

Mercyhurst College

A Case Study of Institutional Dynamics and Climate for Student Assessment and Academic Innovation



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I. Institutional Context

Mercyhurst College is a private liberal arts institution located in Erie, Pennsylvania. Founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1926, it is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Although the Sisters' formal involvement in the running of Mercyhurst was reconceived in the late 1960's, Mercyhurst remains committed to its role as a Catholic liberal arts college. Sisters still occupy active positions on the Board of Trustees, for example. Furthermore, throughout the 1990s, Mercyhurst's strategic planning process has been occupied with a renewed reflection on the meaning of the College's identity within the Mercy Tradition.

Erie, Pennsylvania is a small industrial city located on the southern shore of Lake Erie. The population is descended largely from European immigrant workers employed in shipping and manufacturing industries local to Erie. More recently, in an effort to augment Erie's economy, the city has made some efforts to market itself as a tourist destination, appealing to summer and winter sports enthusiasts and pointing to the lake view. Erie is also home to Gannon University, another Catholic institution which historically served as the male counterpart to Mercyhurst's role as a women's college before both institutions became co-ed.

Mercyhurst's role encompasses multiple functions, offering a range of programs at the associate's, baccalaureate, and master's degree levels. Mercyhurst offers courses not only through its main campus in Erie, but also through the Catherine McAuley Adult Education Center, a branch campus in North East, Pennsylvania, and at the Corry Area Higher Education Council's Smith Education Center in Corry. In addition to its traditional liberal arts offerings, Mercyhurst supports bachelor's degrees in music, as well as programs in archeology/anthropology, criminal justice, education, and research intelligence analysis. An Office of Adult and Graduate programs administers three Master of Science degrees: Administration of Justice, Organizational Leadership, and Special Education. Through Mercyhurst North East and its two other branch locations, the college offers eleven Associate's degrees and six one-year certificate programs focusing on what it terms career education. Associate's degrees are available in: Business Administration; Computer Systems Support; Criminal Justice; Early Childhood Education; Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management; Liberal Arts; Nursing; Office Management; Physical Therapist Assistant; and Religious Education and Lay Ministry. The corresponding certificate programs include: Information Technology Specialist; Medical Assistant; Medical Insurance Coding Specialist; Medical Transcriptionist; Municipal Police; Religious Education and Lay Ministry. In all these capacities combined, the College enrolls just over 3200 students.

In recent years, Mercyhurst has seen notable levels of growth in all aspects of its operation—enrollment, faculty, and institutional advancement. Renovated extensively in 1997, the significantly expanded Hammermill Library is but one visible sign of this growth. Total enrollment has increased nearly 46% since 1990. Moreover, along with numerical aspects of growth, the college also exhibits recent changes in selectivity, and notable increases in the number of faculty and in the proportion of faculty with terminal

degrees. Both the size and the quality of the college faculty have shown substantial change in the past ten years.

Mercyhurst is primarily a residential campus. Approximately 90% of first-year students enrolled in the college's baccalaureate programs live on campus. The overall student to faculty ratio for the college is 19 to 1. Within the departments, however, small classes, undergraduate research opportunities and other structures converge to form still more possibilities for community and interaction among students and faculty. On the other hand, the college has grown from a small institution to one of moderate size just in the last ten to fifteen years. Such material growth has changed organizational dynamics within the institution, creating a need for an elaborated administrative structure and a more process-oriented approach to academic management.

The formal administrative structure at Mercyhurst remains in flux in a number of important ways. In general, the administration remains tightly centralized around its charismatic president. Mercyhurst's president for over twenty-one years, Dr. William Garvey has been characterized as the college's second founder and has over-seen the dramatic changes in scope, size and academic mission visiting the college in recent years. While the president and the academic vice president remain directly involved at all levels of the academic organization, the college is defined structurally by eight divisions, each headed by a division chair: Archaeology; Business; Education; the School of the Arts; Hotel Restaurant, Institutional Management and Human Ecology; Humanities; Natural Sciences and Mathematics; and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Within each division, individual departments offer major courses of study in forty-five areas, several of which include subconcentrations. Departments and programs are led by directors.

