The Sixth Annual Assessment Conference of the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE)

"Assessing What We Value: A Focus on Student Learning"

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AALHE
Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education

Proceedings

It is my pleasure to share with you the third edition of the AALHE Conference Proceedings. The proceedings consist of session topics that were presented at our most recent conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. While all sessions were eligible for inclusion, only those presenters that submitted a paper for peer review and acceptance are included.

The AALHE Annual Assessment Conference is an effort to connect and provide professional development for assessment practitioners in higher education. The conference remains one of the best resources for advanced assessment professionals, though there are other professional development and networking opportunities throughout the year. The 2016 AALHE Conference theme was "Assessing What We Value: A Focus on Student Learning".

In this edition of the Conference Proceedings, you will find many interesting articles about how assessment can help lead higher education to improve and enhance what we do best – facilitate learning in our students. For those of you who attended the conference, I am sure that you will agree with me that our presenters did an excellent job of fulfilling the conference theme. For those of you would could not attend this year, these Conference Proceedings will give you a taste of the wonderful sessions that were presented.

Please read through this document and feel free to contact those presenters whose ideas have sparked interest for you. It is with continuous networking, collegial communications, and sharing of knowledge and experience that we can continue to grow and support assessment practitioners across the world.

Thank you, and enjoy!

Catherine Wehlburg

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AALHE is a professional association for assessment practitioners at colleges, universities, and higher education support organizations. It provides resources and a forum to support assessment practitioners' professional development and the open discussion of issues, strategies, policies, and processes associated with higher education's use of assessment as a tool to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness in fostering student success.

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Oil and Water: When Assessment and Faculty Don't Mix

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Abstract

Assessment has been part of education for a very long time. Many faculty believe their grading is assessment enough and are resistant to the assessment processes most institutions are putting in place to demonstrate how students are learning. In this paper, I will discuss some of the lingering excuses faculty have for not wanting to participate in assessment using an oil and water analogy. Several common excuses will be presented along with the rationale for the excuse and a potential response.

Why Oil and Water?

The analogy of oil and water is used because it is very difficult, but not impossible, to get them to mix. Oil and water are both essential to life and in Higher Education, both faculty and assessment of student learning are needed to demonstrate how an institution knows students are learning. Many faculty are resistant to assessment for a variety of reasons.

Assessment is stable and the terms used in the field are relatively the same: goals, outcomes, objectives, curriculum maps, and aggregated data. Assessment has been around for a number of years. In practical terms, people look for the results of assessment in almost all environments. For example, it is hard to imagine choosing a doctor who was not board certified. A board certified physician has extensive training where they were reviewed, monitored, and held against a set of standards. The board exam, the reviews, and the set of standards are the elements of a medical doctorate assessment process. The focus of assessment is not to make sure that one doctor can do the job, but to make sure all doctors are performing in the same range, and if they are not, then asking what can be altered to help more doctors meet the standards. Any professional accreditation process is a way to assure all those with the professional accreditation meet a set of standards designed by those with knowledge about what it takes to be in that profession. For the medical doctorate, the assessment process focuses on standards most would agree serve people well.

Then there are faculty. No one really teaches faculty a great deal about the subject of learning. They are mostly interested in the subject they teach and imparting the elements of that subject to students. They are passionate, intelligent, and interesting, which is great for higher education and research. Faculty worry about their jobs and all the changes in higher education.

At some institutions they worry about research and funding. They worry about dwindling budgets and class size.

Faculty know their subject matter, or content, and want to focus on imparting that information to students. They believe they are best to determine what students are or have learned based on the exams and other assignments they give students. The problem is that faculty focus on the content, not on how they meet the objectives of the program, and sometimes even how they meet the objectives in their own course. Some faculty see assessment as a threat, but more about that later.

Assessment and faculty are two stable forces that really do not need the other to exist but somehow they have to work together, like oil and water. It is common knowledge that oil and water do not mix well. The physical properties of each make it next to impossible for them to mix. Oil, depending on the type of oil, boils between 375 degrees F and 572 degrees F and freezes from -40 degrees F (motor oil) and 37 degrees F (olive oil). Water boils at 212 degrees F and freezes at 32 degrees F, also very stable. This means that you cannot boil or freeze them and make a single compound (Mancinelli, Bruni, Ricci, & Imberti, 2013).

Oil and water also have different masses and therefore, different densities. Density is a measure of how much of a substance is contained in a specific volume of liquid. A liquid that is less dense than water will float on the water; a liquid that has a greater density will sink (Mancinelli, Bruni, Ricci, & Imberti, 2013). Water is denser than oil, so oil floats on the top of water.

And, most importantly, oil and water are immiscible, meaning they will not mix together. Liquids tend to be immiscible when the force of attraction between the molecules of the same liquid is greater than the force of attraction between the two different liquids. Molecules of water are strongly attracted to each other because they are polar and hydrophilic or water loving. Oil molecules are non-polar and hydrophobic or ‘water-fearing’ (Mancinelli, Bruni, Ricci, & Imberti, 2013).

If faculty is the water and oil is assessment, then it is possible to see how they do not mix. There is no need for them to mix; they are both stable and they both are attracted to their own kind.

When there is an oil spill, companies use detergent to make the oil and water mix into a nasty ball of goo, but it is a ball of goo they can pick up and remove. Detergent molecules are attracted to both water and oil. When detergent mixes with oil and water, one end of each detergent molecule attaches to a water molecule and the other end attaches to an oil molecule. The detergent creates an emulsion, a mixture of water with droplets of oil spread through it. That’s what assessment needs to be in higher education; a mixture where the assessment is integrated into the teaching and learning. That cannot happen with faculty support.

Getting Faculty and Assessment to Mix

There are two key things that need to happen to get faculty and assessment to mix. First, faculty need to recognize that no one in assessment looks at one student or even at one faculty – assessment is looking at aggregate data across time. Secondly, no one should be using an assessment process to provide grades to individual students. It can help, but if the student is not getting the material, there could be a plethora of things wrong and students deserve to have their work graded by the most knowledgeable person – the faculty.

