

A model for demonstrating interdependence of mission, vision, strategic and assessment plans, and educational outcomes to increase awareness of these connections among faculty and administrators

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Abstract

This paper describes a model that demonstrates connectivity between institutional mission, vision, strategic and assessment plans, and educational outcomes of a pharmacy program. The attributes of this model are: i) it uses strategic and action plans to develop and improve the program, ii) it has a comprehensive assessment plan, iii) it will measure progress made towards achieving educational outcomes, and iv) it uses a syllabus template and a course development and review process that will integrate and keep the freshness in the curriculum.

Keywords: *assessment, course development and review process, strategic plan, syllabus*

Introduction

The continually evolving nature of health care and the interplay between various forces that impact its delivery requires that colleges of pharmacy respond to these changes efficiently. Pharmacy programs are required to assimilate and incorporate new knowledge generated by ever expanding research in basic and applied health sciences, comply with evolving standards and guidelines for accreditation, respond to expectations of health care outcomes influenced by political and social debate, and patient preferences influenced by marketing campaigns of pharmaceutical industry. This ever shifting paradigm has significantly altered pharmacy education worldwide, particularly in the United States over the last 25 years. Thus, administrators and educators are not only expected to know what's on the horizon, but are also expected to respond on a continual basis to these changes and assure that graduates of the program have skills and capabilities necessary for contemporary practice.

An assessment-driven review can be used to respond to these challenges efficiently. Although assessment plans that evaluate various curricular and programmatic components are routinely used, a comprehensive assessment plan that clearly and efficiently connects mission, vision, strategic plan, curriculum and educational outcomes seems to be eluding many pharmacy programs.

Additionally, for a variety of reasons, the strategic planning and assessment processes in many pharmacy programs are often relegated to a small group with a token faculty involvement. Thus, faculty's buy-in into the mission, vision, goals, and objectives as well as their assessment becomes peripheral at best, while they are expected to play a central role in developing and delivering curriculum designed to

produce educational outcomes of its graduates consistent with the program's mission and goals. A model that increases faculty's ability to connect to program's mission and impact the educational outcomes is necessary to increase faculty buy-in in the assessment and program development process.

This paper describes a simpler, clearer means of demonstrating interdependence between institutional mission, vision, strategic and assessment plans and educational outcomes in order to increase awareness of these connections among faculty and administrators.

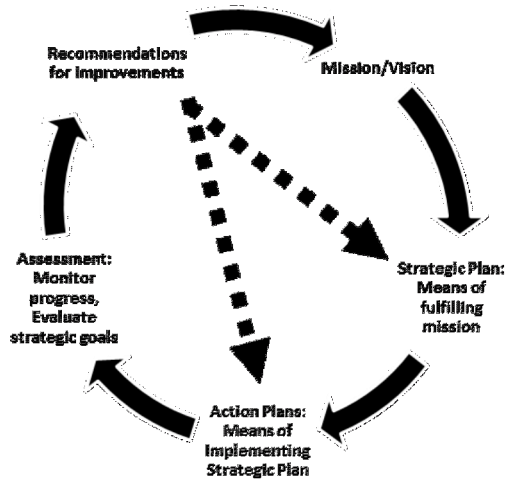
Description of the model

Strategic planning

The relationship between mission, planning, and evaluation is shown in figure 1. The significance of strategic plan may become clearer to faculty and administrators if it is used as a means of achieving educational outcomes of the program consistent with its mission and goals. The process should seek input from key stakeholders and lead to goal statements that are "strategic". This discussion should focus on identifying strategies that will be used to achieve the mission, vision, and educational outcomes. All participants in this process should clearly understand the distinction between strategy and tactics to avoid having to reconcile "global" and "granular" statements of goals. Additionally, agreement among the participants that the strategic plan is the means of fulfilling mission and vision, action plan is a means of implementing the strategic plan, and the assessment plan is a means of assessing the progress made towards achieving goals and objectives of the strategic and action plans, as indicated in Figure 1 will provide the necessary context . It

should also be emphasized that the assessment plan may produce recommendations for improvements at both the “strategic” and the “action” level which when implemented will lead to program enhancement.

