Overview

Institution

Henderson State University

Profile

Henderson State University (HSU), a public liberal arts college (COPLAC), offers undergraduate and graduate degrees to more than 3,700 students in five distinct colleges and schools. Founded in 1890, HSU is Arkansas’ second-oldest state university.

Challenge

To meet a mandate from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission (HLC), Henderson State sought to replace its paper-based assessment system with a solution that supported a sustainable continuous improvement approach. The school was given approximately two years to implement a solution, train users and prepare for a return visit from the HLC.

Solution

TracDat streamlines and centralizes data collection and storage of student learning outcomes and other assessment information for HSU. User-friendly features simplify training and spur adoption among faculty and administrative users. Robust reporting capabilities also facilitate collaboration, and encourage and enable users to leverage data stored in the TracDat repository to support other initiatives.

Henderson State University Uses TracDat to Close the Loop on Assessment and Improvement

“[Users] see that the improvement process is a never-ending cycle and are turning to TracDat as a useful tool – entering information that they want to use to improve their areas.”

— WRENETTE TEDDER, DIRECTOR OF ASSESSMENT

Henderson State University (HSU) implemented TracDat in 2005, in response to a mandate from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to institute a sustainable assessment process.

TracDat replaced an information gathering approach that relied on word processing templates filled in by faculty and administrators. “I’d ask for their plans, and then follow up with information requests twice a year,” recalls Wrenette Tedder, Director of Assessment. Tedder, who describes herself as a “department of one,” routinely encountered resistance. “They thought they were doing it just for me and didn’t see how they could use the information to improve their areas. So they just sent files back and forth, and weren’t sharing them internally or seeking feedback.”

Those attitudes have changed markedly since TracDat proved its value by helping Henderson State complete the follow-up HLC focus visit in 2007, along with a 2012 10-year review in which TracDat enabled the university to catalog and demonstrate student learning outcomes.

“TracDat gave me access to all that the academic and non-academic units had done in establishing learning goals, linking them to university and department goals, taking measurements and formulating actions to close the loop,” says Margaret Hoskins, Ph.D., CPA, associate dean of the School of Business and the primary author of the assessment section of the HLC Report. “It was wonderful to have massive data, and to be able to pull from it the information that I would need for that section of the report.”

Courtesy Henderson State University
TracDat Benefits

- Streamlines collection and storage of outcomes assessment data
- Supports compliance and accreditation efforts
- Provides framework for sustainable assessment process
- Flexibility allows tailoring to specific user needs and requirements
- Ease of use encourages strong buy-in while reducing training and support requirements and costs

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— MARGARET HOSKINS, PH.D., CPA, ASSOCIATE DEAN, SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Today, TracDat provides HSU with a single, centralized repository for assets related to assessment, planning and other activities from the university’s 44 academic units and 47 administrative units. Tedder reports that users continue to find new ways to utilize data stored in TracDat as they become more familiar with its features and capabilities.

“We’re using it for a wide range of activities because it holds so much useful information,” Tedder says. “Of course it supports the accreditation effort and strategic planning. But at the unit level, it’s increasing collaboration by stimulating dialogue and discourse.”

A look at other departments and units shows users leveraging TracDat’s capabilities to meet a variety of information needs that support continuous improvement and other efforts.

For example, the Art Department uses TracDat to organize annual reviews that track students’ development throughout their academic careers, along with evidence of curriculum and faculty teaching effectiveness. “The review allows students to know we are paying attention and gives them some measure of how well they are progressing,” says Katherine Strause, department chair and associate professor. “We look at assessment as an annual checkup with students. Through the documentation, we have gained insight into trends in our department and how to reinforce what it is we want for graduating seniors.”

The Department of Family and Consumer Science uses material organized in TracDat to pinpoint areas where students are weakest or strongest in relation to oral and written communication skills, says Patti Miley, Ph.D., department chair and professor. “As a result, we are now addressing those areas more closely in classes to see if we can enhance or influence further student improvement and development,” she notes.

In addition to providing an assessment data warehouse, TracDat enables the Mathematics Department to vertically align its goals. “It naturally creates a timeline that allows units to recognize data trends or reflect on changes made in past years,” says Debra Coventry, Ph.D., professor of mathematics and a member of the assessment committee. “It has enough structure to be manageable in terms of ease of use, yet enough flexibility to allow for changes to fit the unique needs of our institution.”

“It’s taken one or two iterations, but users now see how they can use TracDat to their benefit,” Tedder says. “They can look at the information and see how they will add courses or introduce new information to the curriculum, and make the changes that will get them to their goals. They also see that the improvement process is a continuous cycle and are turning to TracDat as a useful tool – entering information that they want to use to improve their areas.”

Widespread adoption of TracDat also streamlined the assessment process for Tedder. “I have much more time to spend looking at plans and helping units improve them – the types of activities that add real value,” she says.