Improving ABET Assessment Processes at CalPoly

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Learning Outcomes

• Compare direct measures in terms of workload and effectiveness.
• Identify approaches to centralize assessment efforts.
• Improve surveys.
• Identify elements in a vision of a future assessment process.
Overview

• Characteristics of CalPoly
  – Impact on assessment processes
  – Presenting a college-wide overview
• Assessment methods
  – Direct & indirect measures, skills
• Evaluation methods and improvements
  – Drawing conclusions, validating improvements
• Engaging faculty & campus community, centralize efforts
• Future: More value to faculty, better impact in classroom
• Let’s discuss pros & cons!
  – Help participants critique or improve their processes?
• How we have implemented methods described by Gloria Rogers, results…
Overview - Who Are We?

- CalPoly, San Luis Obispo, CA
- BS & MS programs only - Teaching & Learning emphasis at CalPoly
- ~5300 Engineering students (~1/4 university)
- 15 BS Engineering programs (including Computer Science, in CENG)
- 12 Reaccredidation (Fall 2008)
- 1 First-Time Accreditation (Software Engg)
- Large student body creates challenges!
Overview - General Approach

• Define 3-5 ‘skills’ associated with each A-K Outcome.
• Combine C9 Program-specific outcomes together with C3 A-K assessment
• Use direct and indirect measures
• Program-specific and ‘institutional’ improvements

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My Role?

- Assistant Dean for CENG
- Provide suggestions, share best practices
- Run processes (surveys)
- Specific guidance, S-S template
- Also an ABET Program Evaluator
- Goals:
  - Create a culture of data-driven assessment.
  - Establish value with faculty - impact in classroom.
C3 Measures - ???

• Engage faculty?
• Provide surprising results (sometimes)?
• Readily identify areas for improvement?
• Robust, insensitive to evaluation criteria?

• … These are good goals!

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C3 Assessment Instruments Vary Across College

• Locally-developed exams
  – Yield new information, beyond coursework
  – Multiple-choice or essay
  – Required in course, contributes to grade
  – Topics cover courses from Freshman to Senior level

• Embedded questions on finals
  – Faculty assessors review (2nd pair of eyes for ABET).

• Collection of student materials
  – Faculty assessors review via rubric

• Senior Project analysis
  – Required submission, as part of project write-up
  – ‘Identify ethical issues associated with the use or misuse of your senior project.’
  – Project styles may vary, but analysis could be more consistent?

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C3 Locally Developed Exams & Embedded Final Questions – Better!

• ‘Senior Exam’ (A ‘Local Exam’, G. Rogers)
  – Direct measure
  – Senior seminar or design course
  – 5% of course grade
  – Multiple choice & essay
  – *No preparation for student*
  – Questions identified by faculty (ABET Cmte, CC…)

• Flexible hitting all outcomes, existing student projects may be a stretch to hit all outcomes.
• Questions may address concepts spanning multiple courses.
• With a web-based, proctored, testing lab this would have no impact on class time, faculty time.

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C3 Faculty Shocked
By What Students Do NOT Know

• Try asking seniors questions from freshman, sophomore or junior-level classes…
  – A ‘worst-case’ measure
• Very different than reviewing materials from your courses
  – A ‘best-case’ measure
• Students often ‘bomb’ questions on local exam – splitting hairs to evaluate data is not necessary.
• York: Gauge “Off the cuff” abilities on the job (Co-Op).
• Mercer: Using a 50% criteria as desired performance target
• Mercer: Defining exam can be divisive! (Yes, and healthy!!)
C3 Institutional Data / Resources

- University Writing Proficiency Exam - Direct
- Career Services Surveys - fine tune for ABET
- (WASC) NSSE
  - National Survey on Student Engagement
  - Indirect, administered to freshman & seniors.
  - Comparisons with similar institutions, CSU system and national.
  - Limited use, ‘A third leg’.
  - Used to help identify improvement areas.
- (Future) WASC rubrics & direct measures - writing & LLL, University Learning Objectives

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C3 GSS Survey Improvements

• Process: SurveyMonkey (paperless)
  – Centralized in Dean’s Office. Institutionalizing process.
  – Download class list with re-prompts and hands-off operation for program reps.

• Form: Wording of A-K focuses on skills, not just outcomes
  – Better understandability by students.

• Content: Questions worded better
  – Included ‘No Opinion’…

• Usage: Gauge benefit of improvements
  – Indirect measure used to help close the loop

Both process & program improvements.

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C2 Improvements to Alumni Surveys

- Asked specific questions on career accomplishments
- Collected via SurveyMonkey.
- Prompted with ‘PolyLink’, on-line community
  - Add optional response for contact info to update PolyLink
- Process Improvements
  - Subject line less likely flagged as spam
  - More energetic email message
  - Email prompt appears to come from Dept Chair
  - Increased span of years, 3-9 years back
  - New system provides count of outgoing prompts for response stats.
    2x – 3x improvement, (now) typically 20%-40%
- Prize and gift, as with previous versions of the surveys.

