Summary of observations from Provostial representatives and IR staff

Gleaned from the Year One journalistic summaries of provostial representatives and the IR staff

- Developing departmental learning goals was intrinsically valuable experience for most faculty participants. The task of goal definition permitted some departments to immediately identify inconsistencies in specific courses or curricula, which were changed (an immediate "closing of the loop"). But at the time there was some reluctance to share this experience with non-Teagle colleagues: why?

- Would the grant have benefitted from more ramping-up time in year one concerning the literature and concepts of assessment?

- Participating departments did not consistently utilize standardized templates for the assessment project, and seemed to chafe under the expectation to standardize (culture of academic freedom?). However, the logistics of managing this project for three departments – let alone scaling some version of it up to 30+ departments – requires some degree of standardization of definitions, processes, expectations, and so on. What is the right balance between a departmentally customized approach and a centrally managed and overseen process?

- Language issues: Would assessment efforts such as these benefit from a re-branding? Is "assessment" really a dirty word?
  - Evidence based decision-making?
  - Reflective teaching?
  - Building a culture of evidence?

- Role of IR staff with respect to assessment is ambiguous and situation-specific. With respect to assessment, IR staff (and provost's offices) function as all of the following at different times and situations: Technical support staff; leaders; coordinators; facilitators; third-party (sort of) evaluators. In other words, the administrative support for assessment of student learning is ambiguously defined – from an institutional perspective is this an asset (even Middle States says "assessment is everyone's responsibility") or an obstacle to conducting meaningful, rigorous assessment of student learning?

- By the same token, the faculty role in assessment is, in many respects, still vaguely defined. Clearly the faculty role here is central, but is assessment best classified as teaching, research, or service? Or some combination of all three? Or a distinct fourth responsibility?

- No pain, no gain? Good assessment practice provides a language through which departments can have difficult conversations about resource use, curriculum design, grading, and so on. These may be simultaneously productive and painful conversations. Is it reasonable to expect anyone to endorse necessary but painful experiences without some external incentive for doing so?
• Are course evaluations a tool that can be used to support indirect assessment of student learning, or is this site "spoiled" for this purpose because of its role in the tenure and promotion process?

• It is a truism among those seeking to institutionalize assessment of student learning that "top-down" approaches to assessment, or those based on traditional incentives (salary, tenure and promotion) are doomed to failure, and that change must come from within: "Faculty must take ownership of assessment as part of their professional responsibility." True? Or are incentives necessary to initiate this shift.

• Is this a role for the department chair? Would providing department chairs with compensation/stipends for institutionalizing assessment practices more systematically in their department be helpful or not?

• Levels of analysis: What is the best way to have faculty see the value of bringing empirical data to bear on the measurement of student learning? Starting at the institutional level and working down from there? Or working up from the individual or departmental level? At what level are faculty most likely to have the capacity to respond productively to "bad news" about student learning? What about "good news"?
• Tri-Co sharing provided structure/deadlines/opportunities to connect with other pioneers
• Success grounded in interactive process between faculty and IR/provostial leadership
• Effective structures on each campus to support assessment and lead conversations about assessment are critical
• Leapfrog...begin a fresh with learning goal articulation to change the frame of reference from what faculty teach to what students learn
• Shared experience builds relationships and fosters personal learning.
• Scheduling meetings is extremely difficult
• Once gathered, discussions were always engaging. Face time is essential.
• Translation of assessment terms into our own conventions is necessary for consistency
• "Essential Elements" instead of "best practices by institution"...since we have the most to learn from institutions unlike ourselves.
• Make note of "what works"...to guide resource requests for more effective assessment