Evaluation of Academic Language and Learning Development Provision

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September 2019

International Consortium of Academic Language and Learning Development (ICALLD)

Contents

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Project overview

The *Evaluation of Academic and Learning Development Provision* project is an initiative of the International Consortium of Academic Language and Learning Development (ICALLD). The ICALLD steering committee established a working group that included a representative from each of the member associations to examine the complex issue of evaluating the work undertaken by language and learning development practitioners, and to develop an evaluation framework that could potentially be utilised across all member associations.

The project has involved: a) reviewing literature related to the evaluation of the work undertaken by language and learning development practitioners; b) the creation and electronic distribution of a survey to gather data on the services offered by language and learning development practitioners and existing methods of evaluation; c) the analysis of the resulting data; and, d) the development of a possible framework to support a consistent yet flexible approach to evaluation.

The working group focused on exploring existing methods and uses of evaluation and did not extend the investigation into problematizing the practice or purpose of evaluation, nor the conceptualisation of "impact". Furthermore, the rigour or reliability of the methods deployed by respondents were not explored. We recognize there are a variety of job titles and terminology that reflect this type of work internationally, but will use the terms academic language ad learning developers or academic and learning developers throughout this report to represent all job titles (e.g. learning specialists / strategists, writing consultants, etc.)

The following report summarises these activities.

1.2 Data collection

A Qualtrics survey with 26 questions (see Appendix) was distributed to language and learning development practitioners via the four ICALLD member associations.

Table 1: Survey distribution

Country	Survey distributed via
New Zealand	Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand
Canada	Learning Specialist Association of Canada
Australia	Association for Academic Language and Learning
United Kingdom	Learning Development in Higher Education Network

1.3 Participants

68 academic and learning development practitioners responded to the online survey, though some respondents did not answer all the questions. Respondents from all four geographical regions completed the survey.

Table 2: Respondents' country

Country	Responses	%
New Zealand	18	26.5
Canada	18	26.5
Australia	17	25
United Kingdom	15	22

Allowing for international variation in role titles, the majority of respondents appeared to work in student-facing teaching roles (for example, as an Advisor, Lecturer or Tutor). Almost a third of respondents worked in an academic and learning development managerial capacity.

Table 3: Respondents' institutional role

Position	Responses	%
Managerial role	23	38
Advisor	13	21
Lecturer	7	11
Other	6	10
Tutor	6	10
Learning specialist	4	7
Learning consultant	2	3

The majority of respondents worked for services that provided student consultations and workshops. The most common topics that were supported were study skills, academic writing, and presentation skills. Approximately one half of respondents were also involved in support other academic practices (such as computer skills, mathematics, and information literacy).

Section 2: Evaluation and impact indicators

2.1 Defining impact

In line with an emphasis on demonstrating value for money, the most common definition of "impact" corresponded with demonstrable outcomes rather than mapping a developmental process. Specifically, student achievement (including grades and retention) and the number of students who used services were among the most consistently used ways of defining impact. Moreover, emphasis on satisfaction mirrors growing institutional focuses around student satisfaction and how this can impact on league table positioning [as in the case of the UK National Student Survey (NSS)] and other public metrics [such as the Australian Quality Indicators of Learning and Teaching (QILT)]. Some responses also linked impact to the strategic goals and performance of the institution and engagement or collaboration with staff and academics from other departments or units.

Table 4: Meaning of impact in academic language / learning development evaluation

Impact definition	Responses	%
Achievement / retention	25	35
Service usage / attendance	18	25
Satisfaction	14	20
Other reasons	9	13
Student development	5	7

2.2 Impact indicators

Practitioner perceptions of how impact was locally monitored closely mirrored what they perceived to be "meaningful and effective" impact evaluation measures of academic language and learning development. Most view students' achievement as a useful indicator of service impact. A few respondents specified that comparing students' results pre- and post-service intervention should be used to show service impact. Student satisfaction or perception of services was also perceived as a meaningful indicator, though two respondents referred to academic staff satisfaction instead of student satisfaction. Another suggestion included attendance or increased attendance at workshops and consultations, the number of workshops and consultations, and the number of repeat visits. Although not many respondents included student development when defining impact, quite a number considered students' increased in confidence, academic skills and resilience is a meaningful indicator of service impact.