Figure 1: Mission, Planning, and Evaluation

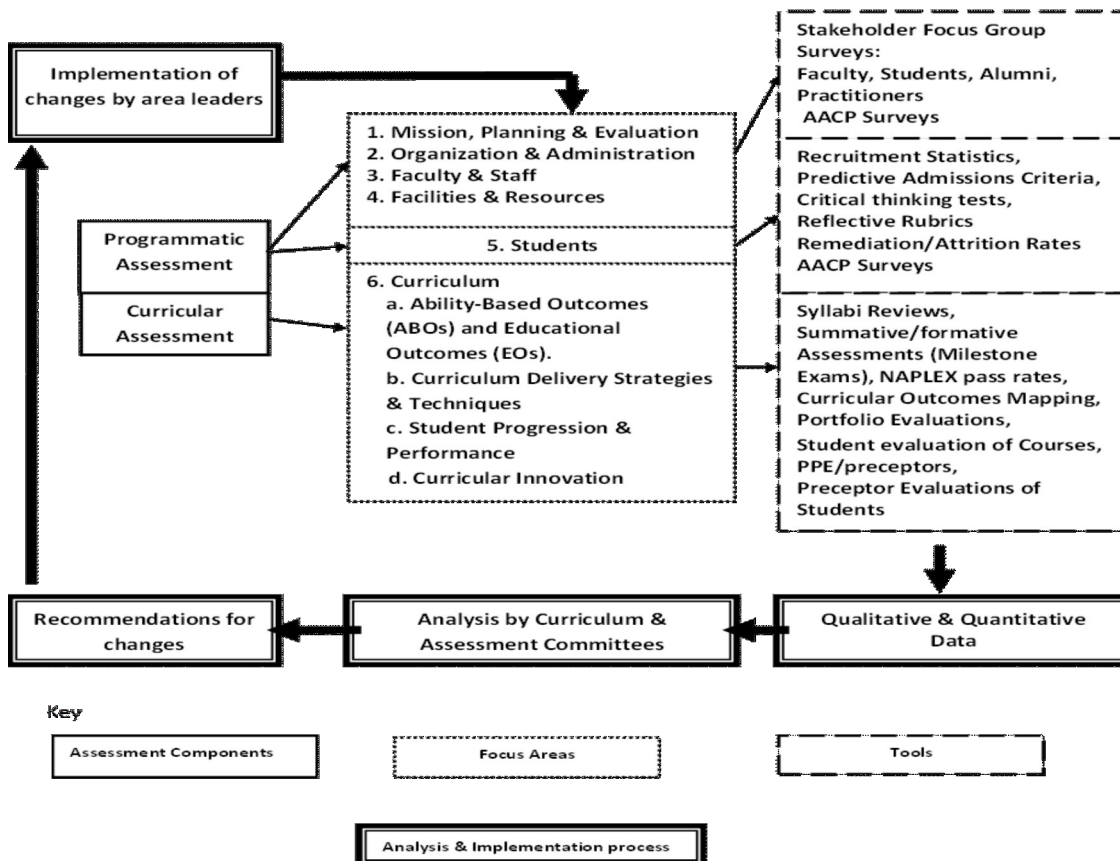


Assessment plan

Developing and implementing an assessment plan that will assess progress made by the entire pharmacy program can be a daunting challenge primarily because of the historical confusion regarding what such a plan should be designed to do? Although the terms assessment and evaluation are distinctly different, they are used interchangeably by many in the leadership roles. If assessment is defined as knowing where one is and evaluation is defined as a process of rewarding (or not) for being there, then intermingling these terms may lead to different perspectives of the assessment process among the stakeholders. Administrative leaders tend to focus on the evaluative aspects of the assessment plan while those interested in improving and enhancing the program may want qualitative and quantitative data necessary to “close the loop” untainted by the biases that evaluative approach may produce.

Figure 2 illustrates a conceptual map of an assessment plan. This comprehensive plan addresses programmatic and curricular components divided into six areas of standards of the Accreditation Council for Pharmaceutical Education i.e., Mission, Planning & Evaluation, Organization & Administration, Faculty and Staff, Facilities and Resources, Students, and Faculty (1). It is also designed to measure progress made in achieving the educational outcomes identified by the Center for the Advancement of Pharmaceutical Education (2).

Figure 2: Assessment-driven Continuous Quality Improvement Plan



The relationship between mission and the strategic and action plans is illustrated in figure 1. Key stakeholders' assessment of the progress made towards achieving mission-specific goals in the strategic and action plans is an important first step. This may also include assessment of effectiveness of the organizational structure in achieving the institutional goals. Quite often, the organizational structure is designed to fit leadership styles and preferences of administrators and may not be assessed to verify its effectiveness. This area remains ripe for deploying assessment strategies that will better serve the institution. The assessment of other programmatic components is illustrated in figure 2.

Assessment of student learning outcomes usually is a major focus of many assessment programs. The assessment strategies employed in these programs tends to range from topic-based formative, classroom assessment to using milestone exams for summative assessment of yearly learning outcomes and capstones exams for program outcomes. The NAPLEX (North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination) pass rate and area-specific performance of students taking the exam are also used although the NAPLEX provides minimal analysis of student performance. Similarly, although alumni and employer surveys are used; their usefulness in providing qualitative and quantitative data has yet to be proven.

Curricular assessment may present many challenges because of curricular structures, curricular delivery methods, and rigid departmental organization. Although all pharmacy programs in the U.S. are designed to produce a general pharmacy practitioner with set of skills and capabilities that enable the student to integrate various knowledge elements and apply them

to make relevant decisions, many curricular structures tend to be more discipline-focused.

A course development and review process depicted in figure 3 will help bring the basic science and clinical faculty closer leading to improved integration of concepts in both disciplines and continuous improvement of courses and curriculum. It uses a syllabus template and a list of core knowledge elements to develop a course. The syllabus template may also list educational outcomes relevant to the course and strategies for their assessment. The course is developed by a team of faculty with background in basic and clinical sciences and improved continually as depicted in figure 3.

Acknowledgements

This model is based on discussions with many colleagues at Appalachian College of Pharmacy and at Roosevelt University College of Pharmacy (RUCOP). The RUCOP faculty is currently in a process of adopting this model.

References

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2. Center for the Advancement of Pharmaceutical Education, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, Educational Outcomes 2004.

Figure 3: Course Development and Review Process

