

Campus Environment/Student Cultures Assessment Strategy Guide

Planning & Assessment

Division of Student Affairs & Enrollment Management

Northern Illinois University

This assessment strategy will be implemented by a Division-wide, cross-functional team, coordinated by the Director of Planning & Assessment. In addition, a representative Counseling, Adult and Higher Education faculty member will consult with the division team in both identifying and implementing a specific assessment project. The information provided below will introduce the concepts of Campus Environment and Student Cultures Assessment. Directors and/or designees are encouraged to become familiar with this information prior to participating in their team assessment activity. Additional information about these strategies is available in *Assessment in Student Affairs: A Guide for Practitioners* (Upcraft, M.L. & Schuh, J.H., 1996).

Campus Environment Assessment

Multiple models and theories exist for conducting a campus environment assessment. In chapter eight of *Assessment in Student Affairs: A guide for practitioners* (1996), M. Lee Upcraft and John H. Schuh discuss several models for assessing campus environments. As a team, the committee will be encouraged to consider which, if any, specific models of environmental assessment might be most appropriate for that year's environmental assessment project. One such model is the Ecosystem Model from Aulepp and Delwoth, which took the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education model and developed a five-stage operational approach implementing the ecosystem model, including the following stages:

1) Organize a Planning Team

- a. Decide: Staff, students, and faculty are assembled into a planning team. This team guides the process, does most of the work, and should have the time commitment and interest in the topic.

2) Determining What to Assess

- a. Identify the problem or problems to be addressed by the assessment.
- b. Define the purpose(s).
- c. Identify the population to be studied. (Mission statements are a great place to begin).

3) The Assessment Technique

Need to decide:

- a. What are the best assessment method(s).
- b. Who to study.
- c. What instrument should be used. (Some ways to do this could be focus groups, questionnaires, data collection, or surveys).

4) Assessment and Data Analysis

- a. Who should collect the data.
- b. How the data should be collected.
- c. How the data should be recorded.
- d. How the data should be analyzed.

5) Redesign and Evaluation

- a. Report the results.

(Upcraft and Schuh, 1997, pp.180-188)

According to Upcraft and Schuh (1997), there are elements common to any environmental assessment. If an existing model is not appropriate, these elements must be incorporated in any newly-identified methodology that is locally developed:

- 1) “[D]etermine how people interact with their environment, and how specific interventions can be developed to improve the fit between people and their environment” Determine how students affect and are affected by their environments.
- 2) “[M]ake changes in the student environment based on the results of collecting and analyzing data, and then determine how well the changes worked.”
- 3) Be action-oriented and work to “bring about change so that the students will function at a higher level of effectiveness in their environment.”
- 4) Continue the process on a regular basis.
- 5) Include students as partners in the process. In an environmental assessment, “The environment is evaluated through a student lens and ideas are sought from them in terms of how the environment can be changed and improved” [Note: All direct quotes are from (Upcraft and Schuh, 1996, p. 177-179)].

Student Cultures Assessment

The process outlined below is a brief overview, adapted from Upcraft and Schuh (1996), of the specific steps necessary to conduct an assessment of a student culture. More detailed information about this process is available in *Assessment in Student Affairs: A guide for practitioners* (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, pp. 202-216).

- 1) Define the problem you want to study.
- 2) Develop a plan
 - a. Decide what time of year you will collect the data, if any permission needs to be secured to conduct your study, and if an internal or external investigator study the issue.
- 3) Select an assessment team.
- 4) Identify data sources (e.g., “people, documents, events and activities, and settings” (Whitt and Kuh as cited by Upcraft and Schuh, 1996, p. 205).
- 5) Select the sample.
- 6) Collect and analyze the data.
- 7) Report the results.

References

Upcraft, M. L., & Schuh, J. H. (1996). *Assessment in Student Affairs: A guide for practitioners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.