And for assessment people, recognizing that there are some deep issues with faculty resistance they will not be able to solve is key. For example, teaching in higher education has not been measured by anyone but students for many years and so the thought that now someone external will be evaluating their teaching can cause resistance. Faculty also object to being told how to teach because they feel they already know how to lecture and grade. And to some faculty the terminology of assessment - rubrics, goals, objectives, outcomes, and curriculum maps are difficult because they are new terms (Joyner, 2016). But the most important element is fear. Faculty fear assessment may bring more change in an already changing environment. What if students are not learning? What if the faculty cannot demonstrate they are learning? What will happen?

Faculty Objections

Like most people, faculty do not want to express their fear so they come up with other excuses. Here are some of the most common and what assessment professionals should consider and explore.

"Rubrics reduce teaching to making students fit a mold." This fear comes from the focus on K-12 teaching and learning in the past decade or so. Faculty hear about "teaching to the test," standards, and other formula based teaching methods. Rubrics are one of these. Helping faculty build rubrics to meet their needs will help faculty see the value of rubrics. (Atkinson & Lim, 2013).

"Assessment is used to determine the "good" faculty." Assessment relies on aggregate data across courses. If a course provides assessment data and it shows the students are not learning, assessment professionals generally share the data with the faculty who teach the course and ask to be included in any changes. The goal is to improve learning, not teaching (Cain & Hutchings, 2015).

"Assessment is just another buzz word." The concept of assessment has been around for a very long time. In fact, it was a topic of discussion in the late 1950s (Pellegrino, 1999). There has been renewed interest as the cost of higher education and the availability of jobs for graduates. And many ask "How do you know your students are learning. Assessment practices are one way to answer this question with data.

"Assessment makes Higher Ed more like K-12." Assessment in Higher Education focuses on student learning at the college level. No one is proscribing expectations to faculty and requiring them to teach them. Faculty are much more in control of their classrooms when compared to K-12 (Wang, & Hurley, 2012).

“Assessment violates Academic Freedom.” Quite frankly, this is the most confusing statement and speaks directly to fear. As faculty feel their stake in shared governance is being reduced, they worry that assessment is just a mandate. “When undertaken appropriately and under the direction and oversight of the faculty, assessment is a potentially useful activity that can help the faculty carry out and improve on their work. It can help provide insights into what students are learning and where, and can help suggest areas and avenues for change. It is a tool” (Cain, 2014, p. 14).

“I don’t have time for assessment.” This is where assessment professionals can offer to assist. They can help develop outcomes and the rubrics through an interview, offer to put together the curriculum map and ask the faculty to review it, and give the faculty the opportunity to participate in training on assessment (Ellett, Monsaas, Martin-Hansen, & Demir, 2012).

“I know my students are learning because I am the expert.” Ask for evidence of student learning. It is important for faculty to provide evidence (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, (2014).

“It’s just checking boxes.” Yes, for many faculty, it may be just checking boxes on a rubric, but those boxes are data points and the information the aggregated data points provide can help provide information to analyze and assure students are learning (Wang & Hurley, 2012). “Students will not be creative.” Faculty can add creativity as one of the requirements on the rubric. It will be up to the faculty to determine if the assignment meets the creativity requirement (Brookhart, 2013).

> Working with faculty and meeting them more than halfway to assure they understand the purpose and the value of assessment is not for the faint of heart. Courage, determination, and an understanding of assessment can create a culture of assessment.

Conclusion

Assessment people need to be the detergent so the oil and water will become a single mass – a place where faculty can retain their style, their creativity, and grade their students without fear of punishment as well as a place where assessment provides an overall understanding about how students are doing against goals. When higher education gets to this point, then will have the ability to use assessment data to improve student learning (notice the goal is learning–not teaching).

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Asking the Right Question - the Key to Good Assessment

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At Johnson County Community College, the Office of Outcomes Assessment has focused assessment activities using the cycle of assessment as a theoretical and practical framework to engage faculty in authentic assessment activities. The first step in the cycle, defining the assessment question, has been especially successful in helping faculty understand and engage in assessment activities.

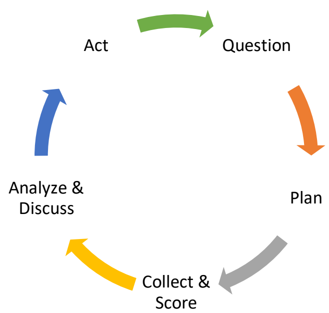

Figure 1 Cycle of Assessment

Based on the foundations of Action Research (Craig, 2009), the Cycle of Assessment starts with a "Question" moves on to a "Plan" for assessment activities, then continues on to the work of collecting and scoring the data. After collection the cycle moves to "Analyze and Discuss" the data, and then finally to "Act" on the data to improve student learning. The first, and most overlooked stage in the Cycle of Assessment is the defining the *Assessment or Research Question*.

What was the Question?

Before an assessment instrument can be designed to collect student learning data, faculty need to define what they want to know about the students. It is important to note that it is the faculty's role to identify the relevant question to assess learning in courses or programs. This is an important component of the assessment plan and begins the process by engaging faculty in a meaningful way in what is happening in their classrooms and programs. This is not an administrative task.

In defining an assessment question, faculty need to ask themselves:

- What should students be learning in the course or program?
- How well are they learning it?
- What evidence do I have of this learning?
- What are will I do with that evidence to improve learning at the course or program level?

This last bullet is the core function of assessment for faculty. Good assessment hinges on how assessment activities inform curricular changes to improve student learning. A well designed assessment question at the beginning of the process will help focus the assessment activities in a class or program that will provide data to help inform the curricular outcomes.

Some basic guidelines for writing a good assessment question are to make the question:

- **Meaningful** – the question is one about which faculty want to know the answer.
- **Relatable** – the question is tied to course objectives, program goals and campus-wide student learning outcomes.
- **Measurable** – the question can be answered! Usually that means specifying the question to an observable student performance.
    - **Too broad:** What attitudes do students need to possess to pass the problem-solving essay portion on the mid-term exam?
    - **Narrower**: What key concepts are students not understanding in the curriculum as reflected in the problem-solving essay portion of the mid-term?
- **Manageable** –the process of collecting data is manageable. Complex assessment systems with multiple variables make for interesting research projects, but can be burdensome to faculty.
- **Actionable** – the answers to the question provide faculty with information to make changes.

It is important in writing the assessment question and designing the collection methods for the assessment to avoid over-collection of variables. Faculty are encouraged to only collect variables over which the course or program may have an impact. Knowing the time of day of the course, or the gender of the students may be interesting to note, but will the course or program change it course offerings based on this data? If not, don't waste time and resources collecting these variables.

