Featured School:

King’s College

William G. McGowan School of Business

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, United States

www.kings.edu/Academics/mcgowan.htm

June 2004
AACSB International
Background

In 1985, under the direction of Academic Vice President Dr. Donald Farmer, a recognized expert in course-embedded assessment, King’s College implemented a new core curriculum and launched a comprehensive assessment program. Seven key competency areas were identified. The faculty designed competency plans for each of the seven skill areas over the next decade.

Description

Assessment at King’s focuses on the integration of knowledge in the major with the skills of liberal learning. The key competency areas assessed are:

1. Critical thinking and problem solving
2. Effective writing
3. Technological competency
4. Effective oral communication
5. Quantitative reasoning
6. Library and information literacy
7. Moral reasoning

The foundation for assessment at King’s College is the competency plan, which describes competencies expected each year, strategies for developing these competencies (specific learning experiences), and assessment criteria. (See sample Competency Growth Plan.)

Faculty adopted a course-embedded assessment model to emphasize the linkage between assessment, teaching, and learning. The approach also ensures that students fully participate in the process. Previous attempts to require participation in assessment activities outside of the classroom were viewed as “extra work” and not taken seriously by students.

The assessment process begins with placement tests to assign incoming students to appropriate courses in critical thinking, effective writing, and quantitative reasoning. Next, exercises in the core curriculum help faculty to understand how well students think and communicate within a discipline. These may be administered at the beginning and at the end of core courses.

The third step in the process is the Sophomore/Junior Diagnostic Project, which is designed to test students' readiness to proceed with their intended major. Students who do not perform well on this project are provided with career counseling and assistance to improve skills and enhance base knowledge. These projects are embedded in courses required for majors. They are discipline-specific and focus primarily on communication and critical thinking skills. Professors in each major design the projects and determine how they will be assessed. Grading criteria are communicated to students in advance. (See example of a diagnostic project.)

The last step in the assessment process is the Senior Integrated Assessment Project. Embedded in required senior courses for each major, these exercises measure command of subject matter and methodology, as well as advanced-level competence in the seven skill areas (see sample Senior Integrated Assessment Project). The projects carry substantial weight in determining course grades and are more comprehensive and ambitious than the Sophomore/Junior Diagnostic Projects.
Using the Data

Annually, each department submits a grade distribution report and examples of very good, average, and marginal papers from the Sophomore/Junior Diagnostic Projects and Senior Integrated Assessments.

The Business School held its first annual “Assessment Review Day” in 2002–2003. Faculty in each major area presented assessment data and discussed implications for the curriculum. Discussions are designed to generate ideas for improvement. For example, the Senior Integrated Assessment in finance indicated that students were relatively weak in their ability to provide analysis using large amounts of computed data. Changes to the capstone finance course were proposed to better develop these skills.

Administration and Budget

There is no direct budget line for assessment within the William G. McGowan School of Business. The culture of King’s College is such that faculty and administrators perform assessment in the normal course of their professional duties. There are some funds in the Director’s budget to provide breakfast and lunch for the annual Assessment Review Day.

Contact

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William G. McGowan School of Business: http://www.kings.edu/Academics/mcgowan.htm

King’s College Assessment web site: http://www.kings.edu/Academics/capprogram.htm