Impact Statement

ProjectTitle: Improving Teaching Evaluations and Curricular Performance in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University

Issue: In this project, I sought to 1) implement improved teaching evaluations and 2) influence a culture that is grounded in learning outcomes that are aligned with meaningful assessment strategies. Little direction has been provided for how best to evaluate quality teaching to enhance student learning. Most evaluations of teaching in the academy focus solely on student feedback. While important, student evaluations of teaching are only one piece of information needed for such an evaluation. Approximately 3 years ago I co-chaired a committee to specifically address this issue that led to a robust set of guidelines. However, these guidelines were never implemented.

Additionally, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) has been engaged in significant work related to learning outcomes and assessment, with a specific focus on academic programs (e.g., majors). However, while we have been making progress in this area there is no plan for how best to ensure that units annually evaluate and assess their work in curricular quality and performance. In a metrics driven culture, it will be important that meaningful and informed teaching and learning metrics are grounded in learning outcomes that are highly aligned to assessment strategies. A process whereby units are annually asked for information about their work in this area and the resultant information is used as a part of a larger unit evaluation ultimately tied to how financial resources are allocated to the units is needed.

What has been done:

Teaching Evaluations – Knowing of the work that had already been completed in CANR, we were asked (by the Provost Office and the HUB for Innovation in Learning and Technology) to be a part of a small team to develop a toolkit to help unit leaders and faculty recognize, understand and support the role of teaching as a catalyst for student learning with the intent universal adoption of the toolkit across the entire Michigan State University campus. CANR's previous work on this topic provide a substantial foundation for toolkit. Additionally, it provides needed structure to inform changes to the University's reappointment, promotion and tenure form, specifically the sections on teaching. The small committee developed the "*Administrator and Faculty Toolkit – Recognizing and Understanding Effective Teaching to Enhance Student Learning*" that will be piloted in CANR and the College of Arts and Letters in academic year 2018-2019 will future adoption across campus in subsequent years.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment – CANR, and most of MSU, has historically not been grounded in a culture of learning outcomes and assessment. For the last six years, since I became the Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs, we have been working to affect change across the college regarding learning outcomes and assessment. To date, all undergraduate major and all Master's and PhD programs in the college have learning outcomes and assessment strategies in place. We recently contracted with Watermark to onboard a web-based platform to track programmatic learning outcomes and affiliated assessments to allow for a more seamless integration of information from course, to program, to college, to university outcomes. Because MSU is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), our work with Watermark will allow CANR to quickly and effectively derive college-wide data to related to Criterion 3 and 4 of the accreditation requirements.

Impacts/New Partnerships:

The work on teaching evaluations and learning outcomes and assessment have elevated CANR as a leader across campus in both areas. Our work in learning outcomes and assessment has pushed CANR

to the forefront of MSU's efforts to make student learning central to the departments' priorities, and this work has been noted by the Associate Provost as a best practice and model for other colleges on the MSU campus. Similarly, it will allow departments to communicate more effectively with students and their families about what they will learn and be able to do at the end of their degree.

The impact of the teaching evaluation toolkit has yet to be determined. However, we anticipate it will have far reaching impacts across campus, ensuring a more transparent and equitable evaluation of teaching to effect student learning. MSU suffers from a culture where faculty believe (and possibly rightly so) that teaching is not on par with research in the evaluation and reward system. Ensuring a more robust evaluation process will be a significant step in moving the value and importance of quality teaching to that which is afforded to research.

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life):
The development of learning outcomes and assessment (and their subsequent aligned) results in:
- increased transparency of how and why a curriculum was designed,
- improving a faculty member, department, college and university's ability to clearly articulate to a student and their family what the student will have learned when they graduate with a particular degree,
- improve the communication of faculty amongst each other to ensure content areas are neither duplicated nor inadvertently omitted, and
- if departments revisit learning outcomes and assessments regularly (bi-annually or annually), minimize the time and energy needed for curricular reform while simultaneously ensuring students are being trained / educated to meet to current and future demands of the work place.

The development of the teaching evaluation toolkit results in:
- increased transparency on how faculty will be evaluated for their teaching assignment,
- increased equity amongst faculty within the same unit, as well as across departments and colleges, regarding evaluation of teaching, and
- providing units leaders with highly sought after guidelines related to best practice in teaching evaluation.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?
I have spent my entire professional career at MSU. As such, I have only been exposed to one way of thinking and one way of doing business. In addition to introducing me to colleagues across the nation whom I can connect with to discuss topics like my project, I have been able to learn about how other institutions are grappling with the same issues. Those discussions have been instrumental in ensuring that I constantly challenge the "we have always done it this way" mantra that often expresses itself on campus and instead ask "why can't we do it differently."

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