

Consultation on individual projects

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In the 2004-05 academic year, I replaced Jennifer Waddell as the project assessment consultant for individual Bush Grant proposals that involved student learning. Faculty, staff and students planning to submit proposals were required to consult with me about the assessment plan for their projects. When I was satisfied with the plan, I would send my approval to Arlen Viste who would subsequently inform the Bush Committee before they considered the proposal. Actual consultations began in Spring semester, 2005 and continued through Fall semester, 2006.

During this time, I consulted with over two dozen individuals or small groups that ranged across the Bush Grant areas. The initial adequacy of the assessment plans varied considerably. In some cases, proposers understood assessment and learning outcomes and means of assessing them were clearly identified. In these cases, I commended the person(s), informed them I would not need to see the proposal again, and sent my approval to Arlen Viste. At the other extreme, proposers did not understand assessment and had not identified learning outcomes or assessment methods. In this event, I would work with them to do so. After seeing the revised proposal that now included the jointly developed assessment plan, I communicated my approval to Arlen. In the majority of proposals, the quality of the assessment plan was somewhere in between. Typically the outcomes and/or assessment methods needed clarification and reworking. If only minor adjustments were necessary, I simply asked the proposer to make the changes and submit the proposal without seeing it again. If major adjustments were needed, I would review the revised proposal before communicating my approval.

The proposals also differed in the immediacy or directness of impact on students learning. With some projects, there was clearly defined and immediate learning expected of participating students (e.g., internships, student research, community-based service learning). Other proposals identified expected learning outcomes that would result when faculty incorporated new knowledge, skills or resources that were developed in their projects (e.g., information literacy and technology). Then there were projects, primarily travel grants to faculty, where the general goal was to promote diversity, globalism and international learning. Because the purpose of these grants was to increase faculty knowledge and resources that would be subsequently incorporated into courses or other student learning experiences, the proposers were unable yet to articulate specific student learning outcomes. Consequently, I encouraged faculty to identify their own specific learning outcomes and assess them upon completion of their projects. I also suggested that they at least speculate about how what they expected to learn could be used in their courses and what student learning outcomes might be expected and how they would be measured.