New Trends and Procedures of Program Assessment for Academic Units

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Abstract

Some consider assessment in terms of a systematic way of gathering and evaluating information within educational system and particularly higher education. Since, the term ''assessment'' refers and relates to administrative processes, this paper has shed light some consideration on how it can benefit the members of department and program. Program assessment ultimately emphasizes on direction for developing students learning quality and satisfaction of its central role in educational system. Thus, this study aimed to regard goals and purposes, specifically, explore new trends, techniques and procedures which play an important role in this aspect of assessment and also can have influences on outcomes of the academic units. To this end, some of the practical assessment methods were selected to be done on different fields of study in Shahrekord Azad University as well as discussing their description, strengths and weaknesses to expose whether assessments follow the rules and procedures of program assessment to reach the best consequences in assessment of academic units.

Keywords: Program Assessment, Assessment, Academic Units, Procedures, Assessment Methods

1. Introduction

Assessment can be considered in a variety of meanings; such as systematic collection, gathering and analyzing the information to improve learner learning from diversity of sources. Also, the term refers to such series of actions which faculty apply to grade learner course tasks in order to enhance learner support and leaning. Assessment even is used to standardize testing or can relate to any activity intended to collect information on the hit of a program, course, institutions or university curriculum. Unfortunately, the various usage of assessment moved education system away from emphasizing on its central role that assessment should play in educational system to upgrade learner practices. Thus, this process can provide basic direction to enhance the quality and constituent gratification.

According to national expert, Barbara Walvoord (1999), "faculty assess in their classes permanently, regarding which method of assessment or which part of it worked well and which did not become useful. Therefore, by observation and some decisions try to make changes in the curriculum". In fact, number of particular advantages can issue when institution employee's and faculty members are directly and actively participating in the development, administering and analyzing the assessment assignments. To this end, the purpose of this study is to ensure that assessment practices will have significant value to learners' learning. It will expose the goals and objectives of program assessment. However, it is obvious that, the most important part of it that assessment should improve learning; it considers program assessment and implementing an assessment for academic units to document the attainment of learner outcomes through the continuous program assessment. Hence, based on what discussed, the following research questions have been proposed:

1) What is the appropriate assessment method for each majors of university?

2) How does program assessment which applied in academic unit follow the procedures of standard program assessment?

In connection with the definition of program assessment, "The Manoa assessment committee" state that program assessment is a continuing process which understanding and enhancing learner learning is its intention. It contains some systematic expectations such as setting proper criteria and high standards for quality of learning. On the other hand, analyzing and interpreting evidence to settle how program assessment performance fit with these prospects and applying the consequences of information to document, display and improve performance (Angelo, 1995). Regarding to Western association of Colleges (2009) "Good Practice" in academic program; good practice guide is to assist colleges and universities in which they can meet new program review which highlighted three functions of program process:

- Outcomes based assessment of learner achievement
- Claims about evidence to make decisions and
- Usage of program results to firm the plan and budget.

Concerning diversity approaches Pitter (2007) scrutinized and integrated the traditional features of academic quality as well as recent assessment issues. A key point of this feature of program assessment is to focus on pursue to assess outcomes to upgrade the academic programs. In respect to program assessment and new directions for higher education, many scholars examined the application of this program. Henry (2007) for instance, describes usage of a program model which can reflect some guidelines for academic unit through follow-up rules of examining all revenues, ensuring about deliver instruction in

the most effective manner and increasing learner retention as the primary outcomes that sought in application of the program model.

2. Method

This review incorporates findings from research on some practical assessment methods and considers descriptions, strength and weaknesses on different fields of study at shahrekord Azad University to expose the matched points of the methods with rules and procedures of program assessment. According to Jennifer Roberts, coordinator of Academic Assessment of Northern Virginia College (2008), three kinds of assessment methods will be discussed in this study and consider their impact on three different majors of university such as Humanities, English language teaching and Graphic. In terms of data procedures, three kinds of assessment methods are explained. In this analysis, these methods of assessment in academic unit consist of Reflective Essays, Performance Assessment and Portfolio Evaluation were examined and discussed. Here, the samples of different majors were shown as following:

2.1. English Language Teaching Using Reflective Essay Method

 In order to figure how well learners understand the issue and content of the class, reflective essays may be used as an assessment tool. Generally, it includes short essays on topics which related to that course and can be done through class assignments or homework. The writing course in English Language major is an example of applying this method in which the learners would have special amount of time (5 to 10 minutes) to write about the subject and present it voluntarily or when it is required.

2.2. Humanities Majors Using Performance Assessment

 Learner activities include class assignments, projects, presentations and similar tasks which arranged to assess skills and knowledge were done through performance assessment. In a more efficient phase, performance assessment is connected to the syllabus of a course. Most of the Humanities majors are linked and experienced to use this method to present issues in class, because this type of assessment requires learners to utilize critical-thinking and problem solving skills within a context relevant to their field or major. The performance will be rated by the master and assessment data will be collected and learners receive feedback on the presentation and evaluation.

