EXAMPLE DEPARTMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROJECTS

Example 1: Oral Communication

A department wants their students to develop better oral communication skills, but are disappointed in their senior students' final capstone presentations.

They map the curriculum to find out where/when faculty are teaching oral communication and how they are teaching it. The results inspire them to articulate more intentionally what they want to see in students' formal presentations and to introduce new pedagogical strategies into specific courses to impart these goals to their students.

Later, they develop a checklist they use to evaluate seniors' capstone presentations, based on these goals. As the years go by, they use the checklist with younger students.

Example 2: Evaluating Scientific Claims

A department wonders whether their students can critically evaluate scientific claims.

They offer to give seniors $10 coffee cards to participate in a "senior assessment exercise" that will last for 90 minutes. The twelve students who agree to participate are asked to take some notes on one popular-press article and one academic journal article. In groups of three, they then discuss and critique each piece. At the end of the mini-discussions (which are recorded), each group submits a one-page paper with their conclusions.

The department later reviews the transcriptions from the group discussions and paper submissions. The results cause the faculty to introduce exercises like this into their intermediate-level courses.

Example 3: Research Opportunities

On an institution's senior survey results, one department notes that their students give lower ratings to the item for "research opportunities." They hold two focus groups with students who tell them the same few students seem to get all of the research opportunities.

The chair creates a Google form that she begins distributing each semester to the faculty where they can report which students are doing research with them and to indicate whether they have the capacity to take on any more students. At the same time, she includes an item on the application form for admission to the major that asks students about their interest in working with faculty on research.

These two strategies work both to collect data and facilitate the matching of more students to more faculty.