Currently, Mercyhurst is in the process of reorganizing its governance system. A College Senate (formerly with faculty, administrator, and staff representation) has been replaced with a tripartite system. The Faculty Senate and Student Senate now meet separately. And under this new configuration, the College Council — a third body with representation from each of the senates — deals with overlapping issues.

The tables below summarize a demographic description of students at Mercyhurst in 1985 and 1999(See Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Racial Composition of Students Attending Mercyhurst College (Comparison Fall, 1990 and 1997)																								
	Non Resident International Students			Black non Hispanic			American Indian/Alaskan Indian			Asian/Pacific Inlander			Hispanic			White Non Hispanic			Race/Ethnicity Unknown			Total		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
1990	37	6	43	32	39	71	9	14	23	5	5	10	1	2	3	758	1150	1908	0	0	0	842	1216	2058
1997	76	12	88	50	57	107	3	2	5	1	2	3	11	12	23	###	1452	2463	0	0	0	1152	1537	2689

Table 2: Percent Racial Composition of Students Attending Mercyhurst College (Fall, 1990 and 1997)

	Non Resident International Students			Black non Hispanic			American Indian/Alaskan Indian			Asian/Pacific Inlander			Hispanic			White Non Hispanic			Race/Ethnicity Unknown			Total		
	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total
Fall 1990	1.8	0.3	2.1	1.6	1.9	3.4	0.4	0.7	1.1	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.0	0.1	0.1	36.8	##	92.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.9	59.1	100.0
Fall 1997	2.8	0.4	3.3	1.9	2.1	4.0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.9	37.6	##	91.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	42.8	57.2	100.0

Arts & Sciences

The college offers bachelor’s degrees in traditional liberal arts’ disciplines, as well as in criminal justice, intelligence analysis, hotel management, education, social work, music and several pre-professional fields. The administration’s Strategic Vision statement for 2000-2005 identifies three areas of traditionally “strong enrollment and regional reputation” – education, criminal justice and sportsmedicine – and prioritizes support for these programs. Mercyhurst is also cultivating several recently introduced programs as promising enrollment draws. These include: computational chemistry, forensic science, e-commerce, neuroscience, corporate communications, and facilities management.

The college has partnered with Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) to offer an accelerated program in primary care. Similarly, Mercyhurst shares an agreement with Duquesne University that allows qualifying Mercyhurst students to be admitted to Duquesne’s Law School after three years of undergraduate study. Cooperative/Internship programs are also available to Mercyhurst students, as well as service learning, study abroad, and honors program opportunities.

The core curriculum was revised in 1997 and presented to the Mercyhurst community in two parts: 1) “The Common Core: Modes of Inquiry and Methods of Interpretation.” and 2) “The Distribution Core: A Range of Disciplines and a Concern for Values.” Recent growth notwithstanding, therefore, Mercyhurst College emphasizes an arts-and-sciences education based in a flexible core curriculum which unifies students’ experience while offering multiple opportunities to explore new directions.

II. Institutional Approach to Undergraduate Student Assessment

History of Assessment at Mercyhurst

Mercyhurst’s involvement in student assessment stems most recently from a two-pronged answer to the calls for accountability which have characterized critiques of higher

education over the last 20 years or more. As Middle States and accreditation boards throughout the U.S. began to pay more attention to student assessment issues, the leadership at Mercyhurst began also to include student assessment efforts in its strategies for showing the college's contributions to the city of Erie. While the leadership at Mercyhurst has embraced student assessment activity as a necessity in itself, accreditation requirements are often cited on campus as a pragmatic reason for moving ahead with an assessment plan.

Indeed, that argument and others in support of an assessment plan have been deployed in the face of substantial resistance among some faculty at Mercyhurst. A fascinating history and debate has emerged. Fueled both by administration-dominated efforts and arguably also by the shifts in faculty roles at Mercyhurst (i.e. the faculty, on average, is becoming younger, better credentialed, and more academically oriented), what might have emerged as a somewhat typical story of faculty members' resistance to an institutional student assessment plan has blossomed into an involved conflict.

