Long-Term Assessment Study Using Focus Groups

Session Goals and/or ABET Criterion (Criteria) Addressed
"Long-Term Assessment Study Using Focus Groups, Including In-Session Model Focus Group"

The USAF Academy Center for Educational Excellence (CEE) has supported the Academy's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (DFCE) by conducting focus groups with the students and cadet leaders of our unique "Civil Engineering Practices -- Field Engineering" course every summer since 1998. DFCE uses the results of these focus groups to implement changes to the course as needed. In addition to producing annual focus group reports, CEE recently reported on findings over the entire 5-year period. Assessment of this course is just one of many instruments used in the continuous improvement process for our academic department.

Presentation Format

This interactive symposium presentation will start by explaining the need for various assessment instruments to validate the department's continuous improvement process in order to maintain ABET accreditation. In 1998 the assessment instrument known as the focus group was selected for measuring student satisfaction in the Field Engineering course, replacing the questionnaires and multiple choice tests of the past. Using the focus group, we are able to obtain qualitative and quantitative assessment data regarding the accomplishment by the students of some of our program curricular outcomes.

In the second part of the presentation, we will conduct an actual focus group with the members of the audience in our particular session. The focus group will include several open-ended questions, a roundtable activity, and an index card activity. The subject upon which we will collect this focus group data will be the reactions of the audience members to the Best Assessment Processes Symposium itself. Some immediate feedback will be given, and upon returning to the Academy, we will prepare a report for Rose-Hulman and send it to the Institute. This data can then be used by the Institute to improve its future assessment symposiums.

In the final part of the presentation, we will discuss the longitudinal aspect of conducting the focus groups on the Field Engineering course. We've been collecting and analyzing this data for 5 years, and we will show changes that have been made to the course, and demonstrate the benefit focus groups offered in preparing for the ABET accreditation visit which occurred in November 2002.

Presenter Information:

Major Mark S. Malone
Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering
United States Air Force Academy
Civil and Environmental Engineering
2354 Fairchild Drive, Suite 6J159
USAF Academy, CO 80840
PH: (719) 333-7363; Fax: (719) 333-2234
Email: mark.malone@usafa.af.mil

Mr. Curtis Hughes
Deputy Director for Academic Assessment
United States Air Force Academy
Center for Educational Excellence
2354 Fairchild Drive, Suite 4K25
USAF Academy, CO 80840
PH: (719) 333-2311; Fax: (719) 333-4355
Email: curtis.hughes@usafa.af.mil