TracDat Tips for Chairs of Interdisciplinary Programs

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Recognizing that most of you work in interdisciplinary programs for which there is no staff support and out of a love for the field, not a desire to run an additional program, I have tried to put together some ideas that may help you with TracDat.

The reason for the urgency is simple. We have a Fifth Year Review coming up fairly quickly. While the decennial review is not until 2019, one of the standards on which institutions are most commonly cited as deficient is assessment of student learning outcomes. For the Fifth Year Review for SACS in 2014, we have to demonstrate the following:

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in the following area: (Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1)

3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes

The current expectation is to have at least two years of data using at least two different methodologies for each student learning outcome (SLO). One of the methods must be “direct” assessment, that is, evaluation of a student product or performance, not student perceptions as in an exit or alumni/ae survey. You also cannot use grades or course completion alone. However, you can use rubric scoring of an essay question or exam as you are grading as long as in the assessment plan, you use a direct assessment method and describe results using something other than letter grades as criteria.

That said, the following is intended to make it easier for interdisciplinary programs to complete an assessment plan in TracDat.

1. You can now reach TracDat easily at: https://tracdat.austincollege.edu:8443/tracdat/. Use your usual login and password (for Webhopper or email). Remember that there are TracDat materials available on the Institutional Research page: http://www.austincollege.edu/academics/academic-support/institutional-research/.

2. If you work in multiple reporting units (e.g., your home department and one or more interdisciplinary programs), you can click down from the “Selected Unit” to find the one you want to open. EDU simply indicates that it is an educational program that offers a major and/or minor.

3. When you open the interdisciplinary unit you want to review, click on the Assessment Unit tab to the right of the dark blue Home tab. Review the name of the unit, the mission statement and the assessment Contact for accuracy.
4. Next review the Faculty/Staff listed under the tab to the right of the gold **General** Tab that showed you the mission and contact name. If there are people who should be there and are not, email Laura Whitfill or me and we will get their names added. Note that between the tabs and the unique content for your program, there is a **gold line** that always tells you the path taken to get you to the current page.

5. Similarly, when you click on the next **Courses** tab, you will need to let Laura know what courses need to be added. She uploads course from Datatel each semester, but only those with the prefix that matches the unit. Therefore, you will need to provide her the list of courses that you want to be available for curriculum mapping to your student learning outcomes, including any January term offerings or courses taught every other year. She needs the course prefix (e.g., AMST), the number and the name of each course. You need not list every course that any student might use to fulfill the minor or major, just those courses where student learning outcomes are introduced, reinforced or assessed.

6. When you move to the next Plan tab, there are four tabs beneath it:
   a. Intended Outcomes
   b. Means of Assessment
   c. Related Courses
   d. Related Goals

   If you are just beginning your work in TracDat, you may want to review all of the information already provided there. Karen Nelson downloaded to your **Documents** (the dark blue tab at the far right) all of the information she found on the Institutional Research server. She came up with the Intended Outcome Name, trying as much as possible to link intended outcomes to General Education Outcomes (which are listed as Related Goals). The first thing you may well want to do is edit those names and the Intended Outcomes themselves. Note also that when you click **edit** (to the right of each outcome), you can also change its status from Active. For example, if you have 5 or more outcomes and someone on sabbatical, you may very well want to defer an outcome for a year or two.

7. At this point, you may want next to look at the options under the dark blue **Reports** tab. Both the Assessment Plan and the Unit Assessment Report – Four-Column ultimately illustrate how you assess each of your student learning outcomes. The Curriculum Map simply shows that you have thought about where and how those outcomes are introduced, reinforced and assessed. During Spring 2011, programs had very different reactions to the curriculum mapping exercise, some (e.g., foreign languages and mathematics) found it pretty useless in that once they had declared where an outcome was introduced, it was likely that the outcome would be reinforced in every successive course the student took. Other programs (e.g., biology) found it very helpful to have the conversations about curriculum mapping; several had, in fact, been working on curriculum mapping before the rollout
of TracDat began. Regardless, your experience in an interdisciplinary program may seem more complicated if you have very few students or have spent little time in the past talking about assessment. If that is the case, it may be wiser to work first on your Assessment Plan, then turn to the Curriculum Map.

8. When you begin looking at **Means of Assessment** for your Assessment Plan, keep in mind the following tips:
   a. Most units assess 4-7 outcomes; with busy colleagues, you are better of selecting three or four than attempting seven or eight.
   b. For SACS, as noted above, you must have two years of assessment data using two different methods, one of which must be direct, for each student learning outcome (SLOs). **Be efficient.** A senior exit interview or survey can be an indirect means of assessment each of your outcomes; an in-course assessment of a capstone or questions on the First Decade Alumni Survey could do the same.
   c. For direct methods, you can look at the drop-down list for Assessment Method Category. The most common direct methods are:
      i. Juried performance
      ii. Objective test scores
      iii. Portfolio analysis
      iv. Rubric-scored assignment/performance
   Keep in mind that you cannot say anything that implies that you are using grades or course completion as your Criterion. However, if a program has an oral communication SLO and you require an oral presentation at the end of your course, create a rubric and apply it to the presentation (or have students use the rubric as a peer evaluation). If you have no idea how to create a rubric, I can direct you to many exemplars. The key is to use the language of assessment (e.g., inadequate, adequate, exceptional or unacceptable, developing, mastery-level) instead of letter grades.
   d. Divide and conquer – work with others to decide who is going to do what assessment in 2011-2012. If a colleague has never required an oral performance, s/he’s probably not going to relish doing so. At the same time, if everyone decides to tackle critical inquiry skills using a course-based assignment, you may end up with no assessment of the other two outcomes you needed to assess.

9. Above all, avoid being overly critical of assessment efforts. One of the reasons Internal Program Review is made available as an indirect means of assessment is to reward you for having program meetings. It may very well be the case that the assessment in Course X did not assess every declared minor’s written communication skills. That’s fine, especially if you have a conversation about what was learned and what could not be learned from that assessment.

10. Ask for help. We can often give you specific examples and ideas to make this task easier.