and outcomes.**
- **Overall, involvement of faculty was a key to the success of the process of “closing the loop.”**

3-YEAR TREND ANALYSIS

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<th>% of Students Achieving Learning Outcome</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
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The assessment outcome is unmet across three years with a substantial decline that was sustained in the most recent two years; the outcome is achieved when 85% of students earn “meets expectations” rating as indicated in the rubric-criteria.

References