Choosing the Assessment Instrument

Defining, through a strong assessment question, what faculty want to know about students allows for a better match to the type of direct or indirect assessment instrument to be chosen. As an example, faculty looking for student gains on key concepts might choose a pre/posttest, whereas programs looking for summative information on their program majors might choose a portfolio option with a rubric for evaluation.

The Importance of Pilots

In the first iteration of many assessment projects, faculty may find the assessment instrument was ill-suited to measure the intended learning outcome. Piloting the assessment with a small number of classes allows faculty to either modify the instrument or change to a different instrument if the data collection is a mismatch to the assessment question.

Once the instrument has been refined and data has been collected over multiple sections/courses/ semesters, results and analysis may indicate an area of challenge for students in the course or overall program. Determining what changes faculty should make to the curriculum or program to improve student learning is an obvious but challenging next step. Assessment data tied to a strong assessment question can provide a more focused discussion by the faculty of the impact on the curriculum that the assessment activity has shown. It is very important, as with each step of the assessment cycle, for faculty to make sense of the data that was collected. Only the faculty in the program are fully aware of the connections between classroom pedagogy and the assessments.

Moving On to a New Assessment Question

Sometimes it is time to move on from an assessment simply because results indicate that students are successfully hitting the benchmark criteria. Continuing to assess a learning outcome in which students show proficiency may not be the best use of time and energy for departments. Faculty may question when it is time to move on and chose a different assessment question to explore. Some questions to discuss when determining if an assessment question has been answered:

- Was there improvement in student learning?
- Did students meet the benchmark performance set by the faculty for this assessment? (Setting these benchmarks early in the process are important as the unfortunate tendency of setting them later results in expectations “sinking” to the level of performance.)
- Are faculty satisfied with student performance?
- Do faculty see a greater need/question that needs to be asked? Often what emerges from an assessment that has reached its benchmark is another question.

Write About It

It is important to report results that are meaningful to multiple stakeholders, internal and external. Good reports provide a history of assessment activities, help crystalize what was learned, and provide a road map for next steps.

An assessment report should answer the following questions:

- What was the question that needed to be answered to improve student learning?
- What assessment instrument was used to answer the question?
- What do the assessment results suggest in terms of actions faculty and others must take?
- What are the next steps?

Conclusion

A significant challenge facing institutions concerns assessment practices that have dual purpose of engaging faculty in meaningful assessment practices, while addressing ever increasing accountability requirements. Using the Cycle of Assessment as a means of framing assessment, starting with an assessment question to drive the process helps to ensure that institutions will have highly engaged faculty invested in a process that is focused on student learning and contributes to developing assessment practices in ways that benefit students and the institution.

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Student and Faculty Engagement in Assessing Students' Progress toward Meeting Program Outcomes

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Abstract

This paper describes the evolution of the assessment program for Keuka College's Organizational Communication major. The assessment project has been underway since 2007 and has generated students' awareness of and engagement in assessing their progress toward meeting program outcomes and developing online portfolios of their professional work that demonstrate their mastery of the skills measured by their outcomes. Samples of program outcomes surveys and responses and students' online portfolios are included.

Keywords: assessment, outcomes, surveys, portfolios, rubric.

"Alice: ...would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?
The Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.
Alice: I don't much care where.
The Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.
Alice: ...So long as I get somewhere.
The Cheshire Cat: Oh, you're sure to do that, if only you walk long enough."

When we first start thinking about outcomes assessment, many of us are apt to find ourselves thinking along the lines of Alice: we're sure our students are learning; after all, didn't we design our majors carefully, requiring the courses we "know" will get them "somewhere" and assuming that if they "walk long enough" they'll surely arrive at the goal of being well-prepared graduates. This is a particular challenge for those of us in liberal arts-based academic disciplines, which usually lack licensure examinations or external standardized tests that allow faculty to point to outcomes such as "90 percent of our graduates pass the certification exam on the first try." Graduates of our majors may be headed in a wide variety of post-graduate directions, and finding employment after graduation may be a lengthy process as well, making it particularly difficult for faculty to point to employment statistics as a measure of successful graduate outcomes.

As faculty in a small college Communication Studies program that offers a BA in Organizational Communication, we have faced these challenges, and over the past eight years, we have been developing a procedure for outcomes assessment involving two key components:

Outcomes Surveys that require students in the major to assess their own progress toward key graduate outcomes in most courses required in the major, and e-portfolios linked to seniors' Linked In profiles, which show samples of their best work to prospective employers. We believe our assessment process overcomes many of the challenges faculty face in similar programs. As the primary faculty in this small program, we are fully engaged in this process, and our students have become invested in assessing their own outcomes, as well. And yes, we do know now where we want them to "get to," although in the real world, as in Wonderland, the paths do change from time to time, as the assessment process tells us what our students are taking away from what we have to offer. The features of the program discussed below are:

- Our outcomes, and how they have been evolving
- Samples of the Outcomes Surveys, with students' self-assessments
- Sample e-portfolios

So, as the King of Hearts, advised, let's begin at the beginning. The original list of Outcomes was developed around 2004 or 05, in collaboration with a former colleague. As you can see, it's pretty messy.

Course Number and Name	Goal 1: Demonstrate competency at speaking effectively and evaluating presentations	Goal 2: Demonstrate understanding of principles and skills of effective work groups	Goal 3: Identify problems and develop strategies to meet needs	Goal 4: Demonstrate proficiency at writing and document design	Goal 5: Demonstrate understanding of communication theory and com. activities	Goal 6: Demonstrate effective listening skills. Note: students may choose other courses in which this goal will be met	Goals 7: Demonstrate understanding of Business, Management, Human Resources, Marketing, and/or Accounting theory and practice	Goal 8: Demonstrate understanding beyond the introductory level of literature/creative writing/structure and development of the English language
COM 122 Intro to Com	2	2	3	3	1	2	4	4
COM 123 Public Spking	1	4	2	4	2	1	4	4
COM 201 Int/Group Communication	1	1	1	3	1	1	4	4
COM 301 Organ. Com.	1	1	1	2	1	3	1 (Business Mgt. Only)	4
COM 320 Bus/Prof.Wrtg.	2	2	1	1	2	2	1 (not Accounting)	4
COM 321 Media Wrtg.	1	2	1	1	2	1	3	4
COM 401 Sr. Practicum	1	2	1	1	3	2	1 (Marketing oneself)	4
COM 420 Com. Theory	2	2	1	2	1	3	4	4

