Using Assessment Information

Case Example from Comparative Studies
Assessment is not fun, but it is useful.

- Already do assessment, all the time.
  - Formalize and Regularize the practice.
  - Focus on Program Goals —everything goes back to them.
CS Program Goals

- **Goal 1:** Students develop the capacity to analyze differences in culture and politics over time.
- **Goal 2:** Students develop the capacity to engage and analyze issues of community and social justice.
- **Goal 3:** Students develop interdisciplinary thinking and writing skills and understanding of relationships between disciplines.
- **Goal 4:** Students develop the ability to read critically and interpret a diverse range of texts, material artifacts, and/or performance traditions.

Assessed by evaluating senior capstone papers

Our goals were not being met with sufficient regularity.

Need to rethink
- Assessment procedure
- Program Goals
- Curriculum

More data needed
Indirect assessment—Survey/Focus Groups

- Focus Groups & Survey of current majors, general education students, and alums
- Strengths/weaknesses of program:
  - Reaffirmed value of program goals
  - Reaffirmed value of individual courses
  - Identified problem in structure of major—too many options, not enough clarity
Undergraduate Studies Committee

- Studied curriculum
- Affirmed value of flexibility
- Identified bulge of courses at 4000 level
- Identified courses irregularly offered
- Identified courses regularly underenrolled

- Flexibility moderated by additional faculty advising
- 1 credit hour course for majors created as intro to department
- Curriculum Reorganized
  - Creating research courses to prepare students for Capstone
  - Eliminating other courses
Challenges

- Integrating indirect and direct measures (systems thinking: how to anticipate how one part affects another, how to track back to the cause of the problem identified in order to create a solution)
- Defining and regularizing learning outcomes across sections and major pathways while remaining open and encouraging the pursuit of unexpected learning outcomes.
- Asking faculty to think critically about the curriculum as a whole, and then come to consensus about how students can best meet our program goals
- Balancing the desire to retain student and faculty freedom while attending to the need for structure and clarity.
- Responding to structural changes like advising being shifted out of the department and increased pressure to increase class sizes.
- Determining how to move incrementally toward a better program.
- Assessing the success of the changes we make.
Conclusions

Assessment is hard
- Avoid distortion of your mission and goals
- Determine how much to change and in what order
- Develop procedures that do not overload faculty

Assessment is useful
- Identified structural issues otherwise hard to see.
- If we get the changes right--
  - Should improve flow through major,
  - Increase clarity of mission and goals,
  - Improve ability to attract the types of students who want to be Comparative Studies Majors