Vision for Student Affairs Division Assessment

Purpose
The purpose of this document is to outline a vision for Student Affairs Division Assessment and to propose some structures for creating a culture of assessment and planning.

Culture of Assessment and Planning
We are all committed to helping students learn and develop while they are students at USD. In order to do that, we need to know how well we are fostering student learning. Additionally, all of higher education is being called to provide evidence that the outcome of our work is intentional student learning. To respond appropriately, we must incorporate assessment into our practices so that we can better understand the outcomes of our work with students. The following characteristics describe the culture of assessment we can create in the USD Student Affairs Division.

Decision-making is supported by relevant data
While anecdotal information is helpful, it should be carefully used especially when the implications involve decision-making applied to a group or process larger than the source of the anecdotal information. It is important to consider when anecdotal information is enough to support a decision and when it should be driving further assessment. In general, appropriate assessment can provide the data we need to inform our decisions.

Assessment and planning are considered integral to our work and present through all steps
Assessment is not a step at the end of a process, it must be considered at the beginning and throughout, influencing decisions about outcomes and strategies. Incorporating assessment and planning helps us to be intentional about what we are trying to accomplish by investing resources in a strategy.

Assessment efforts support unit goals and divisional and institutional strategic plans
Assessment efforts should demonstrate support for unit and divisional goals and outcomes, be part of a unit’s assessment plan (3-5 years) and support divisional and institutional strategic initiatives. We must be responsible about the assessment projects we choose to implement, there must be a valid reason for investing time and resources in a project, the driving force should not be curiosity. There must be clarity in what are we trying to assess and why and consideration given to the best method to employ.

Assessment efforts are coordinated across the division and institution where possible
Coordination is critical when we are gathering new data so that we can avoid over-assessing students. Because overlap among units in the division exists, coordination when gathering new data will help to be sure we are not asking similar questions on different projects and that we get buy-in from other units when asking questions about their area.

Focus on learning and development
Assessment efforts should help us understand what students are learning through an experience. While satisfaction, needs assessment and evaluation are important because they fill out our understanding, the primary focus of our efforts should be on what students are learning. This is ultimately what we and our stakeholders want to know.
Assessment is more than gathering new data
Our understanding of assessment needs to go beyond the gathering of new data, typically through surveys. We are all assessing already. Assessment incorporates utilizing data that is regularly collected from other sources and understanding how our current practice may already be incorporating assessment. It doesn’t have to be a “new” effort.

Share results
When we collect data, we are responsible for interpreting the results, utilizing it responsibly to make decisions and sharing it with appropriate stakeholders.

Accountability through supervision
In order to create a culture of assessment, there must be some level of accountability. Supervisors can incorporate the assessment practices of their staff into the performance evaluation process, 1-1 meetings with staff, etc.

Structures to Help Create a Culture of Assessment
The Assessment Resource Guide is designed to help each unit in Student Affairs develop a common framework for assessment in the division. The Guide is comprised of 7 sections or steps to help each unit:

1. Define the functional areas of the unit
2. Develop learning/operational goals for each functional area
3. Map unit goals to Undergraduate and Graduate Learning Goals & SA Mission
4. Develop learning/operational outcomes for each goal
5. Articulate and map strategies to outcomes
6. Determine assessment methods for learning/operational outcomes
7. Develop a 3-year assessment plan

Please see the Assessment Resource Guide for more details.