

Improvement Dimension Report Pulaski Technical College

Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to effect improvement. Assessment provides feedback to new students to guide their learning, to faculty to guide their teaching, and to the institution to guide planning, resource allocation, decision making, and improvement of programs and policies. As a way to facilitate improvement, these institutions are knowledgeable about current practices at other institutions as well as relevant research and scholarship.

Committee Leaders

- Kellye Mashburn, Director of Institutional Research
- Melissa Myers, Grants and Annual Gifts Officer

Committee Members

Micca Burris, Associate Director of Children First

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Current situation

The Improvement Dimension committee based its findings of the current situation on anecdotal information, interviews with selected faculty and staff, Current Practices Inventory, the Foundations of Excellence Faculty/Staff Survey and an Improvement Dimension Survey. It is apparent that Pulaski Tech has made a commitment to improving its assessment functions as evidenced through the addition of a position of a Director of Institutional Research, who has now been on staff for more than two years.

The Foundations of Excellence survey, sent to all faculty and staff, included fourteen questions that dealt with an area of improvement. Four of those questions covered professional development. On a scale of 1 to 5, Pulaski Tech was scored 2.88 on the question of whether staff and faculty attended conferences or workshops focusing on the first year; 2.49 on whether faculty and staff attended national/regional conferences or meetings; 3.25 on whether staff and faculty read professional materials; and 2.22 on whether staff or faculty presented at conferences or contributed to publications. Pulaski Tech has recognized the need for additional professional development and has released an instructor from class time to begin an on-campus professional development institute with diverse opportunities for additional education.

On questions regarding whether Pulaski Tech used assessment results, the College has scored 2.54 on a five point scale. Questions addressed using demographic information from institution databases to improve working with new students (2.41), using measurement of pre-enrollment academic skills (2.66), using academic skills measured after one semester (2.63), using measures of student time spent studying (scored at 2.2 even though this is not measured at PTC), using measures of student alcohol consumption (1.54; not measured by the College), using current practices at other institutions (2.45), using professional/published research to improve serving first-year students (2.71) and using student evaluations, assessments or feedback (3.63).

Questions regarding whether Pulaski Tech leverages assessment earned a mean of 3.13. Questions addressed whether we are assessing what is relevant to the College (3.12), if results are disseminated in a timely manner (3.12) and if results are used as a foundation for improvement (3.14).

The survey demonstrated that Pulaski Tech is moving in the right direction in use of assessment, but definitely has room for improvement. The College has added an Institutional Research officer in the last couple of years. Most administrative staff and faculty, however, are not familiar with the process of implementing and reviewing systematic assessment and few staff and faculty feel like they have time to complete this process.

The Improvement Dimension survey administered to full-time faculty, staff and administrators provided additional insight into the current situation at Pulaski Tech. Of those who responded (144 out of 280), 77.1% were aware of their department process for setting goals and objectives for the academic year and 70.6% stated that they are involved at high levels in the goal and objective setting process. Of the people involved in planning, 71.7% feel involved in assessment of progress toward stated goals and objectives. It is relevant to note that adjunct faculty members were not given this survey to complete. It may be that results would be less satisfactory if part-time faculty were given an opportunity to complete the survey. As one comment stated, ***"Because we have such a large percentage of classes being taught by adjuncts who do not necessarily understand or care about assessment, it makes gathering useful information very, very difficult."*** Another: ***"Because we lack 100% participation from adjunct faculty in the assessment process, our results cannot be meaningful."***

Respondents described departmental measurement methods, demonstrating that the College collects a good deal of information. Various departments use end-of-program assessment data, student surveys, advisory committee feedback, pre and post-tests, monthly reports on progress toward objectives, retention rates, assessment exams, verbal feedback, surveys, enrollment, student evaluations, POISE data, review of operating plan, graduation rates and other tools to determine progress toward goals.

Of the respondents, 76.2% of staff and faculty had an opportunity to review results. However, that means almost 25% do not get a chance to review evaluation information.

It is not surprising that a drop-off in satisfaction scores occurs when respondents address how effectively evaluation information is used to gauge effectiveness of the College. Responses show 26.4% ranked the College at the lowest of the 1-5 scale, 15.7% scored the College at a 2, 28.1% scored the College at a 3, 19% scored the College at a 4 and 10.7% scored the College at a 5.

Many full-time staff and faculty are involved in the beginning stages of an assessment process. The pitfalls, however, occur in at least two areas: 1) adjunct instructors are rarely involved, but teach a huge number of courses at Pulaski Tech and 2) assessment information is not always effectively reviewed, resulting in changes made on campus because of anecdotal information instead of research.

In addition, the Improvement Dimension Committee completed performance indicators on the five areas outside of Instruction that reach the highest number of first-year Pulaski Tech students. Those areas were determined to be the Learning Assistance Center, SOAR, On-line Orientation, College Seminar and placement testing. In general, it was found that these areas value assessing, try to implement some assessment and try to evaluate that assessment, but often do not have time to do so. The On-line Orientation has no way to assess at this time. None of these areas have systematic assessment, defined as appropriately timed, focused, and based on data collection and analysis methods that provide high quality information for decision making.

Areas of Concern

It is obvious from the Improvement Dimension Committee's research that a large number of full-time faculty and staff value assessment and are part of the process of setting goals and objectives and reviewing progress toward those goals. It is disturbing, however, that almost 25% of full-time faculty and staff do not see the results of assessment. Further, Pulaski Tech relies on large numbers of adjunct faculty to teach our classes. Adjunct faculty members need to understand assessment and be involved in the process so they can make improvements in their classes. In addition, the composition of the adjunct faculty can change from semester to semester; therefore, there is little consistency from semester to semester in the use of assessment results. New faculty members may feel disconnected from assessment activities that have gone on before they began working for the College

The survey information supports the need for strong professional development for faculty and staff. Improvements are being made with the addition of an on-campus professional development institute and regular opportunities for education. Limited budgets, however, have forced reduced travel budgets to a bare minimum this year. This must change to allow participation at regional and national professional development opportunities.

Other concerns are encouraging staff and faculty to use evaluation tools and assessment data to affect meaningful improvement and continuing to measure those changes to determine whether improvement occurred.

The five areas outside of academics that reach most first-year students need to incorporate systematic assessment so baseline data can be gathered and improvements can be made in how first-year students are served in those areas. The Learning Assistance Center, College Seminar, SOAR and other areas already have evaluation information, but it is not systematic (as defined on page 2). It is difficult to determine how to best serve first-year students when we are not aware of whether the students being served are first-year students or are analyzed as unduplicated headcounts.

At this time, all assessment activities on campus are led one person. This one-person IR department is expected to produce all necessary research required by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education and other governing bodies and complete routine assessment for areas such as SOAR.

Recommended Grade: C

Recommended Action Items:

- *Assessment (High priority)*

Conduct systematic assessment for areas outside of academic that serve first-year students, such as SOAR, on-line orientation, Learning Assistance Center, placement testing and College Seminar.

- *Hiring: Institutional Research (High priority)*

Expand size of the Institutional Review office

- Professional Development: IR and Assessment (*Medium priority*)

Conduct workshops to explain the importance of institutional research and assessment at professional development events.

- Faculty Involvement (*Medium priority*)

Encourage Division Deans to involve all faculty, including adjunct faculty, in goal setting and review of progress toward goals.