FACULTY ROLE IN ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Introduction

Assessment of student learning is an emerging activity at CETYS University. Even if there are four institutional learning outcomes (ILOS), established since 2007 [1], and faculty is aware of this fact and had participated in the assessment of two of them along the 2 semesters of 2008, the task ahead is enormous. From the mapping of 2 ILOS on the courses offered in the 2 semesters of 2008 [2], a total sample of 184 courses was selected for assessment: 64 in the first semester and 122 in the second semester of 2008. Only 92 (49.5%) courses completed the assessment. The director for Academic Planning and Effectiveness and the Personnel of the newly formed Center for Development and Improvement of Academy (CDIA) computed the results and produced the reports that were communicated to the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Deans and others members of the administration [3,4]. In the route data-reporting-analytics-action we are in the action phase. The CDIA is a key and catalytic agent to promote the use of the assessment results to improve student learning and faculty development.

To have in place a key resource to make assessment activity more easy and effective, CETYS has started the development of a homemade E-Portfolio (EP). This project is being conducted by members from academia and from the information technology office, with the support of a software developer partner. The tool under development is only one part short to be fully completed, and its total completion is expected to take place at the end of first semester of 2009. Although the EP is still a work in progress, we have tested the parts already functional (students' and professors' web pages) in the assessment activities of 2008.

In the second semester of 2008, a pilot group of 12 professors from the Mexicali Campus was selected to test the partially finished E-Portfolio. They did assessment on 2 ILOS. Ten out of the 12 finished the assignment successfully. The rest of the professors that were selected to perform assessment in their courses, within the Annual Assessment Plan (AAP), completed the task manually. Of the 122 courses selected for assessment in AAP 2008-2, only 61 (50%) completed the task successfully. This gave us an idea of the kind of work we need to do ahead, to gain faculty engagement and compromise with the assessment activity.

The assessment process at CETYS is being driven by an Institutional Assessment Model (IAM), in both, the institutional level and the academic program level. Figure 1 shows how this model translates to the academic program domain to guide the assessment process. In this domain all, but one, of the academic programs have a least one student learning outcome defined. But none of them had been assessed yet. This task is planned to start in the second semester of 2009. Figure 2 shows in a very simple way how the assessment cycle is being performed at CETYS. This figure has been very useful to communicate to the professoriate where, why, when and how their participation is needed, but also how they can capitalize from the assessment activity. What follows is a more detailed description, based on figure 2, on how faculty has participated in assessment at CETYS.

1. Formulation of student learning outcomes and construction of the assessment tools.

In this stage of the assessment cycle faculty members had been involved by attending a workshop on Assessment and Rubrics Construction provided by Dr. Mary Allen on January 7, 2008 [6]. This learning activity was proposed as preparation for student learning outcomes formulation and rubrics design. Then in preparation for the WASC Effectiveness Review Visit, scheduled for the first semester of 2008, faculty, organized in academies, developed a report for every, but one, academic program that includes student learning outcomes and educational objectives as critical elements [35]. These reports are a key point of departure for the Academic Program Periodic Review Process that will start in 2009.
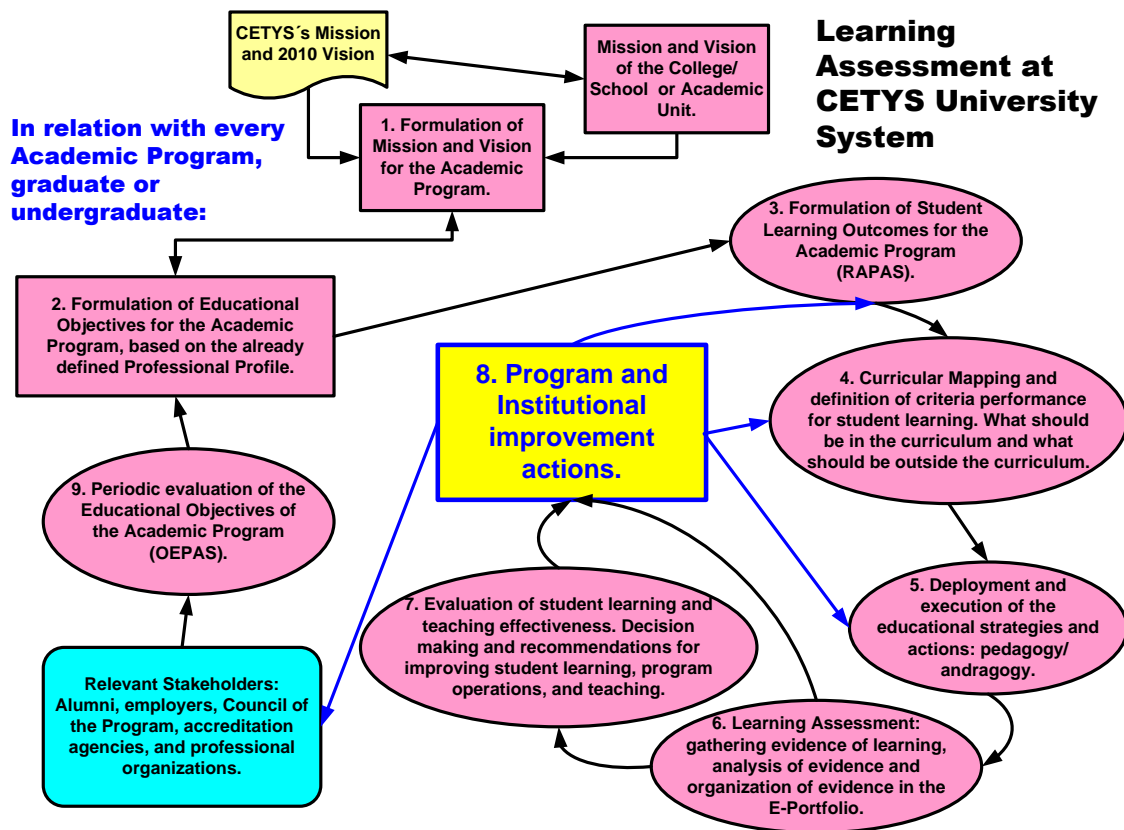
Learning Assessment at CETYS University System