BUS 101 Intro. to Bus.	??*	2??	??	4?	3?	3?	1	4
MGT 345 Organ. Behav.	??	2?	??	4?	3?	3?	1	4
MKT 220 Prin. of Mktg.	??	??	1-2?	1-2?	2?	3?	1	4
MKT 320 Public Rels.	??	??	1 ?	1-2 ?	Theory 4 ? Activities 1 ?	1-2 ?	1	4
Eng 319 Exp. Prose	3	2	3	1 writing only	Act/wrtg. 1 Theory 4	3	4	1
COM 394 Field Period	3	4	1	? Depends on site	1 Activities only	2	Depends on site	4

Course Number and Name	Goal 1: Demonstrate competency at speaking effectively and evaluating presentations	Goal 2: Demonstrate understanding of principles and skills of effective work groups	Goal 3: Identify problems and develop strategies to meet needs	Goal 4: Demonstrate proficiency at writing and document design	Goal 5: Demonstrate understanding of communication theory and com. activities	Goal 6: Demonstrate effective listening skills. Note: students may choose other courses in which this goal will be met	Goals 7: Demonstrate understanding of Business, Management, Human Resources, Marketing, and/or Accounting theory and practice	Goal 8: Demonstrate understanding beyond the introductory level of literature/creative writing/structure and development of the English language
Publication and Design— 3 credits								
COM 350 Desktop Publishing	2-3?	2-3?	1	1	3	4	2-3?	4
CMP 335 Webpage Design	??	??	1?	1? Design only	??	4	4	4
CMP 265 Computer Visual Design	??	??	1?	1? Design only	??	4	4	4
English and Writing Skills— 6 credits								
One 200-level course	3	??	4	2 Writing	4	4	4	1
One 300-level course	3	??	4	2 Writing	4	4	4	1
Business, Marketing, Human Resources, Management Skills— 3 credits.								
One 300-level course.	3-4?	Depends on course	1	Depends on course	4	4	1	4

1= Major focus of the course
2= Consistently emphasized in the course 3= Minor emphasis of the course
4= Not central to the course
??*= Since this course is outside our discipline, and neither of us teaches it, we are unable to say. A ? next to a number represents our best guess.

At the time, someone in the administration had decreed that outcomes needed to be prioritized, with 1 representing a very important outcome in a course, and descending numbers indicating less importance of a given outcome in its corresponding course. Once we began actually assessing whether courses were helping students make progress toward outcomes, it rapidly became apparent that the only ones we could measure would be those ranked as "1" for each course. We also realized that the only courses for which we could assess outcomes were the COM courses, plus ENG 319 (formerly Expository Prose, now Creative Nonfiction), as those courses are always taught by the two COM faculty or by adjuncts. Also, when we report our results annually to the college, their reporting format allows us to submit data on only six outcomes; thus, the outcomes pertaining to courses outside our division (the management and marketing courses) and the English elective options (many and varied) are not assessed at this point. Within the past year, we have cleaned up the Outcomes list, as you can see.

Course Number and Name	Goal 1: Demonstrate competency at speaking effectively and evaluating presentations	Goal 2: Demonstrate understanding of principles and skills of effective work groups	Goal 3: Identify problems and develop strategies to meet needs	Goal 4: Demonstrate proficiency at writing and document design	Goal 5: Demonstrate understanding of communication theory and com. activities	Goal 6: Demonstrate understanding beyond the introductory level of literature/creative writing/structure and development of the English language	Goals 7: Demonstrate understanding of Business, Management, Human Resources, Marketing
COM 122 Intro to Com					1		
COM 123 Public Spking	1						
COM 201 Int/Group Communication	1	1	1		1		
COM 428 Organ. Com.	1	1	1		1		
COM 320 Bus/Prof.Wrtg.			1	1			1
COM 321 Media Wrtg.	1		1	1			
COM 401 Sr. Practicum	1		1	1			1 (Marketing oneself)
COM 421 Media Frontiers			1		1		
BUS 101 Intro. to Bus.							1
MGT 345 Organ. Behav.							1
MKT 220 Prin. of Mktg.							1

MKT 320 Public Rels.							1
Eng 319 Exp. Prose				1 writing only		1	
COM 394 Field Period			1		1 Activities only		

Course Number and Name	Goal 1: Demonstrate competency at speaking effectively and evaluating presentations	Goal 2: Demonstrate understanding of principles and skills of effective work groups	Goal 3: Identify problems and develop strategies to meet needs	Goal 4: Demonstrate proficiency at writing and document design	Goal 5: Demonstrate understanding of communication theory and com. activities	Goal 6: Demonstrate understanding beyond the introductory level of literature/creative writing/structure and development of the English language	Goals 7: Demonstrate understanding of Business, Management, Human Resources, Marketing, and/or Accounting theory and practice
Publication and Design—3 credits							
All Publication/Design courses			1	1			

1= Major focus of the course
2= Consistently emphasized in the course
3= Minor emphasis of the course
4= Not central to the course
??*= Since this course is outside our discipline, and neither of us teaches it, we are unable to say.
A ? next to a number represents our best guess.

The Program Coordinator started developing the Outcomes Surveys during the spring of 2007. At first, they were administered as hard copy surveys in only my classes. The first time one of the surveys was handed out and explained, students' response was immediate and positive, with one saying, "This is great; it asks us what we learned. The other surveys (the college's standard Student Evaluation of Instruction) just ask us how we liked the course (not quite true, but judging from the nods and remarks from other students in the room, a widely-held perception). Given the success of the first couple of administrations of the surveys, the senior author applied for and received a sabbatical for the Spring 2009 term, to write all of the Outcomes Surveys and start putting them on Moodle to provide permanent electronic records of responses.

Each survey asks students to rate their progress toward each of the key outcomes for the course. They are also asked to provide at least one sample of something they did that led to their rating their learning as they did. They are also asked whether there is anything else they could have done to make better progress toward each outcome, and if so, to explain what that would have been. Affirmative responses to this question elicit useful self-reflection at times (e.g., "I could have read the text more carefully before doing the assignments."). At other times, they let instructors know that something about the course needs to be changed (e.g., "The text was confusing.") Occasionally, but gratifyingly rarely, students may just use this question to complain (e.g., "I thought our groups were stupid, and I wish I had been able to pick my own group."). Although students are asked to rate their learning progress, not their performance in the courses, past analyses of some of the survey results have been consistent with majors' mean overall course grades. A sample survey, for COM 428, Organizational Communication, follows.

