

## What is the Institutional Assessment Portfolio?

The Wabash Study includes a very aggressive, three-year timeline for institutional change. By the end of the second year (spring 2012), our goal is for all institutions to have

- reviewed the data in their Institutional Assessment Portfolio, including the results of their analyses of student work;
- identified possible items to change;
- reviewed and prioritized those items;
- chosen one or two items for action;
- developed plans for responses that they are prepared to implement by the fall of 2012.

The key element or metaphor we will use to both move through and document this process is the Institutional Assessment Portfolio. When it is complete, the Assessment Portfolio should capture the *institutional change narrative* and contain the evidence and sense-making steps that led to that narrative. The change narrative is a couple of paragraphs or so summarizing what institutions have learned from, and are doing in response to, their assessment data in order to improve student learning.

One way of thinking about the Institutional Assessment Portfolio is that it is a book that will capture the process of how your institution collected, considered, and acted on evidence to improve a specific area of student learning. However, unlike most books, this one will be written backwards so that the introduction—the institutional change narrative—will be the last thing that you write. Another way of thinking about it is that the “real” writing portion of the project is the Institutional Change Narrative in the first section of the portfolio. The rest is just your background research for writing that narrative. In either case, writing and building the Institutional Assessment Portfolio over the next year and a half will help you move through the steps that we have learned are critical to identifying and creating institutional change.

One of the most important things to keep in mind is that the Institutional Assessment Portfolio is not filled with general assessment evidence; instead, it contains assessment evidence relevant to a particular set of outcomes your institution has chosen to be the focus of its assessment work for the next three to four years. For Wabash Study schools, the Assessment Portfolio will focus on the outcomes that institutions identified in their applications and refined at the kickoff meetings.

A completed Institutional Assessment Portfolio should contain the following elements:

### **Section 1 – Institutional Change Narrative**

This short summary is the culmination of an institution’s work in the first year and a half of the study. It is at the front of the portfolio because it summarizes in *one or two paragraphs or a series of bullet points* what the people at the college or university have determined from their work. This narrative should include a brief description of the findings and then a short list of the responses to those findings.

For example, the summary might say, “At *Very-Good-College*, we have learned that our efforts to improve students’ sense of global understanding could be strengthened by increasing the number of faculty-led, short-term immersion courses. We found that students who participate in many of our semester-long study abroad/immersion experiences were less likely to report engaging in higher order intellectual activities both during and after their semester-long experiences than students in shorter term, faculty-led courses. Students

returning from longer term experiences also earned lower grades and completed fewer courses, on average, than students who participated in shorter term courses. In response, we have chosen to (a) increase the number of faculty-led, short-term immersion course opportunities by one per year over the next five years; (b) eliminate one of the longer term study abroad opportunities that we currently have in which students report very low levels of intellectual engagement; (c) institute a new 15-question survey that students will complete during study abroad to assess the intellectual quality of that experience, and (d) create a new returning GPA and course completion dashboard for programs that appear to create higher levels of academic disengagement.”

After these paragraphs, the institutional narrative should list the individuals and campus constituencies that participated in the development of the narrative.

This is the last part of the Assessment Portfolio your institution should develop.

## **Section 2 – Communication Plan**

The list of individuals, constituencies, and governance structures that the institutional team plans to include in the discussion of sections 1, 3, 4, and 5 of the Assessment Portfolio, as well as the mechanisms, timetable, and resources necessary for engaging in these discussions.

Institutions should develop this list prior to receiving or reviewing their assessment data. It can be revised as your review proceeds if your review indicates that additional groups or individuals should be included in the assessment conversations.

This is the first part of the Assessment Portfolio that your institution should develop.

## **Section 3 – Incoming Student Qualities**

In this section, the institution will gather and make sense of evidence about the qualities, knowledge, and dispositions students bring to their institutions that are relevant to the outcomes on which the institution is focusing.

This section of the portfolio will have two components:

1. Summary – A couple of paragraphs and/or a set of bullet points describing the conclusions that institutional representatives have drawn from the assembled evidence, along with a bulleted list of the different kinds of evidence contained in this section. This summary will be the last section the institution completes once it has considered the evidence; so the front piece is, once again, the last thing to be written.

In writing this section, you should be mindful of the variability in incoming student qualities. The summary should avoid simplistic statements indicating that “all of our students are [fill in the blank] when they arrive on campus” and consider whether there are significant pockets of students who bring qualities that differ from that of the “typical student.”

2. Individual pieces of evidence – Each piece of incoming evidence the institution has assembled to describe relevant incoming student qualities. Before each piece of evidence, there will be a page with bullet points briefly describing up to three important lessons the institution learned from the evidence relevant to its selected outcomes.

Evidence allowing, institutions should work on this piece of the Assessment Portfolio second, after the Communication Plan.

## **Section 4 – Extent to which Students Experience Good Practices and Supportive Conditions that Promote Learning**

In this section, institutions will gather and make sense of evidence about the prevalence and distribution of good practices and supportive conditions on their campuses. We ask all institutions to include notes from conversations with students about their experiences at the institution in this section of the Assessment Portfolio.

This section of the portfolio will have two components:

1. **Summary** – A couple of paragraphs and/or a set of bullet points describing the conclusions institutional representatives have made, based on the evidence, about the frequency and distribution of supportive teaching practices and institutional conditions on their campus. These conclusions should point to particular groups of students that experience these practices and conditions at unusually high and unusually low levels. It should also consider connections between the distribution of good practices and supportive conditions and the evidence from Section 3 about what students bring to the institution.
2. **Individual pieces of evidence** – Each piece of evidence about student experiences—from surveys, interview or focus group summaries, departing student conversations, high DWF courses, and other sources—relevant to the outcomes the institution identified as its focus for the Wabash Study. In front of each piece of evidence will be a page with bullet points briefly describing up to three important lessons the institution learned from the data, as well as any connection between this evidence and data from Section 3 on incoming student qualities.

Evidence allowing, institutions should work on this piece of the Assessment Portfolio third, after the section on incoming student qualities.

## **Section 5 – How Students Grow on the Outcomes the Institution Identified as its Focus in the Wabash Study**

This section includes evidence from standardized outcome measures, portfolios, and student performances or other artifacts relevant to the outcomes on which the institution is focusing for this project. We ask all institutions to include findings from student work in this section of the portfolio.

This section of the portfolio will have two components:

1. **Summary** – A couple of paragraphs and/or a set of bullet points describing the conclusions institutional representatives have made, based on the evidence, about student learning gains on the outcomes the institution has identified. These conclusions should point to particular groups of students who gain or decline at unusual rates compared to the rest of the students on campus. It should also contain reflections on the extent to which these gains, and the variability in the gains, are related to incoming student qualities (Section 3) and to the distribution of good practices and supportive institutional conditions (Section 4).
2. **Individual pieces of evidence** – Each element of evidence the institution has assembled to describe students' growth on the selected outcomes. In front of each piece of evidence there will be a page with bullet points briefly describing up to three important lessons the institution learned from the outcomes data, any connection between the outcomes data and evidence from Section 3 on incoming student qualities, and any connection between the outcomes data and evidence on the supportive practices and conditions from Section 4 of the portfolio.

Evidence allowing, institutions should work on this piece of the Assessment Portfolio fourth, after the section on good practices and supportive institutional conditions.

The Center will create a web-based method of displaying Institutional Assessment Portfolios so that other institutions in the study can see and share information with one another.