Middle States' 1992 accreditation report on Mercyhurst outlined the need for increased assessment activity among other changes. Subsequently, from 1994 through 1997, the college undertook a reflection on several aspects central to the institution's identity. These foci were termed "thematic clusters" and included the following seven points:

1. A Catholic college within the Mercy tradition...
2. A college of modest size...
3. A college that values teaching & research , not research & teaching
4. A college engaging with technology in order to enrich its educational offerings
5. A college characterized by shared governance...
6. A college implementing means for continuously assessing its programmatic outcomes and its education effectiveness...[emphasis added]
7. A college committed to providing education opportunity to all through its Mercyhurst-North East center

The result was the Strategic Vision statement "The Soul of a College and Its Quest for Excellence."

In the Fall of 1998, a standing committee of the College Senate, Academic Planning and Assessment Committee (APAC) was charged with designing a student outcomes assessment plan. An assessment subcommittee (APACAS) was formed as a task force to address this assignment. Late in 1999, the task force, executive officers, and an external consultant made an informational presentation for the faculty. A heated public exchange ensued, in which the task force's external consultant alienated the faculty by insulting one assessment critic among their ranks.

At the center of the debate in the early months of 2000 was the president's position that faculty merit salary increases should be linked to student learning data. This proposal

met with considerable opposition from the faculty. While the president maintained this position at first, it ultimately became necessary to separate the issue of student assessment from the evaluation of faculty merit. In an effort to mark this separation structurally, student assessment and faculty evaluation were placed under the purview of two different vice presidents. In April, 2000, the Faculty Senate passed a condensed version of the task force assessment plan. Possibly due to the heat of the controversy, the faculty passed the least detailed version of the task force's proposal – unintentionally, but effectively, giving the college administration a *carte blanche* for implementation. Shortly after, a group of faculty published a philosophical counterpoint in response to the assessment implementation plan and by extension to the college's Strategic Vision for 2001-2005.

At the time of our study in the Fall of 2000, implementation was in its earliest stages. Focusing on three areas — the core curriculum, program review, and student life – the implementation plan remains centralized at the highest levels. Information about the plan and its implementation has yet to be shared widely across campus during this phase.

The faculty at Mercyhurst includes supporters of assessment efforts as well as critics, and to be sure, many who espouse more intermediate positions. But the debate itself has nevertheless become a visible issue on campus, and nearly all faculty exhibit an distinct awareness of the controversy. The history of assessment adoption at Mercyhurst has become more complex and controversial because of additional dimensions that have little to do with debates on the value of assessment. While most institutions encounter difficulties in gaining campus-wide acceptance of assessment, additional complications have arisen at Mercyhurst because the college was introducing a large-scale assessment initiative while the faculty evaluation process was simultaneously being examined.

Student Performance Data: Nature and Source of Instruments and Reports

In addition to collecting data through CIRP, the College Student Survey (CSS), and placement examinations, Mercyhurst administers its own senior exit survey. Focusing on student satisfaction and self-ratings, the in-house survey asks students about their experiences within the majors. These efforts are maintained by one institutional researcher who – with a half-time appointment — oversees student surveys and draws up brief reports. At the time of our study, Mercyhurst's data collection on student learning was limited to these activities; no other data was gathered at the institutional level.

The distribution of student assessment data also remains limited at this stage. Most information is contained within the higher levels of the college administration – the president, the academic vice president, and the vice president of enrollment. Executive officers receive summary descriptive reports. Department chairs see survey data only for their respective units. However, institution-wide averages are also made available at the program level.

III. Institution-wide Support Patterns Guiding & Promoting Student Assessment

Mission and Purpose

The institutional mission statement refers to student assessment only at an implicit level, suggested by a list of general learning goals (See Figure 1, emphases reflect Mercyhurst's official format and presentation of the statement as included in its 2000-2001 Catalogue). Historically, however, professional development seminars at Mercyhurst have touched on assessment principles and have reached a small group of voluntary participants among the faculty. Despite the absence of any explicit reference to assessment in the mission itself, recent public statements by both President Garvey and the vice president for academic affairs, in addition to the emerging assessment plan illuminate a role — as seen by the leadership — for assessment within the College.

Figure 1: Mercyhurst College Mission Statement

Mercyhurst College a *Catholic* institution in the *liberal arts tradition*, is *community of learning* dedicated to the *lifelong development of the whole person*. It strives for *academic distinction* in each of its programs. Inspired by the vision of Sisters of Mercy, the College holds in highest esteem the qualities of

excellence,
compassion,
creativity,
and service to others.