CETYS´s Mission and 2010 Vision

Mission and Vision of the College/ School or Academic Unit.

In relation with every Academic Program, graduate or undergraduate:

1. Formulation of Mission and Vision for the Academic Program.

2. Formulation of Educational Objectives for the Academic Program, based on the already defined Professional Profile.

3. Formulation of Student Learning Outcomes for the Academic Program (RAPAS).

8. Program and Institutional improvement actions.

4. Curricular Mapping and definition of criteria performance for student learning. What should be in the curriculum and what should be outside the curriculum.

9. Periodic evaluation of the Educational Objectives of the Academic Program (OEPAS).

7. Evaluation of student learning and teaching effectiveness. Decision making and recommendations for improving student learning, program operations, and teaching.

5. Deployment and execution of the educational strategies and actions: pedagogy/ andragogy.

Relevant Stakeholders: Alumni, employers, Council of the Program, accreditation agencies, and professional organizations.

6. Learning Assessment: gathering evidence of learning, analysis of evidence and organization of evidence in the E-Portfolio.

Fig. 1: How the Institutional Assessment Model is deployed in every academic program.

It is at the institutional level where the assessment cycle is almost completed. At the moment of writing this statement we are closing the cycle. This thanks to the work done by the Academy of Institutional Learning Outcomes (AILO).

The assessment cycle at CETYS University

CETYS UNIVERSIDAD.

2. Gathering evidence that learning is taking place

3. Analysis of evidence and evaluation of accomplished learning

1. Formulation of student learning outcomes and construction of assessment tools

4. Execution and following of improvement actions: learning, pedagogy and the assessment process
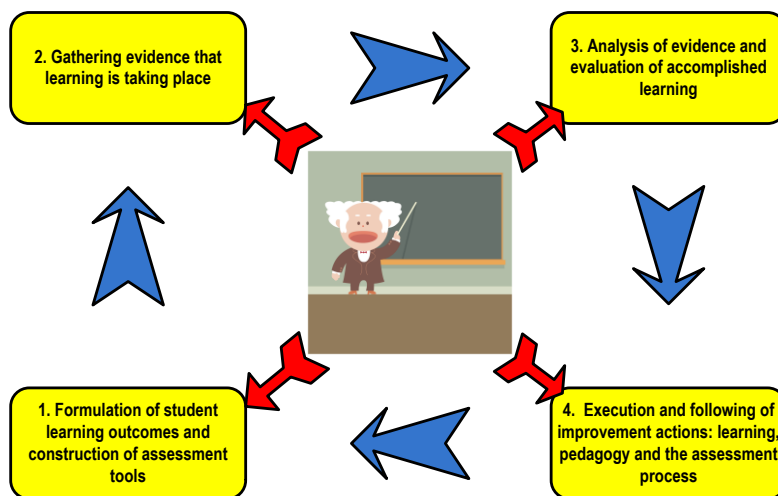
Fig.2: Faculty participation in the assessment cycle.

AILO is comprised of faculty members and administrators, and these individuals are doing the pioneering work in assessment at CETYS. They reformulated the ILOS initially developed by the deans of the three colleges and have been involved in EP design and testing. They also have developed three rubrics to do the assessment of two ILOS: Effective Communication in Spanish and Continuous Learning. And as stated before, they have conducted the assessment cycle at the institutional level.

