Evaluation Capacity Building in College Language Programs: Developing and Sustaining a Student Exit Survey Project


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Student survey as an evaluation data collection tool

• A survey cannot and was not intended to evaluate all aspects of a given LLL academic program
• Faculty are generally interested in hearing from students about their program experiences
• Online surveys are logistically practical, inexpensive, and comparatively easy to administer and modify
• Surveys provide data that are comparatively easy to analyze, interpret, and report
Online Student Exit Survey Project at LLL: Impetus and the issue of ownership

LLL Dean’s office

A “top-down” initiative (fall, 2008)

LLL Departments

Impetus: No systematic method to get feedback from our graduating majors on their experiences in the program and its impact on their accomplishments & future plans that could be used to (a) better understand and improve our degree programs, and (b) help meet externally-mandated evaluation requirements

Not a faculty-initiated, bottom-up project

➡️ How to foster a sense of ownership and gain evaluation buy-in?
In order to successfully conduct an externally-mandated evaluation initiative.

- Must balance the evaluation needs of college/university administrators with the needs of stakeholders within departments (e.g., department chairs, program heads, section coordinators, etc.)
- Must be accompanied by some kind of evaluation capacity building that will help faculty engage in the planned evaluation activities
College of Languages, Linguistics, and Literature (LLL) at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa (UHM)

- 25 degree programs, from BA to MA and PhD programs
- 800 undergraduate majors and 350 graduate majors in LLL fields
Concerns related to budget and faculty workload

• In the fall of 2008, UH-Mānoa was undergoing deep budget cuts due to a severe state government budget shortfall.

• The UH-Mānoa central administration’s academic program prioritization initiative sparked fear and resentment throughout the campus.

  ⇒ In order to get faculty support for LLL’s exit survey initiative, we needed to convince them that the project had *nothing* to do with the academic program prioritization process.

• Faculty perception of institutional evaluation demands as a bureaucratic burden and something that increase workload without benefit.

  ⇒ A low-cost project beneficial to the programs.
  ⇒ No excessive increases in faculty workloads.
Concerns related to budget and faculty workload (Cont’d)

How did we get the project started?

- Hired two quarter-time graduate assistants (0.25 Full-Time Equivalent [FTE] x 2), who were then being trained as professional evaluation specialists, for the initial year of the project

We conduct useful and meaningful program evaluation by:

- Ensuring that the voices of various stakeholders are reflected in the designing of evaluation
- Consulting with and providing support to faculty in planning, conducting, and sustaining evaluation activities
- Making evaluation planning and processes feasible, sustainable, and transparent
- Facilitating decision-making by providing evaluation findings based on systematic collection and analysis of evidence
Ad-hoc LLL Assessment Committee and the initial planning

• Formed an ad-hoc LLL Assessment Committee that includes department chairs and two faculty members with evaluation/assessment expertise

• In September of 2008, met with the committee to propose the project and get feedback

• Requested each department chair to (a) communicate about the project to faculty, (b) appoint an assessment liaison for each academic program, (c) identify who in the department (e.g., faculty, student representatives, and staff advisors) would provide input, and (d) schedule an individual follow-up meeting with the GAs
Development of survey questions

• To develop common questions, review literature on student survey as well as example exit surveys used at other institutions

• Create an online instrument that included a number of draft common items and ask faculty to rate the items for inclusion/exclusion with comments

• The common questions include: (a) background information, (b) awards and other accomplishments, (c) satisfaction with overall program experience, (d) satisfaction with courses, (e) satisfaction with institutional resources, (f) immediate and long-term plans after graduation, and (g) opinions of program value

• Asked departments to submit any program-specific questions they wanted to include in their surveys.
Sample common questions for Numerical data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Overall satisfaction with the program</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Availability of program information (website, brochure)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Academic standards and expectations</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Relevance of program to academic/professional goals</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>4. Appropriateness of degree requirements</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Faculty mentoring and advising</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Extra-curricular activities (e.g., cultural activities)</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Student morale</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Research opportunities</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>9. Professional training opportunities</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>10. Faculty's ability to keep pace with the field</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>O</td>
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<td>O</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please provide comments that will help us understand your ratings above if any.
Sample common questions for Narrative data

1. What are the strengths of the program?

2. What recommendations do you have to improve the program?

3. Did the program increase your job prospects?
   - Definitely not
   - Maybe not
   - Neutral
   - Maybe yes
   - Definitely yes

Please provide comments that will help us understand your response if any.
Sample questions about student learning outcomes (SLOs) (BA in Korean for professionals)

1. The following statements are student learning outcomes for your degree program.

To what extent can you do the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage in oral communication in Korean in various social contexts, in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways</td>
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<td>Express opinions and ideas by using professional-level vocabulary and formal expressions</td>
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<td>Read and comprehend professional-level Korean materials from a variety of genres and contexts (e.g., newspaper or internet articles, books, etc.)</td>
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<td>Listen, comprehend and analyze Korean audio/video materials from a variety of genres and contexts (e.g., news, documentary, talk shows, etc.)</td>
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<td>Apply critical thinking and rhetorical skills to produce coherent written works and presentations in Korean only</td>
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<td>Use a variety of Korean reference works and sources, including dictionaries and encyclopedias both in book form and on the Internet</td>
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<td>Conduct independent research on students' major-related topics in Korean, and effectively communicate the results</td>
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Please provide comments that will help us understand your ratings above if any.
Sample program-specific questions (BA in Second Language Studies)

### 3. Satisfaction with the capstone course (Professionalism in SLS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Coverage of aspects of professionalism</td>
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<td>2. Increasing student awareness of being a developing professional</td>
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<td>3. Development of a professional philosophy statement</td>
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<td>4. Development of a professional portfolio</td>
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<td>5. Increased student confidence as a developing professional</td>
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</table>

Please provide comments that will help us understand your ratings above if any.
From data collection to data use

The College of LLL Dean’s Office

Data Collection
* Sending students personalized invitations to complete the exit surveys
* Sending out brief reminders to students, stressing the importance of the survey,
* Asking program heads and advisors to encourage students to respond, and so on.

Data Analysis
Response rate: 50% for BA surveys and 65% for MA/PhD surveys

Reporting the results back to the department
* Quantitative results (descriptive statistics)
* Qualitative data (easy-to-read formats)
From data collection to data use (cont’d)

In the department

- Distribute data
- Interpret data
- Use data

Share the results with all faculty members in the program or with those in a relevant committee in the program

- Confirm and reconfirm the strength and value of their programs
- Help them identify areas needing program-level improvement such as modifying graduation requirements, revising curriculum, developing new courses, modifying course offering frequencies and schedules, etc.
Mandatory annual assessment reports to the Mānoa Assessment Office
Issues and challenges

• Engaging faculty in a program-level evaluation initiative like this one is a challenge to do well.

• It requires leadership and cooperation from both students and faculty.

• Obtaining high survey response rates for all programs.

• Sustaining administrative support.

• No executive administrator is permanent.
Conclusion

• Abandoning new evaluation initiatives will come quite easily unless we keep putting energy into sustaining our effort, motivation, and support.

• In order to engage faculty in sound and functional program-level evaluation practices, such practices must be useful and meaningful for both internal and external stakeholders.

• The institution needs to invest in assessment and evaluation capacity building.
Thank you!

References
