

To Tracdat or Not to Tracdat – sent to LSSUstaff@lssu.edu April 22, 2015

Any faculty member or department can submit assessment summaries directly, not ever using Tracdat at all. To do this simply prepare a short summary report, following a format that uniquely fits your department, school or college, or use a template like that in the attachment (also available at <http://www.lssu.edu/assessment/documents/AssessmentActivityLog.docx>). Reports can be stored on a shared network drives, emailed to tracdat@lssu.edu or sent by campus mail to D. Myton in ADMIN206. Voila!

Any assessment summary should address these four basics:

- a) Clearly stated goals (outcomes) for student learning or departmental effectiveness
- b) Meaningful processes (means) for assessment of those goals
- c) Summaries (findings) describing and documenting how well we achieved our goals
- d) Actions describing how the information will be used to improve student learning or the departmental effectiveness

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The Shared Governance Assessment Committee

'Supporting student learning and institutional effectiveness'

tracdat@lssu.edu

The END of TRACDAT?

Well, it is the end of Tracdat 4.9.1 since this summer will see the release of the version 5, with a refreshing new user interface and familiar structure. Training resources will be available for departments in late summer and throughout the fall 2015.

GRADES as ASSESSMENT? – sent to LSSUfaculty@lssu.edu on April 27, 2015

Faculty members assign grades as a measure of individual student learning. In contrast, assessment looks at the learning of all students in a class or program. Grades can be used as the basis of assessment IF the activity which is graded is directly related to achievement of a specific outcome.

It may be helpful to illustrate this with an example. Assume students are assigned a paper on the role of the Federal Reserve Bank to address a course goal related to U.S. financial policy. If the paper's grade is only based on the correct interpretation and application of financial policy then the average grade of all students could be a meaningful assessment of student learning for this outcome. However, if the grade is based on a combination of grammar and punctuation, proper use of references, the assignment being turned in on-time, AND appropriate content related to financial policy then the grade is not just a direct measure of the goal and not a good basis for assessing the outcome. However, in this latter case it might still be possible to average just the content-subscore and use that for the assessment of student learning.

Faculty members are best qualified to define effective measures of student learning in their classes, this is why faculty bear the responsibility for assigning course grades. Assessment uses the information gained through grading (or other means) to look at the performance of the group in achieving the specific outcomes of the course or program. Look for ways to simplify assessment of student learning by capturing existing evaluation data (grades) from your courses and programs.

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Why CARE about Assessment? – sent April 28, 2015 to LSSUstaff@lssu.edu

First let's look at what DO we care about. We care about student learning, and building a strong and healthy university. The Assessment Committee agrees with this sentiment and wants to keep the focus on student achievement and institutional effectiveness.

There are four aspects that are common to all evaluative activity:

- a) defining clear goals for student learning and institutional effectiveness
- b) having effective ways to measure achievement of those goals
- c) collecting information on the attainment of our goals
- d) using the information collected to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness

How is this data being used?

There are clear benefits, and obligations, that led the university to develop a central integrated system for the collection and aggregation of assessment data across all units. Faculty and staff need to be individually engaged in assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness within their work, but that doesn't mean that everyone needs to personally enter their piece of the assessment puzzle directly into Tracdat.

So What about Tracdat?

Tracdat provides a way to collect institutional evidence on assessment, institutional progress toward our goals. Individuals and departments can simply prepare a short report, following a format that uniquely fits your department, school or college, or use a four-column template like this example: (<http://www.lssu.edu/assessment/documents/AssessmentActivityLog.docx>). Reports can be stored on a shared network drive, emailed to tracdat@lssu.edu, or sent by campus mail to D.Myton ADMIN206

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Is Assessment a Distraction? - sent April 29, 2015 to LSSUstaff@lssu.edu

Some may say that doing assessment is a distraction which competes with the key and vital functions which define our jobs: teaching classes, leading research projects, running the steam plant, or coordinating the varied activities of Student Life. However, perpetuating any activity without meaningful assessment of the effectiveness of that activity is inherently bad. Accountability has come to higher education and student, parents and legislators are looking for evidence that their educational investments are warranted, productive, and lead to the outcomes we advertise.

As a university, we must demonstrate that we have:

- a) Clearly stated goals (outcomes) and effective processes (means) for assessment of that learning
- b) Assessed the achievement of our goals (findings) for both our curricular and co-curricular activities
- c) Used the information we collected to improve achievement of our goals (action),
- d) Used processes and methodologies that reflect good practice and in which faculty and staff have participated substantially through the process.

Assessing goals that are artificial, unmeasurable, unrealistic or useless is a distraction. Creating reams, or gigabytes, of documentation that no one reads or uses is a distraction. Collecting data that we can't or won't use is a distraction. If those things are happening in your department, just stop it. Meaningful assessment must focus on improving student learning, achievement and institutional effectiveness. Meaningful assessment won't be oppressive, externally driven or useless – it will be based on looking reflectively at the things you care about and acting to improve those things.

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Meaningful Assessment Matters – sent April 30, 2015 to LSSUstaff@lssu.edu

We all care deeply about student learning and sustaining a strong effective institution. We strive daily to improve student learning, create supportive and encouraging environments for our students, and build toward our common institutional goals as defined in the mission and strategic plan.

Periodically, we need to step back from the activities of teaching, committee work and our daily routines of our jobs to consider whether students are learning all we intend, whether our office practices and the programs we provide have been effective, and whether we are achieving our institutional goals. Then we must use what we have learned to improve. This is the basis of meaningful assessment – setting reasonable goals, identifying the means to attain the goals, measuring our progress toward those goals and using that information to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness.

Faculty and staff are the ones who are best able to exercise their professional judgement in all aspects of meaningful assessment. There is no single or uniquely right way to assess student learning or the effectiveness of our programs and services. There is no predetermined target level for student performance, or administrative unit performance. There is no single action which must result when we consider the results of our assessment. Continue to exercise your good judgement as you engage in an ongoing process of review, evaluation, action and documentation leading to enhanced student achievement and to a strong, effective university.

P.S. Just as a reminder: Any faculty member or department can submit assessment summaries directly in Tracdat, or indirectly using an alternative format. To do the latter simply prepare a short summary report, following a format that uniquely fits your department, school or college, or use a template like that in the attached example (also available at <http://www.lssu.edu/assessment/documents/AssessmentActivityLog.docx>). The summary reports can be stored on a shared network drives, emailed to tracdat@lssu.edu or sent by campus mail to D. Myton in ADMIN206.

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The END of TRACDAT? – sent April 30 to LSSUstaff@lssu.edu

Well, it is the end of Tracdat 4.9.1 since this summer will see the release of version 5, with a refreshing of the user interface and navigation. Training resources will be available for departments in late summer and throughout fall 2015.

Have a safe and relaxing summer, and please document your assessment of student learning, program or departmental goals, and progress on strategic initiatives or other activities before next fall's convocation week.

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