COM 428
Outcomes Survey

Instructions: Each question below concerns one of the key goals for COM 428, Organizational Communication. Please circle the answer that best describes how much progress you feel you made toward meeting this goal. Please be very honest when you respond; these questions <u>are not</u> intended to "test" your achievement, and they <u>will not</u> affect your course grade in any way. These questions are a "test" of how well the course is working to help students meet key goals on the way to their degree. Following each question, you are asked to provide at least one specific example to explain why you feel you made the progress you did. Please describe briefly at least one activity or learning experience from the course that you feel contributed to your progress, and explain why it helped you.

1. <u>Goal: Demonstrate competency at speaking effectively and evaluating presentations.</u> Note: For this course, we will focus only on speaking effectively. Please consider how your achievement in this course compares to what you learned or accomplished in previous courses, such as COM 123, Public Speaking.

How would you describe the progress you made in this course at speaking effectively (Check one):

____Excellent ____Very Good ____Good ____Fair ____Poor

Please give one or two brief examples of activities, projects or learning experiences from the course that show why you gave the answer above:
Is there anything you could have done differently in the course that would have helped you better achieve this goal? _____Yes _____No

If you answered "yes" above, please explain briefly what you could have done and how/why it would have helped you better achieve this goal:

2. Goal: Demonstrate understanding of principles and skills of effective work groups (what groups should do and how to do it). Note: Please consider how your achievement during this course compares to what you learned or accomplished in previous courses, such as COM 122, Intro. to Communication or COM 201, Interpersonal and Group Communication Skills.

How would you describe the progress you made in this course at understanding how to work effectively in a group and at working effectively with a group (Check one):

____Excellent ____Very Good ____Good ____Fair ____Poor

Please give one or two brief examples of activities, projects or learning experiences from the course that show why you gave the answer above:

Is there anything you could have done differently during the course that would have helped you better achieve this goal? _____Yes _____No

If you answered "yes" above, please explain briefly what you could have done and how/why it would have helped you better achieve this goal:

3. Goal: Identify problems and develop strategies to meet needs. Note: Please consider how your achievement during this course compares to what you learned or accomplished in previous courses, such as COM 122, Intro. to Communication, any other COM course or during previous Field Periods.

How would you describe the progress you made toward identifying and solving problems (Check one):

____Excellent ____Very Good ____Good ____Fair ____Poor

Please give one or two brief examples of activities, projects or learning experiences from the course that show why you gave the answer above:

Is there anything you could have done during the course that would have helped you better achieve this goal? _____Yes _____No

If you answered "yes" above, please explain briefly what you could have done and how/why it would have helped you better achieve this goal:

4. Goal: Demonstrate understanding of communication theory and activities. Note: Please consider how your achievement in this course compares to what you learned or accomplished in previous courses, such as COM 122, Intro. to Communication or any other communication course.

How would you describe the progress you made in this course toward greater understanding of communication theory (theories of scholars as discussed in the text or in class) and communication activities (how effective communication takes place) (Check one):

____Excellent ____Very Good ____Good ____Fair ____Poor

Please give one or two brief examples of activities, projects or learning experiences from the course that show why you gave the answer above:

Is there anything you could have done differently in the course that would have helped you better achieve this goal? _____Yes _____No

If you answered "yes" above, please explain briefly what you could have done and how/why it would have helped you better meet this goal:

5. Goal: Demonstrate understanding of business and management principles. Note: Please consider how your achievement in this course compares to what you learned or accomplished in previous courses, such as BUS 101, Intro. to Business or any other business or management course.

How would you describe the progress you made in this course toward understanding business and management principles (Check one):

____Excellent ____Very Good ____Good ____Fair ____Poor

Please give one or two brief examples of activities, projects or learning experiences from the course that show why you gave the answer above:

Is there anything you could have done differently in the course that would have helped you better achieve this goal? _____Yes _____No

If you answered "yes" above, please explain briefly what you could have done and how/why it would have helped you better achieve this goal:

Thank you for your responses. They will be used to help evaluate this course and its contribution to the Organizational Communication major.

To allow us to keep track of students' reported progress through the major, please fill in the identifying information requested below. Remember, this information will <u>not</u> be used in determining your course grade!

ID#___________

Year in school (sophomore, junior, senior)

Today's Date_____________________

Surveys are administered only to COM majors enrolled in the surveyed courses, as the assessment pertains only to how well students in the Organizational Communication major are progressing toward meeting key program outcomes. Students are directed to save a copy of their responses to each survey to their own Outcomes file. During the final two weeks of each semester, of the semester, COM majors enrolled in the COM courses and ENG 319 receive emails telling them that it's time to go to Moodle and complete the survey, with a reminder to save a copy. This is a time-consuming task for the Program Coordinator, which could be eliminated if release time for administration of the project were available, a goal still hoped-for but not realized.

After the semester is over, the Program Coordinator compiles all of the data from each survey on a blank survey form. Each student's responses are entered in a different color, to allow the instructor to distinguish between different students' responses and to see how any given student responded to the entire survey. The version of the completed survey shared with instructors has student ID numbers deleted, which has led to excellent "buy in" by faculty who are not among the "core" communication faculty. Over the years, the program has accumulated a substantial database of the responses, which would be a wonderful resource for all kinds of analyses, if time permitted (probably after the current Program Coordinator retires). A sample completed survey for COM 428 is presented in Appendix A.

A composite rating of respondents' learning (Number on Appendix A below the line where totals of "Excellent, Very good" etc. are entered) is based on counting every "Excellent" as a 4, every "Very Good" as a 3, every "Good" as a 2, and so forth, effectively converting the ratings into "grade-type" scores for students' learning progress toward each outcome and their overall learning (rating at bottom of the page) progress in the course. In evaluating our program, we have set a minimum rating of "B-" (2.77 overall course rating) as the minimum acceptable level of student progress toward key outcomes for every course. Of course, we strive for, and generally achieve, a higher success rate than this. (For the survey shown in Appendix A, students' overall mean rating of their learning was 3.4.)

