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A Model for Culture Change at a Research I University

Both the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and the Assessment Movement have been focal points of higher education discussions for over 20 years. However, despite the attention given them, Ewell (2002) describes the Assessment Movement as “broad but not deep”, and Angelo (2002) states that “...neither assessment nor the scholarship of teaching has yet to make the deep and lasting impact on teaching and learning or academic culture that proponents have hoped for” (p. 189). Likewise, the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration for research and teaching are espoused by internal and external constituents of higher education; however, entrepreneurial efforts aimed at increasing collaboration across disciplinary boundaries for research remain at the fringes of institutions and are likely to fail (Kezar 2006).

At the same time, the challenge of cultural change on college campuses is often noted in metaphors including change as “moving graveyards” and faculty consensus as “herding cats”. Organizational theorists describe higher education institutions as loosely coupled systems (Weick 1976) and higher education as organized anarchies (Cohen and March 1986). These metaphors and descriptions suggest that higher education institutions are loose affiliations of individuals and groups whose identity is more closely associated with scholarly disciplines than with the institutions housing those disciplines. Collaborations struggle to become institutionalized “because higher education institutions work in departmental silos and within bureaucratic/hierarchical administrative structures” (Kezar 2006).

Yet we know that scholarly exchange and collaboration within and across disciplines and in relation to teaching and learning does occur. We [Program for Instructional Innovation] are working on initiatives that will uncover the types of social networking faculty current employ and apply that to a teaching commons model. In this way, we are focusing on what already works that resembles the core values and products of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and the Assessment Movement. We will discuss the model we are developing at a large public research university and report on progress in three thematic areas: technology, writing, and service learning.