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Review of Hallmarks of Effective Outcomes Assessment. Assessment Update Collections

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Hallmarks of Effective Outcomes Assessment: Assessment Update Collections. Edited by Trudy W. Banta. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004. iv + 68 pages. ISBN: 0-7879-7288-6. \$14.95.

This small volume addresses many of the fundamental questions regarding how to get started in outcomes assessment. Editor Trudy Banta initiates the discussion by introducing the seventeen hallmarks of effective assessment, which she previously had identified. These are focused around the three phases of planning, implementing, and improving and sustaining assessment. At the planning stage, the four hallmarks are to: (1) involve stakeholders from the outset; (2) begin when there is a need and allow time for development; (3) have a written plan with clear purposes related to goals that people value so that assessment will be a vehicle for improvement, not an end in itself; (4) base assessment approaches on clear, explicitly stated program objectives. At the implementation stage, the hallmarks include: (1) have knowledgeable, effective leadership; (2) recognize that assessment is essential to learning and therefore is everyone's responsibility; (3) include faculty and staff development to prepare individuals to implement assessment and use the findings; (4) devolve responsibility for assessment to the unit level; (5) recognize that learning is multidimensional and developmental and thus use multiple measures; and (6) assess processes as well as outcomes. The hallmarks of improving and sustaining assessment are: (1) producing credible evidence of learning and organizational effectiveness; (2) fostering an environment that is receptive, supportive, and enabling; (3) incorporating continuous communications with constituents concerning activities and findings; (4) using assessment data to improve programs and services; (5) providing a vehicle for demonstrating accountability to stakeholders within and outside the institution; (6) making outcomes assessment ongoing, not episodic; and (7) incorporating ongoing evaluation and improvement of the assessment process itself. Banta provides a matrix on page eight illustrating which articles in this collection discuss these hallmarks, although four of the ones in the latter two categories are omitted. All of the essays address methods of assessment.

The remainder of the book is divided into two sections, one addressing institution-wide approaches and the other dealing with specific strategies for advancing the hallmarks of effective assessment practices. The discussions of institution-wide approaches include essays dealing with public and state universities (Syracuse University; West Point; California State University, Northridge; the University of Scranton) and regional accreditation bodies (MSCHE). Those addressing specific strategies include discussions of engaging faculty in outcomes assessment, encouraging faculty ownership and involvement, enlisting student aid in assessing departments, using assessment data in institutional planning, using classroom-based assessment for general education, and linking assessment with program review.

Those who already have been involved in outcomes assessment will not find any earth-shattering revelations in this volume. However, for readers who are familiar with assessment strategies for their own courses and now are trying to create a climate of assessment on their campuses or are in the process of establishing institution-wide procedures for assessing majors and programs, the contributions in part two offer some very practical suggestions of how and where to begin. Banta's essay dealing with "That Second Look at Student Work" focuses on assessing the major; the Nelsons' essay outlines how to use student data to assess departmental objectives; Smith and Eder treat program review; Morey highlights assessment of the general education curriculum; while Juillerat and Schreiner focus on using student satisfaction data to shape institutional planning. The essay by Haessig and La Potin outlines how to enlist faculty support for these kinds of institutional assessment strategies.

Each contributor to this brief volume speaks with the voice of experience, and each essay is kept short and tightly focused on specific, practical strategies that can be applied in a variety of educational contexts. Assessment officers and faculty involved in institutional and/or program review may find it particularly useful.

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