Table 5: Meaningful and effective indicators for demonstrating the impact of academic language and learning development units

Impact indicator	Responses	%
Progression (completion / grades)	27	32
Satisfaction rates	23	27
Service usage / attendance	18	21
Student development (self-advocacy / confidence / skills)	17	20

When asked what indicators were actually used, the list of indicators (ranked based on the responses) was the reverse of the list of meaningful indicators above. Indicators such as the number of students accessing services, user satisfactions and feedback seemed more commonly used than indicators such as “learning outcomes” (students’ improvement in skills, confidence, or work produced), “user grades” and “user retention”. In the “other” category, nine respondents reported using feedback from academics, tutors, schools or other academic staff as an indicator. Only a few respondents reported using indicators such as practitioner observation or report, increase in interest from academics to collaborate, policy change, and student resilience (e.g. one respondent identified they use the GRIT scale).

Table 6: Indicators used to demonstrate the impact of services

Impact indicator	Responses	%
Attendance / participation rates	54	20
User satisfaction	46	17
User quotes / feedback	46	17
Learning outcomes	34	13
User grades	31	12
User retention	30	11
Other	27	10

Section 3: Collecting and analysing data

3.1 Evaluation frequency

Over two-third of the respondents reported a formal, institutional, requirement to evaluate services. Most indicated that they undertake evaluation on an on-going basis (for example, at the end of workshops) with a view to consolidate and report findings at predefined periods. The most frequent evaluation reporting period was on a termly / semester basis:

Table 7: Frequency of evaluations

Frequency	Responses	%
Term / semester	21	45
Annual	16	34
Quarterly	4	9
Ad hoc basis	3	6
Unclear	2	4
Over a year	1	2

Responses indicated both quantitative and qualitative data were commonly collected for evaluation purposes.

*Table 8: Use of quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate service impact**

Data type		Responses	%
Quantitative	Yes	46	86.79
	No	7	13.21
Qualitative	Yes	44	84.62
	No	8	15.38

3.2 Quantitative data

Of the quantitative data used, the number of students participating in or accessing the services was the most common type of data, followed by user grades, retention and graduation rates. While user versus non-user comparative data was used in some instances, most data referred to grade comparison instead of retention or graduation rates.

Some respondents also reported collecting descriptive information such as students' background (e.g. age, gender, or course of study), type of services accessed (e.g. workshops, one-to-one consultations, or referrals), and user self-assessment scores of confidence, skills and motivation).

Table 9: Sources of quantitative evaluation data

Sources	Responses	%
User participation rates	41	32
User grades	18	14
User retention rates	18	14
User vs. non-user grade comparison	15	12
User graduation rates	10	8
User vs. non-user comparison retention rates	6	5
User vs. non-user comparison graduation rates	2	2
Other	20	15

Quantitative data were mostly collected through institutional profiling databases that include grades and demographic information and some sort of booking / registration systems that individual language and learning development units held. The survey was also used to collect data, but most did not specify which specific tool was used. Some respondents reported using Excel to analyse the data, and three indicated analysis could be requested from dedicated institutional information analysis / research units.

Table 10: Tools used to collect and analyse academic language / learning development quantitative evaluation data

Tool	Responses	%
Institutional database	12	31
Registration / booking system	10	26
Survey (paper or online)	5	13
Excel	6	15
Survey Monkey/Moodle	2	5
LibAnalytics	2	5
Blackboard	1	3
Google Analytics	1	3

3.4 Qualitative data

The main providers of qualitative feedback about academic language and learning development service impact is service users**.** Respondents indicated that they would ask users about service experiences, satisfaction and areas for improvement. A second common source of qualitative data was lecturers / tutors within faculty / academic departments.

Table 11: Sources of qualitative evaluation data

Data source	Responses	%
User satisfaction / experience	44	26
User recommendations for improvement	41	24
User feedback	43	25
Faculty / instructor feedback	33	19
Other (e.g., photos / social media comments)	5	3
Alumni feedback	4	2

Online surveys and feedback forms collected after teaching were the most common ways to collect qualitative data. Some respondents mentioned using Survey Monkey, Qualtrics, or email to distribute surveys. Two respondents mentioned using thematic analysis to analyse qualitative data.