When students enroll in the major capstone course, Senior Practicum, in addition to completing a final internship (over and above the one per year required of every Keuka College student), students meet twice a week to prepare their final portfolios and get ready to respond to a series of "tough interview questions" they will soon be facing as they enter the job market. To prepare to answer the question, "What did you learn in that major?" they review their collection of Outcomes Surveys, looking for the "value added" by their coursework. Accomplishing this has been a slow process, although they are becoming more adept at this (or maybe the instructor is getting better at helping them figure out the task), year after year. To make this process easier, during the summer of 2016, all of the surveys will be revised to include a final question about the "take-away" (what the student learned/accomplished in the course). This year's seniors said they thought this is a great idea, which would have helped them accomplish the task much more quickly and effectively.

The final component of our program assessment is the e-portfolios. Since the beginning of the Organizational Communication major in 1997, students in the practicum course have been required to compile a hard-copy portfolio with samples of their work to be used during interviews. They still do so, but since around 2009, they have also been required to compile an online portfolio. The Program Coordinator refers to this as their "electronic foot in the door," and from the start, she has encouraged them to include a link to the portfolio in any cover letters they send with job applications. Unfortunately, no examples of the earliest e-portfolios survive, as they were casualties of a series of college-sanctioned portfolio products that were adopted and discarded as successive persons held the position of Ed. Tech. expert. Sadly, many of those portfolios were abandoned by their authors because they required the authors to purchase a subscription they could not afford or chose not to pay for. Moreover, most of the "officially sanctioned" portfolio products were, in our judgment, amateurish-looking--not the kind of showcase we wanted for our students' increasingly-professional work. And of course, when the portfolios vanished, so did evidence of our students' overall major achievements. However, we do consider the current college-sanctioned portfolio a useful repository for students' course project samples, as some of them still fail to save (or they lose) their own e-files of those projects.

In late 2007, one of our graduates contacted us to let us know about LinkedIn, which she highly recommended to those following her through the program. The Program Coordinator groped her way through setting up a profile and then began requiring that seniors set up a profile as part of their practicum course requirements ("If I can do it, surely you can!").
Frustrated with the series of "lost portfolios," and less-than-stellar products, the Program Coordinator had the great good luck to stumble across Behance in late 2010. Behance is free, relatively easy for students to use and produces very professional-looking results, making it the first choice of many who produce and wish to display creative work online. Behance portfolios can easily be linked to the LinkedIn profile. Starting in Spring 2011, practicum students were required to produce Behance portfolios and to link them to their LinkedIn profiles. The practicum syllabus lists the following requirements for the portfolio:

Electronic Portfolio Requirements: The electronic portfolio will also be used as evidence of your attainment of some key graduation outcome goals for the major. You will need to include at least one sample of the types of items listed below. An explanation, which makes clear the intended audience for each item, must accompany each work sample. You will need to display an electronic copy of your resume, plus at least one of each of the following items:

- Media writing sample (e.g., print or broadcast news stories, press releases; if available online, include a link to the published work)
- Business/professional writing sample (e.g., proposals, business/professional reports, executive summaries)
- Document design sample (e.g., brochure, web page, advertisement; if available online, include a link to the published work)
- Academic writing sample (carefully-edited version of work completed for a course, without instructor comments/grade; if published, include publication information)
- Collaborative design or writing project (must be accompanied by a concise explanation of with whom, where and why the project was done)
- (Optional, creative writing sample--poetry, short story or essay that demonstrates your capability as a creative writer)

Evaluation Criteria for Hard Copy and Electronic Portfolios:

- Attractive, professional presentation; user-friendly
- Careful editing; free of spelling, punctuation and grammar errors (Ask if you need help!)
- Readability/effective use of language; clear, concise phrasing, words and images well-chosen to reach the target audience
- Design and layout; uncluttered pages, effective use of graphics, photos, color, fonts
- Usefulness; must serve a clear communicative purpose for the organization for which materials were produced

The portfolios may include work from your practicum, past Field Periods, current or previous course work. Examples include: brochures, newsletters or other publications, advertising or publicity campaign, training program, video or audio tapes, community service campaigns or projects, published writing, web pages, blogs.

As noted above, the portfolios demonstrate graduating seniors' attainment of all of the key outcomes for the major, and also provide ample evidence that they have the skills and experience they list in their resumes. Students have used Behance for portfolios ever since 2011. Its chief drawback is that it does not allow users to upload pdf files, so much of their work has to be converted to jpg files before uploading. Each year's seniors form their own "user group," and they give one another endless help at problem solving, as well as a wealth of appreciation and encouragement for what their classmates produce. So we have never been at a loss when it comes to problem solving, and the results get more impressive every year (especially due to the recent strengthening of our digital media course offerings since Enid Bryant joined the program in 2012). Figure 4 shows the rubric we have developed to evaluate our seniors' final professional portfolios. (Figure 4 here) The portfolio rubric is completed independently by both authors of this paper, without consulting one another, and our ratings of senior portfolios have been in very close agreement. Ratings are averaged for each student, and the total rating (of a possible 25) for each student is one of the key components of their final course grade for the capstone, COM 484, Senior Practicum. Examples of seniors' portfolios from the past two academic years can be seen in Figures 5-10. (Figures 5-10 here) The full portfolios can be accessed at the links that follow; each year's portfolio links are part of the information contained in our annual report to Keuka College's Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness:

https://www.behance.net/kezawisa
https://www.behance.net/cooperlyon
https://www.behance.net/siningobese
https://www.behance.net/daniellealred
www.Behance.net/JacobJBanas
https://www.behance.net/zipng

To sum up, we believe we have developed an effective, program-embedded assessment process that meets many of the challenges faced by liberal arts-based majors where no external metrics such as standardized tests and licensure exist to help faculty gauge program effectiveness. Faculty and students have become co-participants in assessment that is "owned" by students and faculty alike. We and the students are invested in and proud of the results of our program to date. For further information, the authors may be contacted at: achirco@keuka.edu and ebryant@keuka.edu.

