



MEMORANDUM

To: Division of Student Affairs

From: Dr. L. Christopher Miller, Vice President for Student Affairs

Date: March 30, 2011

Re: Importance of Assessment

Recently I moderated a panel discussion for the Trustees on the co-curricular experience. I introduced the discussion by underscoring how much students learn outside of the classroom. I don't need to tell you that it is where significant learning occurs. You are deeply involved in the out of classroom experience of students, so you know well the resources devoted to ensuring this learning happens. Because we are professionals dedicated to educating the whole person, and because our work is informed by the mission, much of the teaching we do is intuitive, but it is not by faith alone that we provide learning that is genuinely transformational. We need continual professional development. We need to stay informed of best practices. And most importantly, we need to assess our students' needs and learning styles so that we are prepared to meet them.

Our students' academic, mental, social, spiritual and physical needs range in complexity and are not static. In order to meet those needs and contribute to learning, we must be active in determining student needs, measuring student learning and growth, and assessing our effectiveness. Assessment is an intimidating process for many of us, but we need not fear it. It is imperative that our work and decisions be guided by assessment, that our culture be a data driven culture. It is the only way we can address those complex needs.

Our strategic plan has identified assessment as a divisional priority. Therefore I want to underscore the importance of assessment in our community. We should embrace the opportunity to look at what we do and how well we do it. Certainly we do a tremendous job of meeting our students' needs, but the goal is to make sure every student receive the education we promise them. We must strive to keep that promise, and we must continue to seek ways to do our work better.

The leadership of the Division has made a significant investment in assessment this semester with the establishment of a partnership with Campus Labs (formerly StudentVoice). As many of you know, our colleagues across the country have found Campus Labs to be valuable in their ongoing commitment to collecting and reporting actionable information about students and their experiences. Our DSA Assessment Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Jodi Blahnik and Dr. Jon Dooley, have advanced our assessment efforts significantly in the past few years (for an example of this work, visit our Divisional assessment website at <http://www.marquette.edu/dsa/assessment>), and the committee will be hosting a training on Thursday, April 7 to learn more about Campus Labs and how to maximize our partnership. This commitment to Campus Labs is just one of the many ways we will continue to advance our work with assessment through our new Strategic Plan.

I encourage you all to take advantage of Campus Labs as a resource as well as of our many colleagues both in Student and Academic Affairs who can serve as mentors and guides in the assessment process. The work we do has tremendous impact on our students. One only has to look to the data we've already collected on the student experience at Marquette to see evidence of this. We must continue to improve upon this impact so that we remain steadfast in carrying out our mission.