Table 12: Tools used to analyse academic language / learning development qualitative evaluation data

Tool	Responses	%
Surveys / feedback forms	30	81
Focus groups	3	8
Interviews	3	8
Classroom interaction	1	3

Section 4: Reporting evaluation

4.1 Use of evaluation data

Responses indicated three main trends or themes for how quantitative and qualitative data was used in reporting: quality enhancement, marketing and communications, as well as institutional reporting. Quality enhancement activities included using data to continuously improve programming. Staff use the information collected to inform their decision-making processes for the next offering of services. In terms of Marketing and Communications, numbers and quotes are used to help promote the service to students via infographics, social media, posters, and other similar mediums. This helps demonstrate impact to future students and is used as a way to promote services and programming. Finally, institutional reports and updates were the most frequently mentioned use for data collection. Some respondents stated that such reporting was to justify the institutional cost of academic language / learning development provision. Two respondents also mentioned using evaluation data for evaluating staff performance.

Not all reporting was the same, with responses indicating multiple layers of reporting. Many programs did not report above their unit or department, while some reported to their unit heads as well as to the institution's senior management team.

4.2 Report audience

The majority of respondents indicated that they had to report evaluation findings to multiple audiences. The most common audience for evaluation was reported to be senior management (this could either be through a direct report or via an institutional committee). Table 13 provides a breakdown of specific audiences identified by respondents:

Table 13: Audiences for academic language / learning development evaluation reports

Theme	Examples	Responses	%
Senior management	• *CEO* • *Deputy Vice Chancellor* • *PVC Education* • *Vice Principal* • *Dean / Associate Dean* • *Director*	47	39%
Immediate team	• *Line Manager* • *Team*	31	26%
Colleagues outside of immediate team	• *Faculty* • *International Office* • *Student Services* • *Library*	23	19%
Do not know	-	6	5%
Students	• *Via student intranet* • *Via student magazine*	5	4%

External returns	• *Office for Fair Access* • *Association for research Libraries*	5	4%
Conference presentations	-	3	3%

Responses indicated that there are two main groups who reviewed reporting. Most respondents indicated their unit or department heads reviewed the data on at least an annual basis. Others also indicated their senior management team reviewed the reports, but often times less frequently (e.g., anywhere from one year to every three to five years). In some cases, institutions had a committee that required regular reports as well. Two respondents shared they report back to their team at retreats, to spend some more in-depth time examining the data.

Section 5: A model for future evaluation

5.1 Rationale for a standardised evaluation model

As shown, survey responses shared common themes relating to why evaluation is undertaken, evaluation indicators and how data is collected. Regardless, there was little consistency in how evaluation was actually conceptualised at a macro level amongst the academic language and learning development community (both nationally and internationally). Responses consistently focused on methods of data collection rather than an overarching rationale for structured evaluation. This is perhaps unsurprising given that academic language and learning development practitioners have quite eclectic backgrounds which may be reflected in their understandings and experiences with "evaluation".

The absence of a shared conceptualisation of academic language and learning development evaluation fundamentally threatens to undermine the extent to which evaluation findings can be meaningfully compared and generalised, and impact demonstrated. It is therefore proposed that there would be significant benefits in introducing a more standardised evaluation framework for use within the academic language and learning development sector. This would serve to:

- Ensure that practitioners consistently understand what is meant by "evaluation";
- Make it easier to triangulate findings across contexts (national and international);
- Support practitioners in communicating the impact of their work; and
- Provide a more robust basis for evaluation training.

5.2 Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model

A classic and widely used model for undertaking training evaluations was proposed by Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006). This model suggests that evaluation can be undertaken at four different levels:

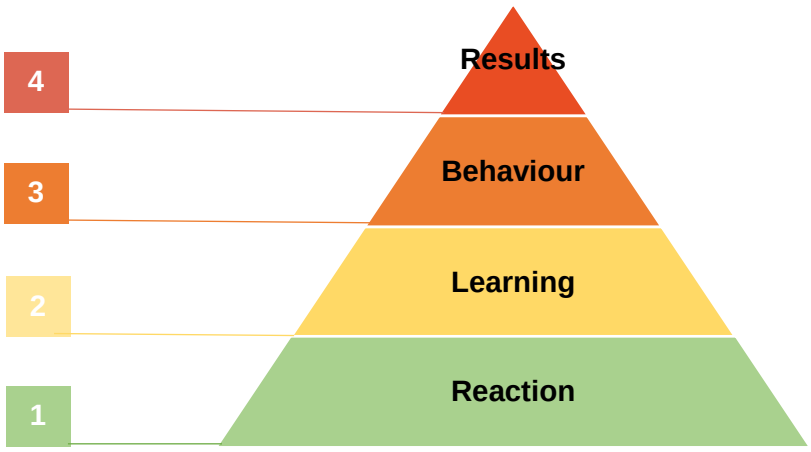

Figure 1: Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) training evaluation model

