Welcome to the fall 2016 Student Affairs Assessment, Evaluation & Research newsletter. We have some exciting projects in the works across the Division of Student Affairs. In addition to highlighting these projects this year, we’ll also be taking a look at the Assessment Liaisons who are making an impact with best practices in their respective offices.

We look forward to sharing your assessment journey and telling your success stories through results.

Message from the Vice President of Student Affairs

At the start of the fall semester, it’s time to reflect on what Student Affairs has accomplished and establishing new goals to serve our students. This fall our leadership is redeveloping the Student Affairs Strategic Plan in alignment with the University of Utah’s Four Big Goals.

Visit goals here: http://president.utah.edu/universitystrategy/

I am excited about this planning process as I see opportunities for us to strengthen our collaboration between our departments as well as within the institution to meet the needs of our students. We will be holding forums and sending out a survey to get your perspective and to gather input from across our Division. I hope you will share your insight as we set course for our future.

~Barb Snyder
“First Destination” is the term used to describe where students go after graduating from college—whether to continue their education, to pursue employment, or to engage in other plans. Nationwide, these results are reported to many stakeholders and are often considered as a factor when ranking institutions. Here at the University of Utah, Career Services also uses the results to inform current and future students about common outcomes for U of U graduates (see their website: http://careers.utah.edu/outcomes/index.php).

Because of its importance, the first priority is to obtain this information from as many students as possible; this is called the Knowledge Rate. With recent changes to the process and collaborations, we went from a first-round knowledge rate of 26% for undergraduate students who graduated Spring 2015, to a first-round knowledge rate of 56% for undergraduate students who graduated Spring 2016. There will be additional efforts over the course of the next few months to continue to gather information from these graduates; the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) asks for data through the first six months post-graduation.

We are excited to share these preliminary results regarding first destination for undergraduate students who graduated Spring 2016. In addition to what their plans are, another key data point is the Placement Rates. For those whose plan is education, graduates are considered placed if they have been admitted to a specific institution. For those whose plan is employment, graduates are considered placed if they have secured a position (which can include freelance work and entrepreneurship).
Assessment Liaison Spotlight:
Eric Bloomquist, Career Services

Adulting is hard... And for this reason, career coaching is fun. My favorite part of the job is when I’m working with a student, and they have that “aha!” moment and feel more secure and confident with the next step of their professional plans. In Higher Education, we’re in the business of helping students realize positive futures. Since the future is so often uncertain, unknown, scary, and intimidating, this can be challenging work—which makes my job as a career coach even more rewarding. Assessment is critical in order to know the scope of our work’s impact and whether our work is making a difference in students’ lives. In my role as the Career Services assessment liaison, it is my charge to lead our office in the effort of measuring our worth and telling our story.

Easily the biggest (and arguably the most important) assessment project for our office is gathering data around students’ plans after college—including employment and graduate school placements. Collecting this data is critical for our institution as it provides a snapshot of our students’ first destination and paints a basic picture of the ROI on a college degree. Not to mention this data helps illuminate career possibilities for current and prospective students of the U. Since this project is so critical, our office has taken extra efforts in collecting this data. Starting with a survey at graduation, we will learn around 15%-25% of students’ outcomes. Which is not bad! But also...not great, considering our industry standard is a 65% knowledge rate of students’ first destination plans. So there is work to be done: Following the close of the survey, we then send follow-up emails to students who did not complete the initial survey, which results in a few more handfuls of placement records (and even more opportunities for additional post-graduation career coaching!). Finally, following the initial survey and the email campaign, our staff resorts to mining LinkedIn for data on recent graduates’ post-graduation plans—a process endearingly labeled “Stats Blitz” by our office. In the May 2015 Stats Blitz period, I am proud (or embarrassed?) to admit that I reached the maximum number of searches allowed on a LinkedIn free account. Yes, this is possible. I am thankful for Elizabeth and the OAER who continually helps us improve the process by which our institution collects first destination data each semester.

I certainly don’t work alone on the assessment efforts for our office. The other Career Coaches have each been instrumental in collecting first-destination data for students in their respective populations. Additionally, I’m lucky to work with a phenomenal Assessment Committee who helps ensure our programs and services are contributing to positive outcomes relating to institutional, divisional, and departmental objectives. Over the past year, our office has undergone a huge strategic planning process. We have spent many hours together finalizing a document which outlines our vision for each of our four primary stakeholders: Students, Employers, Alumni, and University Academic Partners. The Assessment Committee has been integral in determining how we will know we have been successful in accomplishing the goals set in our strategic plan.

I love my job! Not only do I get to work with students to help them better understand themselves and how they might contribute to the world, but I am also faced with the unique challenge of helping our office understand the value of our work and our impact on students.
Introducing Amanda North
Student Affairs Assessment, Evaluation & Research
Administrative Assistant

Hi, my name is Amanda North and I’m the new Administrative Assistant in the Assessment Evaluation and Research department. I’m very excited to be joining the world of secondary education. I spent the last decade with Granite Credit Union fulfilling various positions, the last of which was Member Relations Supervisor. The best part of my position at Granite was all the lasting friendships I developed over the years; I look forward to the same at the U. At home I love spending time with my puppy-child, Bubba (Cosmo), and when/if I have free time I usually spend it working on my house, reading or crafting with my family. I particularly love wood working and creating holiday decorations.

Assessment Boot Camp

In August, Student Affairs staff comprised of directors, assessment liaisons and other staff members came together for Assessment Boot Camp. As we have evaluated the assessment occurring across the division, it became apparent that greater alignment with outcomes and a more focused approach would benefit departments as well as the division as a whole. Just because you can assess something, does not mean that you should. All assessment efforts should start with the end in mind—how will the data be used and shared internally and externally? As a challenge, we asked for each of the departments to focus on the four most important programs or services provided by their department in all of the exercises throughout the day. These “Four things” will be incorporated in to our broader focus on communication within Student Affairs in subsequent assessment and planning efforts, to ensure that the important work that occurs does not get lost in details. The full day session was comprised of specific modules that addressed the full process of assessment, the context of assessment within Student Affairs, overview of learning and general outcomes, utilization data and the role of the assessment liaisons. Time was provided for departmental conversations to occur. Based on the evaluation of the event, AER learned the following: (A) departments used the event to have focused conversation around their key activities and assessment, (B) more information and outreach needs to be provided around utilization data as there are many sources of information that can be used, (C) participants who attended as part of a team were more satisfied with the event. Look for a re-booted Assessment Boot Camp in Summer 2017.
Increased Understanding as a Result of the Boot Camp

- The process of assessment
- Student Affairs Assessment Model
- Purpose of utilization data
- Role of the Assessment Liaison

Spending time with my team away from the office allowed us an opportunity to engage in assessment conversations at a deeper level.