The College integrates its strong foundation in the arts and sciences with focused programs in career preparation, challenging students

to think critically,
to comprehend the richness of our global community,
and to work for positive change.

At Mercyhurst, students gather the

knowledge,
insights,
skills,
and vision

necessary to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

Guided by its Catholic heritage, Mercyhurst promotes the values of

truth,
individual integrity

*human dignity
mercy,
and justice*

Institution-wide Events Related to Student Assessment

Aside from the occasional engagement with assessment issues in faculty development workshops, few regular events are in place to build discussions on student assessment into the structure of daily life at Mercyhurst. Several one-time events, however, have brought a debate on student assessment to the attention of every faculty member who spoke with us: Faculty Senate discussions, presentations by the Task Force on Student Assessment and by the vice president for academic affairs, and finally the contentious scene in which the external consultant alienated the faculty with a series brusque comments.

Planning and Coordination for Student Assessment

At the time of our study, Mercyhurst's plan for the coordination of student assessment was just emerging in the form of a Task Force report, previously described in the Institutional Approach section above. The plan outlines three focal areas for implementation: core curriculum, academic program review, and student life. The Faculty Senate approved the task force document in the spring of 2000.

In the wake of the worst incident involving the external consultant and of the heated debates that followed, President Garvey appointed the vice president for enrollment to head the implementation effort, conceiving of him as an internal consultant and resident expert. Once the assessment plan was passed by the faculty senate, its execution became centralized at the executive level. Working under the guidance of the vice president of enrollment, a faculty curriculum committee shared some responsibility for the arm of the assessment plan that concerned the core curriculum. The committee's role in the broader implementation of student assessment, however, remained unclear. Subsequently in 2001 and in the academic year 2001-2002, the implementation of student assessment has been incorporated into the college's self-study process in preparation for the upcoming Middle States' accreditation.

Program reviews follow a separate process under the leadership of the academic vice president. The emphasis seems to lie on program effectiveness in this process. It is unclear whether and what kinds of student learning data will be available for use in program review. Since divisions will be drafting program-level assessment plans, opportunities may arise, whereby department-level assessment findings can be "scaled up" for use in the program review process.

The third focal area identified in the Mercyhurst assessment plan — the assessment of student life — is to be implemented by the dean of student development. This initiative seemed at the time of our visit to be in its earliest stages. Details, resources and assignments related to this responsibility had yet to be communicated formally.

Support for Student Assessment

Although support for institution-wide assessment efforts is uniformly strong among higher administration, the campus as a whole remains deeply divided in its attitudes toward the student assessment plan at Mercyhurst. While some faculty actively support departmental and institutional initiatives concerning student assessment, opposition to these efforts was also highly visible among the faculty. A well-publicized debate around the controversy has ensued. Thus, even where support was often not forthcoming, faculty awareness of an institutional agenda for assessment remained high. Nevertheless, the Task Force's three-pronged assessment plan received the endorsement of the Faculty Senate in the Spring of 2000. At the time of our visit, administration and coordination of the plan was still being developed.

Evaluation of Student Assessment Process

At the time of our study, the implementation process was still in the early stages, and thus not yet advanced enough for an evaluation mechanism to have developed. As the program review aspect of the plan develops, however, it is apparent that a component can potentially be incorporated to evaluate mandated and emergent program-level efforts to assess student learning.

IV. External Influences

Since Mercyhurst is a private institution, it rarely experiences state influences and even then only indirectly (for example, in state requirements for teacher certification). On the other hand, the impact of accreditation pressures is quite apparent. Faculty and administrators alike cited accreditation demands as an important force – both rhetorical and pragmatic — driving the implementation of an assessment plan at Mercyhurst. Indeed the push to include student assessment among the foci for current planning at Mercyhurst relates back to the 1992 accreditation visit. Middle States' report for that year identified student assessment in addition to some physical plant, faculty and fiscal issues as key areas for improvement. Following suit, Mercyhurst's Strategic Vision planning process 1994-1997 identified assessment as one of the central areas for attention and change. Assessment of student learning and other measures of what Mercyhurst terms "educational effectiveness" receive prominent attention in the self-study documents currently being prepared for the 2002 visit of Middle States.