The levels in Figure 1 correspond to:

1) Reaction: attendees' satisfaction with their training

2) Learning: the extent to which attendees report acquiring intended knowledge - as a result of training attendance

3) Behaviour: whether attendees are able to actually apply what they learned during training

4) Results: whether the training resulted in an improved output

Undertaking evaluation becomes incrementally more resource demanding and challenging the higher the level.

5.3 Adaptions of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's evaluation model

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's evaluation model has been extensively used to assess impact of training [for example, heath information management courses (Rouse, 2011)]; leadership program (McLean and Moss 2003). Within higher education, examples of adapting Kirkpatrick's framework can be found. For instance, when evaluating educational development (Baume, 2010), e-learning environments (Hamtini, 2008), assessment of learning outcomes (Praslova, 2010) and learning development (Briggs, Hayes and Kukharvea, 2014).

5.4 ICALLD evaluation model

An adaption of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's model is proposed for standardising evaluation practices amongst academic and learning developers. It is envisioned that practitioners would routinely use this model to identify the level(s) at which they are evaluating and include this information when reporting their results. This would serve to regularise how evaluation is both conceptualised and reported within the academic and learning developers' community.

The ICALLD adaption has three main deviations from the original:

1) A new level 0 to accommodate a widespread need to evaluate effectiveness of advertising or promotional strategies.

2) An expansion of the behaviour level (3) to include attitudinal change. It is possible that those engaging with academic and learning development activities (either staff or students) might not drastically change behaviours as a result of this engagement but nonetheless could experience conducive attitudinal shifts (or vice versa).

3) The "results" level was divided into two distinct levels:

    a. Level 4 relates to evaluating the impact of the work of ALLDs on student cohort(s) academic performance.

    b. Level 5 corresponds with evaluating the impact of the work of ALLDs on institutional performance metrics.

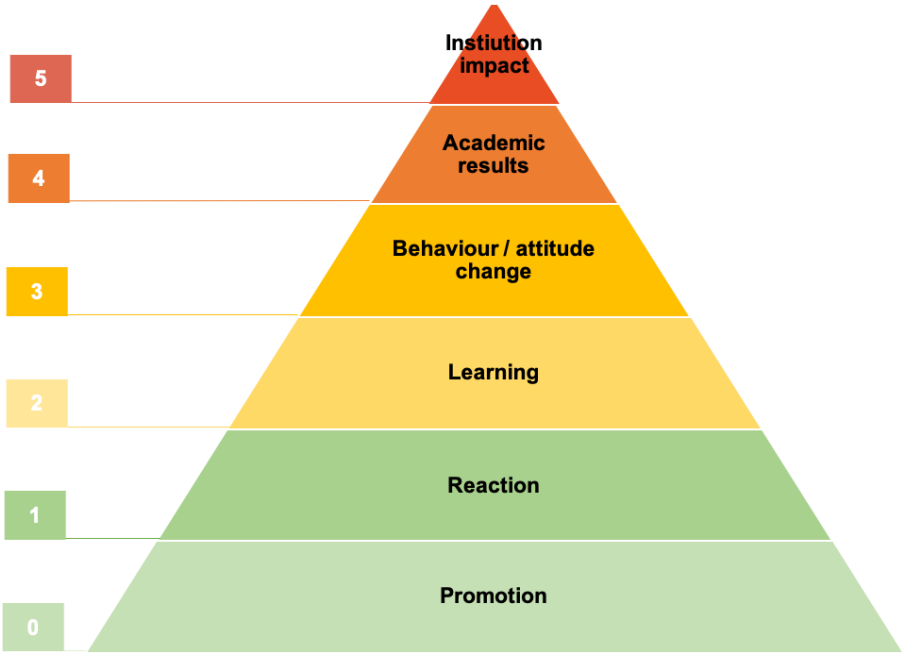

Figure 2: ICALLD training evaluation model (adapted from Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick)

5.5 Mapping evaluation indicators / data collection methods

The following are examples of how evaluation indicators / data collection methods can be mapped against each level of the ICALLD evaluation model. Levels are meant to represent foundational ways in which assessment could happen – it is not meant to be hierarchical in nature.