2. Gathering evidence that learning is taking place.

The members of AILO have produced the 2008 Annual Assessment Plan [2] after mapping two of the four ILOS along all the courses offered in that year. This plan states which courses were selected for assessment of effective communication in Spanish and continuous learning. In the reports for both semesters it is possible to identify how many professors were called to do assessment and how many finally did it. The effectiveness for the first semester of 2008 was 48% and 61% for the second semester. In this stage participants had to include assessment in their learning activities and had to use the provided rubrics to assess how well their students can communicate in writing and graphical (presentation) forms, and how well they conduct a research. Since the EP was not finished yet, all the participants have to integrate an assessment package, comprised of an assessment report that summarizes their results and the assessed learning products with their corresponding completed rubrics. These packages, most of them in electronic format, were concentrated in the deans' offices to be later picked-up by members of AILO to proceed with stage 3 of the assessment cycle. For the first semester of 2008, a video was produced as a visual and instructional aid to help professors to understand how to do assessment and clarify the assessment information to be delivered to the deans' offices. For the second semester of 2008 and taking in mind the pilot group of professors and students selected to test the functional parts of the EP, two instructional videos were developed by AILO members to help them in how to use the EP. In summary, fulltime and part time faculty from the three campuses had participated in doing assessment and gathering evidence on the amount of gained learning. In this part of the assessment cycle members of AILO worked also a facilitators and advisors for those professors who required help in understanding how to conduct with the assessment activities. The faculty members in AILO applied their instructional design talents to develop visual aids to facilitate the execution of the assessment. They have to move between campuses to execute these tasks.

3. Analysis of evidence and evaluation of how much learning is taking place.

Members of AILO gave their selves to the tasks of gathering and integrate all the assessment information from the assessment packages that were concentrated in the deans' offices. This part of the work was very intensive because not every professor followed the instructions to integrate, accordingly, their assessment reports; a situation that lead to rework some of the individual reports and to confirm the information with the professors that provided it. It was clear at this stage that the EP is a critical element for the assessment process. Not only because of its repository capabilities, but also for purposes of reporting, keep the integrity of the information and to distribute the resulting reports to all members of academia (students included) and administrators. Once the reporting part was finished the members of AILO made a presentation for purposes of communicate the assessment results to the different groups within the CETYS community. The results and the presentation were uploaded to CETYS's Academic Information Portal, with the intention of making this information available to all members of academia. The results from the first semester were communicated to the deans, the VPAA and the President of CETYS. This information was also included as one of the performance indicators in the annual report for the Board, discussed in its annual meeting [7] at Ensenada, Baja California in January 23, 2008.

4. Decision making towards the improvement of student learning, faculty competency and the assessment process

At the moment of writing this document we are beginning to close the assessment cycle for the second time and steepening into the conclusion/decision/improvement part of the loop. Assessment, with the punctual participation of full time and part time faculty, has been done for two of the four institutional learning outcomes during the whole 2008. We need to connect the results to initiatives directed to improve student learning and the pedagogy of the professoriate. We are very conscious about that and the leaders in academia are taking charge and assuming accountability. Before the start of the second round of assessment for 2008, several actions took place to improve the assessment process. What follows is a summary of these accounts.

An institutional call to the professoriate was made, through the institutional communication office, to improve the design and operation of the three rubrics used in the first round of assessment. The response was cold but the rubrics were improved with the few contributions received [7]. The new rubrics have a thanks note to those contributors. This action is to consolidate SLOs and rubrics that are collaborative formulated and collectively accepted. After the second round a survey was sent to all the participants to gather feedback regarding the assessment process and the tools used. We are, at the moment of writing this report, in the compilation of the results of that survey.

Another decision, regarding the assessment process, was to escalate the number of courses selected to perform assessment, and to place more emphasis in having the evidence in electronic format.

Regarding the EP, a modification was made in the software to use a learning product (essay, for instance) to do assessment with more than one SLO. This action with the idea of not loading the faculty with additional work, and to embed the assessment process into what they are already doing in their summative and continuous evaluation practices.

List of pieces of evidence that support this statement

[Evidence #8) DOCUMENT that describe the four institutional learning outcomes adopted by CETYS University in 2007.

[Evidence #7) Annual Assessment Plan for the two semesters of 2008.

[Evidence #13] Presentations used to communicate the assessment results to members from academia and administration.

[Evidence #13)] Copy of the Academic Council Agenda Meeting when presentation of assessment results took place.

[5] Attendance list of faculty to the Mary Allen Workshop on Assessment.

[Evidence #30) Set of rubrics applied in 2008-1 and 2008-2.

[Evidence #59] File of the Board's 2009 Ordinary Meeting at Ensenada, B.C.

[Evidence #10] Report of the analysis made by academies of each academic program.