Utilizing Authentic Assessment in ESL and Foreign Language Classes

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the uses of authentic assessments in foreign language classes as a way to engage the majority of students in genuine language learning. Authentic assessment pushes the focus of instruction from rote memorization and other traditional forms of teaching to learning that values adult experiences, engages the whole person, considers context, and promotes self-direction (Achacoso & Svinicki, 2005). Furthermore, the notion that learning can stem from multiple sources is celebrated and students are encouraged to learn not only from the instructor, but also from their peers, native speakers, and the wider community. Assessments on both a small and large scale are valid and each provides their own set of positive enhancements for adult development. Finally, recommendations are given for instructors looking to incorporate authentic assessment into their curriculums. Activities such as conversing with native speakers and practical writing are considered, as well as larger scale group projects that involve other organizations on campus and the wider community.

***Key words**:* Authentic assessment, ESL, foreign language acquisition, cultural awareness

Why Use Authentic Assessments?

The direction of adult education in the United States is moving swiftly towards that of equipping students with the ability to take the concepts they learn in the classroom and apply it to their jobs in the working world. This is where authentic assessments come into play. When instructors utilize authentic assessments in the classroom they allow students to more fully immerse themselves in the material and acquire the skills necessary to put that information to practical use. In their text, Achacoso and Svinicki (2005) explained that traditional assessment consists of a narrow focus – the audience for student work is solely placed on the instructor. However, when employing authentic assessment, the focus shifts to people, places, ideas, and issues outside of the classroom. Making connections between the course topics and problems in the wider community puts more value behind what students are learning. Furthermore, it prepares students for what they should expect upon entering the workforce and can give them some background knowledge so that they are not working from scratch.

Authentic assessment utilizes the core concept that assessment is ongoing and ever changing. In her text, Suskie (2009) expanded upon the idea that instructors and practitioners should always be striving for constant improvement in order to continually refine the teaching and learning cycle. In using authentic assessments, instructors are able to gather more versatile data, which can help them engage the upcoming generation of adult learners through the inclusion of more relevant content in their courses Authentic assessment is important to the overall learning process because it is student-centered and in the case of foreign language classes, instructors employ these techniques in the hopes that students can effectively use the language in all aspects of their lives - through such things as verbal and written communication, active listening skills, and reading for comprehension. Achacoso and Svinicki (2005) discussed their five key principles of adult-oriented learning that believes learning comes from multiple sources, engages the whole person, promotes self-direction through feedback, considers context, and values a learner's unique experiences. These are the aims of integrating authentic assessment techniques in the ESL and foreign language classroom.

Effective Assessments for Second Language Acquisition

The five key principles of adult-oriented learning are the foundations upon which instructors can build a curriculum surrounding authentic assessments. When the audience of the assessments is both inside and outside the classroom, students have the opportunity to learn from multiple sources. Instructors should work to provide students with the chance to communicate with native speakers of the target language. Students can work to master the basics of the target language when they interact with native speakers and it keeps the subject interesting and engaging. Furthermore, hearing the target language in action will allow students to grasp the language's idiosyncrasies, which can help propel them forward to maximum comprehension and knowledge retention. This type of assessment works to engage the whole person through listening, speaking, and internal comprehension of the language. A study conducted by Martensson, et al. (2012) showed a positive correlation between second language acquisition and adult brain development. Areas of the brain related to language and long-term memory creation showed increased size and plasticity, demonstrating all over growth instead of isolated development. This study, among others, shows the versatility of second language acquisition and its significance on adult development.

Learning a foreign language is about more than just grammar and vocabulary, it requires that new information to be put into context. A slew of educators and researchers agree that instructors cannot hope to successfully teach a foreign language without the inclusion of its culture (Altay, 2005; Xue, 2014). The ways in which people speak and write are directly related to their cultures; therefore, foregoing this aspect of language teaching is robbing students of contextual knowledge they so desperately require. An effective assessment that this author has used on multiple occasions is that of collaborative group work. The instructor presents a broad topic for the work such as, "research a region of the United States and discuss its apparent culture, roots, dialect, and so forth." Small groups are utilized so that each student can fully participate, learn from others, and receive thorough feedback from fellow group members and the instructor. Furthermore, in small groups each student's contributions are valued and their experiences aid in advancing the work of the group (Achacoso & Svinicki, 2005).

The outcomes of a group project such as this are varied and expansive. Though most importantly, students are able to immerse themselves in a significant portion of the culture of the target language's country. Xue (2014) observed that many misunderstandings arise from an inefficient comprehension of the target culture creating "misjudgment, or ill feeling between native and foreign speakers" (p. 1492). Having students engage in research related projects where they investigate origins and become comfortable with the target culture works to build this cultural competence that will serve them well in the future.

Conclusion

Authentic assessments are designed to support the adult student in the many varied ways of knowledge acquisition. The ultimate goal is to make language learning accessible, relatable, engaging, and inclusive of multiple learning types. Some recommendations for instructors looking to employ authentic assessments into their courses are to seek out the interests of current students. Students are more likely to become interested if they can see value in the presented material. More advanced learners could be given a community betterment project that infuses language study with engaging native speakers in the community and working to solve an issue that affects those involved. Language instructors will find that they are able to create an array of authentic assessments for their students when they focus their gaze outside of the classroom and use the vast resources put forth before them.

References

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Presenting Assessment Data that Empowers Decision-Making

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Abstract

This paper, based on the AALHE 2016 Conference presentation of the same title, offers a brief look at a suite of easy-to-use techniques for transforming data presentations and visualizations into strategic decision-making tools. It addresses the importance of data visualization, specific techniques that are readily accessible, and some lessons learned. Attention will be given to applying data presentation and visualization principles across diverse institutional contexts to include course-level insights, department/program level insights, and institutional insights. Examples of data presentation and visualization techniques will be shared and discussed.

Key Words: Data Visualization, Assessment Data, Evidence Based Decisions

Presenting Assessment Data that Empowers Decision-Making

If you can remember the sound of a dot-matrix printer pounding away to produce a colorful graph showing institutional enrollment, then you can recall a time when graphics, data visualization, were difficult to produce. Even the best Institutional Research office or Assessment office might provide tables rather than a graph simply because of the difficulty of producing the visual. Then it seemed that almost overnight printers and software made it possible to produce anything – and the visual product itself seemed to take precedence over the data. A graph might have a horizontal axis that climbed from left to right, or twenty different color lines to illustrate the enrollment trend of twenty different classifications of students. Anything had become possible.

This paper presents techniques and best practices concerning data visualization that represent the evolution of data visualization and its importance in the decision-making process. Data visualization is becoming more important as the demand for more assessment and data grows. The reports stemming from the mountains of data are often lengthy, convoluted and tiered. To support informed decisions data visualization needs to be understood by various users, easily accessed and shared.