V. Academic Management Policies and Practices

Resource Allocation

Mercyhurst has not yet expanded the allocation of resources to incorporate student assessment activity in a formal way. In these early stages, staffing is increasingly being

allotted to work on student assessment. For example, it has been established that the vice president for enrollment will lead the student assessment efforts. Program review processes will remain under the direction of faculty committees and the vice president for academic affairs. Finally there is a somewhat less explicit assumption that the assessment of student life would be undertaken by the dean of student development.

Student Assessment Information Systems

Currently, only basic objective data on student progress or graduation is available for integration with emerging data on student learning. Such student assessment data is not yet collected consistently. Moreover, no student information system has been proposed to support or enhance the student assessment plan.

Accessibility and Distribution of Data and Reports

Reflecting the centralized model of administration at Mercyhurst, assessment data have been accessible primarily to executive officers – above all to the president, vice president for academic affairs, and vice president for enrollment . Some information – the results from Mercyhurst senior survey, for example — is also reported to departments, but for the most part each department only sees data relevant to its own programs.

Student Policies

Although students have participated in some assessment-related committee activity to date, we observed very little student awareness of assessment issues or the corresponding debate on campus, even among those students who had participated indirectly in the planning process.

Professional development opportunities

Professional development opportunities related to student assessment have not been extensive at Mercyhurst. As mentioned above, a number of individual faculty development workshops have touched upon assessment issues. On a more permanent basis, it is important to note that the college has allotted a part-time professional development/faculty development position which is currently unfilled.

Faculty Evaluation

Mercyhurst does not plan to use student assessment data to inform its assessment of teaching or to help determine faculty rewards. The controversy surrounding the faculty merit salary issue eventually forced a formal and complete separation of student assessment from faculty evaluation. In the first year of implementation, this separation was articulated structurally within the organization. The vice president of enrollment was in charge of the implementation of student assessment, while the vice president for academic affairs continued to manage the faculty evaluation processes. As of the summer of 2001, however, a restructuring at the vice-presidential level has erased this division. The former vice-president for enrollment has assumed the vice presidency for academic

affairs. Moreover, functions previously overseen by the vice president for enrollment are now included under the vice president for academic affairs' purview. Thus both faculty evaluation and student assessment activities now function under the supervision of the vice president for academic affairs. Although this is an important change, especially given the preceding controversy, it is also important to note that the move also represents some continuity. While the supervision of student assessment activities has been reassigned to the vice president for academic affairs, the individual responsible in this area remains the same.

Academic Planning and Review

Beginning first with the core curriculum, and moving now through an initial cycle to encompass all departments over the next few years, Mercyhurst plans to use student assessment information in academic planning and program review processes.

VI. Innovative Teaching, Learning and Assessment Practice

Teaching, learning and assessment activity

A fairly high level of division between faculty and administration is evident in our conversations on campus. Nevertheless, we also had opportunity to observe among the faculty we interviewed, efforts and discussions aimed at the improvement of undergraduate education. Some examples of innovative teaching and learning activity at Mercyhurst include:

- Small environments
- Core Curriculum Reform
- Capstone Experiences / Honors Programs
- Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)
- Undergraduate Research Opportunities
- Service Learning
- ACT 101 (an academic support/opportunity program)
- K-16 programs
 - International Baccalaureate program
 - Writers' Workshop

In particular, efforts in support of writing-across-the-curriculum innovations (WAC) have seen a sustained level of activity at Mercyhurst. English department faculty have been working to introduce this type of curriculum transformation at Mercyhurst since 1989. Building on faculty initiative and with the support of a former associate dean, Mercyhurst entered into a multi-institutional collaborative project focused on writing across the curriculum in the mid-1990s. Centered at Robert Morris College, the initiative focused on transforming faculty's use of writing throughout the curriculum, instead of on the

reform of specialized required writing courses. The collaborative employed a faculty development workshop model and received a three-year FIPSE grant for this work. Mercyhurst emerged as a model participant institution and was subsequently awarded new FIPSE funding for additional cycles of faculty workshops through the 1999-2000 academic year. In addition to the annual cycles of faculty workshops – each cycle involving approximately fifteen faculty in intensive reformulation of syllabi, course plans, and pedagogical practices — the faculty innovators leading the WAC efforts were also able to incorporate faculty development opportunities focused on writing “assessable” courses. Prevalent norms in the English department in particular emphasize the value of an assessable course plan. The FIPSE grants included funds for teaching release time and other support structures to facilitate faculty involvement in the workshops. Frequently, however, faculty could not be released from course assignments – due both to required teaching loads (eight courses a year) and high enrollment. Thus, while FIPSE afforded the project support for fifteen course reductions annually, Mercyhurst typically was able to take advantage of only three to four per year. As FIPSE grant support has come to an end, it remains unclear whether the faculty development efforts on writing across the curriculum will be able to continue without substantial institutional support.