2.3. Graphic Majors Using Portfolio Evaluation

 Collections of work over time, during a semester that are applied to display learner growth and accomplishment in a specified area are called Portfolios. Portfolios can demonstrate information about learner learning. In other words; assess their work in general, in a targeted area. Architectural and Graphic are examples of portfolio evaluation. It contains reports, research papers, art journal, videotapes or every practical art work.

3. Results

A crucial section of an effective program is to use a systematic approach which fit to the demands of administrative and academic unit. The first trend is to arrange the assessment, in order to success of academic unit, it is necessary to identify committees and structures before the assessment. The second one is to explain the goal of academic unit by providing the basis and standards for assessment and then define them obviously. After focusing on goals, it is turn to

expose the outcomes that are more particular and reflect on the boarder goals. Whereas academic units involved with a learner support, they usually emphasize on process and learner's achievement than on learning, and hence, the consequences will determine what the department organize to do and what impact will be on learner. Next technique is to invent and apply those assessment methods which are needed to this aim; a checklist of accessible approaches that can be useful to conduct assessment should be identified. After revising the demands of the academic unit, select extra methods which provide essential information for assessing need to be taken account. By encountering these steps, it is time to lay out and report findings of how assessment outcomes will be useful for the target of an academic unit accomplishment. Through settling a schedule, assessment plan is proposed to revise, collect data and finally in order to drive improvements of data and continue the established approaches, provide feedback and documentations, in other words, ''closing the loop'' to key members of the academic and administrative unit.

Regarding application of reflective essay method at writing course of English language major, this type of assessment can act as a tool to offer data on other learner point of views and perspectives at a particular moment in class. This method is one of the effective one to writing course, because as the outcomes of its program assessment demonstrate, learners are proficient in producing analysis, reflective writing and research-based writing that is focused, well elaborated, supported and well edited.

With regard to Humanities majors including psychology or literature, one of the effective assessment methods is performance assessment which has a close connection with goals; capability to argue effectively, evaluate literacy or philosophical works. Moreover, communication between the master and learner is often strengthened and the opportunity for learners' self-assessment

is increased and improved. Based on practical art work include Graphic /Architectural major, portfolios evaluation is the unique assessment method in which it can be helpful resources after graduating or to find a job. Due to the portfolios, learners also encourage to take great responsibilities; as one of the objectives of its program assessment.

4. Discussion

Considering application of practical assessment methods on three majors of university including English language teaching, Humanities and Graphic/Architectural, program assessment of these majors were reviewed and analyzed, then compared with the standards of program assessment. Due to the first research question, results indicated that the appropriate and profitable assessment method for English language, for instance writing course is reflective essay. Although, analysis of essay content takes additional time and expertise, but this method provides variety of responses and might lead to discussing among learners of the class.

In addition, results of reviewing the Humanities major, display that performance assessment plays an active role in assessing the skills of this major. Despite the fact that this type of assessment is sometimes separate from the daily routine of faculty, master and learners, it can be beneficial as capstone phase to receive the better outcomes of its program. In terms of performance assessment, Stiggins (1991) notes that the key to developing performance criteria, is to place oneself in the hypothetical situation of having to give feedback to a student who has performed poorly on a task. Stiggins suggests that a teacher should be able to tell the student exactly what must be done to receive a higher score.

The findings which grab the attention of Graphic/Architectural major revealed that portfolio evaluation is one of the useful options to assess and evaluate learners' practical work. Portfolios, however, identified as time-consuming and required extra effort especially for learners of that project, but it was found useful due to the creativity of works and preparation for the future jobs. In application of art major, results of present paper were in line with Georgia Brook and Heidi Andrade (2013) mentioned that the purpose of a process portfolio is to promote student reflection and ownership over the learning process. By having students set goals for their process portfolios, deciding which works to include in them, and reflecting on how the chosen pieces document growth, student learning becomes more self-regulated. Furthermore, in other studies, Gipps (1998), Assessment Reform Group (1999), emphasized on the use of portfolios to make an explicit relationship between curriculum, assessment and pedagogy.

At last, in terms of second research question, considering program assessment of those three university majors demonstrated that, most of them follow-up some procedures and rules that are so essential to prepare a standard program assessment and have some items in common consist of goals, objectives, identify criteria and invent necessary assessment methods, but did not care about some of the key points include determine how assessment results will be used for improvement or enough feedback which are two significant elements of standard program assessment. Because, the existence of these factors can complete the process of well program assessment, in other words; "close the loop" and to receive the best consequences of assessment in academic units.

5. Conclusion

While it was beyond the scope of this document to fully clarify assessment methods, rules and procedures which need to be taken account to follow the steps of program assessment, this brief guide provided some introductory framework of trends to department, academic units, masters and faculty members, that will hopefully facilitate reflection, improve some ideas to relevant program assessment and resources to enhance the current assessment methods and their program assessment. The results from an assessment process can be used to specified how outcomes being attained and how the program can be enriched. Thus, program assessment emphasizes on experiences and makes judgment about learner learning to recognize whether or not learners have developed the skills, knowledge and capabilities company with their program of study (University of Wisconsin-Madison, April 2000). Therefore, this achievement is devoted to the development of learners and operational outcomes which involved in the assessment process. Also, it has shown approaches and methods of assessment that are not educationally successful, but workable and effective, hence, benefiting both masters and learners.

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