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C3 Example Skills & Measures…

- *Agglomerated versions* – college-wide
- Phrased with observable action verb.
- *Preferably* high on Bloom’s scale, to improve retention.
- Attempt to identify multiple choice exam questions for efficient grading, essays otherwise.
C3 Example Skills & Measures: *Ethics & Professionalism*

- Identify situations with ethical concerns, e.g. NDA.
- Knowledge of X-E code of ethics.
- Identify situations with inappropriate professional behavior, e.g. sexual harassment.
- Assessment instruments:
  - Multiple choice questions
- *Emphasis varies in programs.*

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C3 Example Skills & Measures: 

Multidisciplinary

- Recognize the value of a broad skill associated with an MD team, by identifying examples associated with a project.
- Rate examples of team communications and identify ways to improve team communications.
- Identify when problems occur due to poor interactions among team members and propose changes to improve team dynamics.
- Assessment instruments:
  - Describe a hypothetical team interaction, then ask students to identify problems and suggest remedies. Essay or multiple choice.
  - Essay on prior project experience.

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C3 Example Skills & Measures: *Impact of Engr on Society*

- Cite examples of current or recent events in nation or world that could influence a student's career path or the field.
- Identify societal impact associated with a project or product.
- Identify a disruptive technology.
- Assessment instruments:
  - Essay or multiple choice

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C3 Example Skills & Measures: Contemporary Issues

- Cite examples of science and technology to needs driven by society, health & safety, or the environment.
- Identify sustainability issues associated with a project or product.
- Identify negative impact of science and technology on society, perhaps resulting from an unintended consequence.
- Assessment instruments:
  - Describe examples open-ended question
- *Not high on Bloom’s scale 😃

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C3 Example Skills & Measures: *Life-Long Learning*

- Able to learn new techniques, tools, or devices outside the classroom environment.
  - Cite examples from (Senior Project…)
- Find appropriate technical resources
  - Cite examples and compare quality (Senior Project…)
- Able to identify need for and to plan for additional training or learning
  - *Indirect*
(C4) Institutionalizing Processes

• Any difficulties managing documents?
• Example:
  – 13 programs submitting survey questions (or updates)
  – 13 data summaries, response stats…
• Using BlackBoard to organize docs
  – Bb site for each program
  – Post survey questions, download summary
(C4) Process Improvements

• (Less work, regular completion)
• Centralized surveys on SurveyMonkey
  – Paperless, Hands-off operation for programs
• College provides template for S-S covering university & college level issues.

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C4 Changing the Culture
On Program Improvements

• “Do we have to measure to know the sky is blue?”
  – We may not have to, but we need to convince our Evaluator!
• How will we know we have achieved a desired result for our students’ improved abilities?
  – By yet another anecdotal observation?
• Data helps…
  – Prioritize improvement areas
  – Retire improvement areas, move on to new ones
C4 Program Improvements

- (C1) Grad advising
- (C3) Math/Science, Writing, Disciplinary skills (e.g. programming).
- (C3) Course changes…
- (C3-GE, getting the most from Gen Ed)
  - Teamwork in PSY course in GE
  - Wide Outcome coverage in Tech Writing
- Intro to engineering course
- ‘MD Certified’

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C3/C4/C5 Where Do Students Practice Their MD Skills?

- At CalPoly, ‘MD Certified’ for graduation.
- New college-wide requirement.
- Programs each define list of one or more acceptable activities to meet certification.
- Mitigates throughput issues associated with a single venue.
- Flexible solution, not restrictive.

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Activities for MD Requirement Are Varied

- (As discussed in 2007-09 Cal Poly catalog)
- Team senior project
- CO-OP or internship employment
- Certain club activities (e.g. EWB Project)
- Working with faculty on a sponsored project
- Project embedded in curriculum
- Taking certain courses
- Service learning project

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C4 Were Your Improvements Beneficial?

- **Required:**
  - Close the loop
  - Summative (Outcomes) assessment

- A **desirable** method is probably to wait for impact of change to bubble up to direct measures of seniors.

- What about validating
  - Small changes?
  - Changes with diffuse effect (freshman course)?

- Validation may be difficult sometimes!

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C4 Were Your Improvements Beneficial?

- Suggest: Deploy a survey specific to improvements.
- Deploy in the course specific to the change
  - Course following a prerequisite change, e.g.
- Involve a control group
  - Parallel sections taught by two different methods

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(C4) Getting Traction With Technology

- Prior pilots too complex, even with a small user group
- Bb fine
  - Document management
  - Post office boxes (surveys)
  - Parallel access (syllabi and resumes)
- SurveyMonkey
  - GSS & Alumni
  - Prefer Additional Feature: summarize with categories

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Future Vision - Goals

• To provide more effective feedback on students for faculty
• Feedback that is formative as well as summative.
• Feedback that hits closer to instructor’s day-to-day classroom efforts.

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Future Vision for a Process - Elements

• Longitudinal tracking of students
• ABET summative measures
• ABET-style formative direct measures
• Other assessment measures (WASC)
• University measures (writing exam)
• Student demographics
• Student learning styles / communities
Future Vision of a Process - Benefits

• Provide data for educational research studies
  – Benchmark pedagogical changes
  – Compare consistency of tools that measure or predict student success
  – Diagnose systemic problems

• Provide data for ABET
  – Have control group data, as a baseline

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Goal: Promoting A Culture Change

• “We can still learn from an imperfect assessment process.”
  – Derek Bok, ‘Our Underachieving Colleges’

• “It sure is nice to have all this data to review when considering curricular changes!”
  – CalPoly faculty member (recent)
Conclusion

• ‘All or bomb’ direct measures
  – Engage faculty. Shock value.
• Centralize efforts
  – Surveys, S-S template
• Future: Longitudinal studies and assessment.
• Appropriate technology
  – Technology / processes that people will use
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