Level		Possible indicators / data collection methods
Level 0	Promotion	• Headcount of those attending ALLD activities / events • Views or interactions with digital learning objects via virtual learning environments analytics • Survey student / staff awareness of activities/events (pre and / or post) • Ask stakeholders to rate promotional materials • Social media (e.g., Facebook likes / Twitter re-tweets)
Level 1	Reaction	• Questionnaire handed out at end of activities/events to rate satisfaction indicators (e.g., content / delivery / venue / food / etc.) • Informal feedback mechanisms such as through interactive learning objects or unsolicited feedback • Longitudinal data to map satisfaction (assuming same questions are used)
Level 2	Learning	• Attendees complete open-ended questions at start of activities / events and then complete further open-ended questions at conclusion addressing learning outcomes (online and face-to-face) • Questionnaire handed out at conclusion of activities / events containing open-ended questions addressing learning and teaching content • Discussion with attendees at conclusion of activities / events

Level 3	Behaviour / attitude change	• Observe behaviour during future teaching interactions • Perceptions of self-efficacy / confidence in applying new or refreshed knowledge / understanding (staff and students) • Follow-up focus group • Follow-up survey (online / paper based) • Follow-up interview • Observational or documentary evidence of changes to curriculum (including assessment) and / or pedagogy following collaboration/consultation with staff
Level 4	Academic attainment change	• Statistical analysis of grade trends to identify possible correlation(s) • Statistical analysis of institutional data (e.g., retention, progression, completion) to identify possible correlation(s) • Follow-up focus group • Follow-up survey (online / paper based) • Follow-up interview
Level 5	Institutional impact	• Student Survey results (e.g., NSSE / IGrad / QILT) • Publications in academic journals • Media coverage • Conference proposals accepted / attendees at conference presentations • Policy development

5.6 Triangulation

Notably, academic language and learning developers did not widely report incorporating triangulation opportunities when designing and undertaking evaluations. This is a potentially missed opportunity as it provides a more robust means of drawing conclusions about impact [and is equally applicable to each level(s) being evaluated].

Triangulation involves examining impact using multiple metrics and drawing conclusions based on combined results. For example:

- Examining the same evaluation level using different data collection methods (e.g., collecting both student feedback and staff feedback).
- Collecting data longitudinally at multiple points of time to establish the extent to which result trends remain consistent.
- Comparing findings at different levels of evaluation – for example, is a positive impact found across levels or is this restricted to certain levels?
- Comparing findings across contexts (for example, online delivery v face-to-face, workshops v drop-ins, generic professional learning for staff v integration of ALLD into course) or across campuses or platforms.

Section 6: Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Evaluation of the work undertaken by academic and learning practitioners is becoming increasingly important in the current evidence-based and financially-constrained higher education environments in which the ICALLD member associations operate. The adoption of a consistent yet flexible approach to evaluation will support practitioners and managers to make judgments about their program(s), to improve their effectiveness, and / or to inform future decisions while drawing upon international comparable evidence. The proposed model is not intended as a prescriptive “one-size-fits-all” approach, but rather as an approach that allows for contextual nuance and local priorities. Through the accumulation of a body of consistent evidence, the respective associations are well positioned to articulate the elements of an “effective” service and lead the debate around student support services in the public sphere.

6.2 Recommendations

1. The ICALLD Committee make the report available to members via the ICALLD website.

2. Resources from each national organisation be linked to the ICALLD website to support practitioners and unit managers to engage with the practical components of collecting and analysing relevant data.

3. The ICALLD Committee promote testing of the evaluation framework presented in this report and collect and assess feedback from ALLDs and managers.

