

Blackboard

outcomes *System*™

Developing the Blackboard Outcomes System with Baker College

"We are a large, multi-campus system. A huge challenge for us was to collect data from faculty teaching the same course around the system, aggregate the data and analyze it for the purposes of assessment. Our legacy system was pencil-and-paper-based, requiring hand tabulation and aggregation at both the campus and system levels. As a result, we collected very little data on student learning."

Dr. Chris Davis
Director of Assessment
Baker College



Many schools of thought exist within the higher education community regarding how to best address major assessment challenges. Key stakeholders agree, however, that ongoing improvement is best achieved when faculty and administrators at all levels of an institution have concrete evidence on which to base their decisions.

How does an institution make outcomes assessment an effective agent for change? Doing so requires coordinating course, program and institutional assessment, and focusing them on outcomes—a significant departure from common practice. Unfortunately, most schools lack the tools to gather and maximize the impact of the evidence they seek to make decisions.

Baker College met these challenges head-on by participating in the Blackboard Outcomes System Product Development Partner Program. Baker is the largest independent college in Michigan, has both undergraduate and graduate programs, and fully utilizes Blackboard applications at each of its 13 campuses across the state.

Since 2005, Baker has prioritized the assessment of student learning and supported its assessment process by

dedicating significant resources in staff time and professional development for administrators and faculty. Each department at the college has planned program outcomes mapped to their courses and developed an assessment plan.

Assessing the Challenges

As Baker moved from planning its assessment strategy to implementing the necessary tools, the college discovered unanticipated challenges. "We are a large, multi-campus system," explains Dr. Chris Davis, director of assessment at Baker College. "A huge challenge

- Private not-for-profit higher education institution established in 1911
- Undergraduate and graduate programs
- Thirteen campuses located across Michigan
- 18,900 full-time students; 15,650 part-time students
- Blackboard Academic Suite client since 2003



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Baker initially began using an online survey tool to collect data from rubrics and standardized tests. The process facilitated data collection, but required manual generation of reports. With more than 200 reporting instruments, generating the required reports entailed tremendous effort each quarter. Baker then encountered the challenges of managing program assessment plans, mappings, annual updates and data for over 140 programs. Dr. Davis says, “We struggled with how to use the Web to make these accessible to faculty and administrators and keep them all current.”

Baker decided to join the Blackboard Outcomes System Product Development Partner Program. Baker’s staff shared their assessment needs and experiences, and provided guidance and feedback on the development of a new assessment

software platform: the Blackboard Outcomes System.

The Blackboard Outcomes System supports and connects the academic and administrative assessment processes across an institution’s many departments. This software platform enables the planning, measuring, and improving of outcomes and provides a comprehensive set of instruments for student and program assessment.

A Better Solution

The Blackboard Outcomes System is comprised of a series of integrated systems that support improvement. One tool enables the collection of electronic portfolios, so student work in a variety of formats can be gathered and evaluated. Other tools enable institutions to set standards for course and program performance in order to determine—based on data gathered by faculty members—whether students are meeting those standards. Tools to record course evaluations and manage surveys are also available. Other tools enable institutions to group together all their mandates from outside stakeholders and track institutional performance toward meeting various corresponding goals.

The multiple systems comprising the Blackboard Outcomes System are connected so that faculty members and administrators can plan, measure and improve performance via the same Blackboard platform and user-interface they already use. Blackboard’s vice president of product marketing, David Yaskin, explains further benefits: “The Blackboard Outcomes System enables colleges and universities to measure course effectiveness and act on those findings, determine gender or ethnic patterns in course performance to better allocate resources, and track alumni or employer satisfaction.” He adds, “And all those assessment processes can be completed on both the micro- and macro-level.”

Although existing technology solutions—such as online survey tools—have not met the institutional assessment challenges at Baker, Dr. Davis feels optimistic about the Blackboard solution. “Our hope is that the Blackboard Outcomes System will provide a better solution for collecting and reporting assessment results,” Davis explains, “while at the same time helping manage the various documents and reports associated with program assessment.”



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