

## **Assessment in the Genetic Counseling Graduate Program**

**Dr. Angela Trepanier**

### **Wayne State University's Peer-to-Peer Program Assessment Forum Presentation**

*In the Winter 2016 semester, 31 faculty and staff were invited to share program assessment examples with their peers in open forums to demonstrate the use of data to improve student learning, program curricula, or support for student success. The forums also served to recognize the important work of our Wayne State colleagues. This video is a brief version of one of those examples.*

### **Enhancing Academic Programs- The Value of Assessment Plans**

My name is Angela Trepanier and I direct the genetic counseling graduate program which is housed in the School of Medicine.

Genetic counselors are health care professionals who identify and assess risk of genetic disease, provide education about the nature of risk, available genetic testing, and medical management, and provide short-term client-centered counseling to facilitate adaptation to genetic disease or risk. The genetic counseling program at Wayne State is accredited so assessment is nothing new to me. But going through the process of developing outcomes and assessments for Compliance Assist actually helped me think of new, more comprehensive ways to evaluate whether my students are meeting program objectives.

### **Learning Outcome: Patient Education**

For example, one of my assessments is related to evaluating students' knowledge and skills in patient education about diagnosis and natural history.

### **Assessment Method and Results: Board Examination Scores**

One of two metrics I use to evaluate this outcome is a component of the genetic counselor board examination score. I noticed that the score in this area had dropped over three exam cycles. Although our graduates were still all passing the exam, their performance in this particular area had declined. Because our program is small, usually only 5-6 graduates sit for the board exam in any given cycle. Therefore, when I see a trend like this it is hard to know whether it reflects an actual change in knowledge or if it just a chance occurrence related to that particular cohort of students.

## **Action plan**

Nonetheless, I reported this result to my advisory committee to discuss potential reasons for the decline. The clinicians on the committee discussed that since there are now so many genetic tests available that cover multiple diseases in one test, they no longer do as much pre-testing counseling about natural history. As a result, genetic counseling students are likely getting fewer opportunities to have natural history discussions with patients or are having more limited discussions. Based on this feedback, we made plans to incorporate more activities related to describing natural history in our courses.

## **Benefits of program assessment**

I'm not sure that I would have identified this problem or managed this situation in the same way if it were not for the assessment processes laid out through Compliance Assist. For me, using this system to track student outcomes has enhanced my ability to identify small, but important, changes in student performance and to respond to these changes more quickly.

## **Usefulness of Curriculum Maps**

Another required component of Compliance Assist that I find particularly helpful is the curriculum map. For me, the map is a visual way to evaluate in which courses, activities, or internships, my students are developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to each of my learning outcomes. The map also helps me think about what level of skill I am expecting for each course or experience. Am I just expecting that a concept be introduced? Or am I expecting that the concept is being developed, reinforced and practiced? Or am I actually expecting to see the students master the concept? Whatever my expectations are, it is important that I communicate them clearly to my instructors so that they can incorporate the appropriate learning activities and the necessary amount of time. Looking at this visual map also helps me determine how many opportunities students are getting to learn a skill before they are expected to master it. If students are not mastering a particular skill, the map gives me ideas of where I can ask instructors to incorporate additional content and activities to reinforce development.

## **Worthwhile Effort**

I hope I have given you a couple of examples of how the overall process of developing outcomes, curriculum maps, and assessments in Compliance Assist can be a beneficial way to strengthen your educational program. At first, I found the process daunting but the information I have gotten back has been well worth the effort.

---

See more examples at <http://wayne.edu/assessment/examples/>