4. Subsequent work to be undertaken to revise the framework in response to feedback.

5. Consider a funded research project to examine the implementation of the framework across international contexts.

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Appendix: ICALLD Qualtrics Survey

Start of Block: Introduction

The ICALLD Assessment Committee is conducting a survey about assessment and evaluation practices across its membership of the ICALLD consortium (AALL, ALDinHE, ATLAANZ and LSAC). In order to support the ongoing development of resources and best practices in assessment and evaluation of academic services, the Committee is interested in learning about what units are currently doing to measure the impact of their services. We would appreciate if you could take approximately 15 minutes to complete the following survey. All responses are anonymous and will be reviewed in the aggregate. If you have questions or encounter problems with the survey, please email jhamil06@uoguelph.ca.

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: Block 1

Q1 Please indicate your country

- ○ Canada (1)
- ○ Australia (2)
- ○ the UK (3)
- ○ New Zealand (4)
- ○ the US (6)
- ○ Other. Please specify. (5) _____

Q2 Name of your unit and institution

_____

Q3 Your job title

_____

Q4 Types of services your unit offers. Please select as many as applicable.

- [ ] Writing services (1)
- [ ] Supplemental instruction/PASS (2)
- [ ] Student consultations (3)
- [ ] Study skills workshops (4)
- [ ] Writing workshops (5)
- [ ] Research help (6)
- [ ] Graduate student support (7)
- [ ] Presentation help (8)
- [ ] Tutoring (9)
- [ ] Math Services (10)
- [ ] Information Literacy (11)
- [ ] Computer skills (12)
- [ ] Other (please specify) (13)

_____

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q5 In your institutional context, is your unit required to demonstrate the impact of your services?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

Q6 What does 'impact' mean in your context?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q7 What do you think are meaningful and effective indicators for demonstrating the impact of academic language and learning development units like yours?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q8 What indicators do you use to demonstrate the impact of your services?

- ☐ Attendance/participation rates (1)
- ☐ Learning outcomes (2)
- ☐ User grades (3)
- ☐ User retention (4)
- ☐ User satisfaction (5)
- ☐ User quotes/feedback (6)
- ☐ Other (7) _____
- ☐ Other (8) _____
- ☐ Other (9) _____
- ☐ Other (10) _____

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Block 3

Q9 Do you use a particular evaluation or assessment framework, model, or approach to guide the evaluation of service impact? If so, please specify.

_____

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_____

_____

_____

Q10 Do you use quantitative data to demonstrate your service impact?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Block 4

Q11 What kind of quantitative data do you currently collect?

- ☐ User grades (1)
- ☐ User retention rates (2)
- ☐ User participation rates (3)
- ☐ User vs. non-user grade comparisons (4)
- ☐ User graduation rates (5)
- ☐ User vs. non user comparison graduation rates (6)
- ☐ User vs. non user comparison retention rates (7)
- ☐ Other (please specify) (8) _____
- ☐ Other (please specify) (9) _____
- ☐ Other (please specify) (10) _____
- ☐ Other (please specify) (11) _____

Q22 How do you collect and analyze your quantitative data?

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Q12 How do you use the data in reporting?

_____

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_____

End of Block: Block 4

Start of Block: Block 5

Q13 Do you collect qualitative data to demonstrate your service impact?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 6

Q24 What kind of qualitative data do you currently collect?

- [ ] User satisfaction/experience (1)
- [ ] User recommendations for improvement (2)
- [ ] User feedback (3)
- [ ] Faculty/Instructor feedback (4)
- [ ] Alumni feedback (5)
- [ ] Other (please specify) (6) _____
- [ ] Other (please specify) (7) _____
- [ ] Other (please specify) (8) _____

Q23 How do you collect and analyze your qualitative data?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q15 How do you use the data in reporting?

_____

_____

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_____

End of Block: Block 6

Start of Block: Block 7

Q16 When and how often do you evaluate your service impact?

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Q17 Where do you report your service impact and indicators?

_____

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_____

Q25 Who at your institution reviews your reports on program metrics/indicators?

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_____

Q18 Do you have a good example of using data to demonstrate service impact? If so, please summarise it.

_____

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Q26 How do you define or differentiate between the terms *assessment* and *evaluation*?

_____

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_____

_____

End of Block: Block 7

Start of Block: Block 8

Q20 If you are interested in being contacted in the future to provide further feedback on assessment and evaluation of academic services, then please provide your email below. We estimated you would only be contacted 1-2 times in the coming year, and your ongoing contributions will help guide the work of our committee in making recommendations to our members.

_____

End of Block: Block 8