Assessment Practice

Philosophical debates on the role and validity of the student assessment efforts have developed amid the controversy surrounding the Strategic Vision and assessment plan. As we have highlighted above, the drafting and implementation of a plan for student assessment has met with vigorous objection from some faculty. One of the most visible manifestations of this resistance is found in a position paper drafted by a group of faculty in response to the assessment plan. In the paper, the faculty critics ground their argument largely in notions of academic rigor, traditional (implicit) discipline-based norming, and some epistemological objections based in broad characterizations of post-positivist theory. Still other faculty voiced a wish to divorce themselves from what they perceived as a political entanglement on campus, only minimally related to their work lives.

Most of the Mercyhurst faculty were aware of the campus debate on student assessment; a few faculty leaders on campus showed special interest in assessment for pedagogical or practical reasons. Nevertheless, many of our faculty participants at Mercyhurst were not very self-aware about the assessment techniques they employ in the classroom. With some probing, however, faculty named several strategies incorporated into their classroom practice, by which they gather and interpret information about student learning.

Faculty report using classroom assessment techniques from Accent on Learning by Angelo & Cross in their teaching (Cross, Angelo, & National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning., 1988). In addition, some courses employ learning journals. As a part of the assessment team’s early work, a few departments have already drafted whole assessment plans. The English department was one of initial departments attempting to draw up an assessment plan during this earliest phase. They

have articulated student learning goals for their programs and have placed departmental course offerings in context with these goals.

Evaluation of Teaching

In general, norms and support structures are in transition because of growth and transformation of faculty in recent years. For example, an unusual proportion of the current faculty came to Mercyhurst within the past ten years. Moreover, many senior faculty members with non-terminal degrees more typical of Mercyhurst faculty in earlier eras work alongside new Ph.D.'s whose research occupies a greater portion of what is expected of them at Mercyhurst.

Formally, Mercyhurst faculty members meet with traditional tenure and promotion structures and processes. In addition, some mentoring and peer review is evident in both the English and Math departments. Student evaluations figure heavily in the evaluation of teaching. Moreover, student commentary on individual faculty members is noted along with the department-by-department analysis of satisfaction ratings elicited through Mercyhurst's senior student survey. These student- and faculty-based review practices notwithstanding, several participants expressed an awareness that the academic vice president and the president involve themselves directly in the evaluation of individual faculty members.

VII. Uses and Impacts of Student Assessment

Uses in Academic Decisions and Internal Institutional Impacts

Currently, the College's use of student assessment data is limited by the scope of the data available. Nevertheless, the vice president for academic affairs expects to use information on student learning in program review. Moreover, several active departments show promise of employing data to improve program-level practices.

The antagonism that has accompanied college-wide debates on student assessment has taken a toll on the climate for student assessment at the institution. Faculty opposed to student assessment expect to see emergent data on student learning employed in negative ways – in the evaluation of departments, programs and individual faculty.

VIII. Assessment Culture and Climate

Mercyhurst currently shows limited infrastructure to support data driven decisions. No substantial history of faculty development opportunities regarding teaching, learning or student assessment has emerged as yet to support faculty engagement with student assessment. Student satisfaction figures prominently in how data are collected and used. The college collects information on student satisfaction and self-ratings in more different

ways (student evaluation, senior surveys, etc.) than on other relevant constructs such as performance information, portfolios, etc. Informal and predominantly top-down administrative decision-making and communication patterns may at times serve to aggravate a divide between faculty and administration, particularly with regard to student assessment. These patterns — and the College’s efforts to adapt within and beyond them — appear to have played out elaborately in the story of Mercyhurst’s assessment plan.

References:

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