While there are many different approaches and techniques for visualizing data there are three specific techniques that can be easily used by assessment professionals. Sparklines, heatmaps, and removal of 3D effects provide methods for enhancing the usefulness and clarity of assessment data. Each of these methods can be accomplished in Microsoft Excel, which is a common and accessible application for most professional in the field. What follows is a brief presentation of each of these processes that should help with data presentation.

Sparkline

Display space is often a challenge when working with assessment data. There is often more data to present than room for displaying the data. The Sparkline provides a data-dense method for communicating data across time.

> "A sparkline is a small intense, simple, word-sized graphic with typographic resolution. Sparklines mean that graphics are no longer cartoonish special occasions with captions and boxes, but rather sparkline graphics can be everywhere a word or number can be: embedded in a sentence, table, headline, map, spreadsheet, graphic. Data graphics should have the resolution of typography" (Tufte, n.d.).

The following example displays a simple table showing Headcout from a Factbook. This data is enhanced by using the Sparkline feature in Excel on the far right to show trends over time.

University of Central Oklahoma Headcount from Factbook

	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015
Headcount					
Freshmen	4,358	4,427	4,391	4,090	4,549
Sophmore	2,606	2,522	2,441	2,452	2,352
Junior	3,156	3,267	3,250	3,346	3,070
Senior	5,036	5,007	5,050	4,990	4,971
Post-Baccalaureate	110	109	154	120	125
Total UG	15,266	15,332	15,286	14,998	15,067
Graduate	1,872	1,825	1,841	1,842	1,843
Grand Total	**17,138**	**17,157**	**17,127**	**16,840**	**16,910**

The Sparkline feature is accessed in Excel through the Insert, the Line functions. The trends displayed are for a single row, and it is important that the researcher or professional make that clear to the audience.

Heatmap

Heatmaps provide a visual data display that consolidates data into an easily comparable and consumable format. This technique is particularly well-suited for cross tabulations and for comparing frequencies across groups. Heatmaps are region-based visualization techniques "created by displaying the table of record values using color rather than text" (Ward, Grinstein, & Keim, 2010, p. 255).

The following example shows the previously used Headcout data table enhanced using the heatmap technique in Excel. This approach allows data cells to be colored based on the frequency in the cell. The feature is accessed by highlighting the area to be processed and then using the conditional formatting option.

University of Central Oklahoma Headcount from Factbook

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Removal of 3D Effects

The third technique that provides useful benefits for assessment professionals is actually the removal of a common feature incorporated in many assessment data presentations. Three dimensional effects commonly added to data graphics distort the accuracy and value of the presentation. While some will argue with this concept, it is based on the desire to provide clear and easily understood graphics, rather than graphics that have a life of their own.

In this example, a common column chart is presented without shadows or 3D effects. This allows the data to be the emphasis of the display rather than the effects distorting the presentation.

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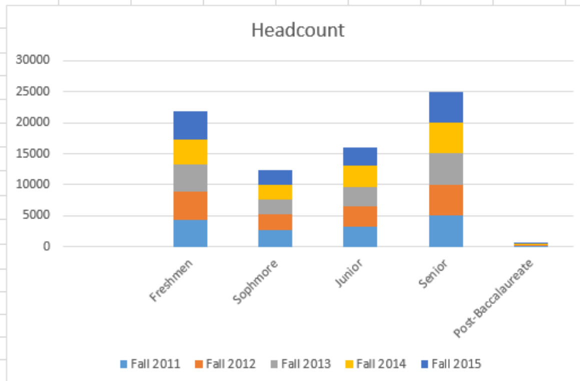

Conclusion

Each of the three prior techniques provides assessment professionals with tools for enhancing the value and usefulness of data. When using these or any other data visualization process there are four guidelines that will help. First, it is imperative to keep the audience for the data in mind and develop presentation techniques that enable decision-making and understanding. Addressing top level administrators who may be running from one meeting to another may not have the time to delve into the information, so clear and simple helps. It also helps to be responsive to data requests that may have come from them. Faculty, on the other hand, are the ones who often will be using assessment data to make changes in curriculum. They may be willing to spend more time with the data, so the provision of different perspectives or vistas may be helpful. Know your audience and respond to reasonable requests.

It is also essential to maintain a clear framework for how the graphics are presented and aligned with the needs of the audience. At times this is an issue of labelling tables appropriately or providing supplementary verbiage or references. Many of the current data analytic tools are readily used in the midst of the decision-making process, so setting the proper stage is important.

With masses of data available, it may be helpful to consider presenting the information as if you were telling a story. How might the information you are sharing look in the life of a student enrolling or from the faculty moving from class to research to a class. The data represent a lived experience, so give it life when it helps.

Finally, data visualization is a powerful tool – it can be used for good or evil. Well, that may be an exaggeration, but the medium can obscure or clarify the situation. Consider the presentation of the data as a significant responsibility and always act with integrity.

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Real-time Developmental Assessment for Transforming Students and Teachers

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Abstract

Closing the loop with academic autopsies produces delayed results, displaced rewards, faded memories of criteria, and missed learner transformations. Reflection on student accomplishment results in remembering major projects. Critical assessment of "closing the loop" reveals it often requires faculty to act on questionable data. We need to replace short-term stressful exams with student triumphs from extended work, base faculty changes on data they respect, and focus on transformative learning of individual students and cohorts that teachers and learners retell years later. Real-Time Developmental Assessments (RTDA) use developmental rubrics on a class-by-class basis to identify important student transformations. Such rubrics are behavioral, multidimensional, based on a succession model, and scalable across times and spaces. The succession of modes of practice within each dimension is *beginning* with momentary attempts, *exploring* over months, *working* over years, and *contributing* over decades. Performing RTDA requires teachers to know the DEEP modes of commitment required for learners to move from one mode of practice to its successor. These are Disorienting dilemmas, Examining to distinguish successor modes, Enabling, and Performing new modes. Such instruction results in Accelerated Development Curricula (ADC), which save learners, institutions, and society time, and money. Institutions are challenged to test this model.

Keywords: Real-Time Developmental Rubrics, Accelerated Development Curricula, Transformative Learning, Modes of Practice.

We have been urged to "close the assessment loop" for decades. Typically, this means that we identify measurable student learning outcomes, assess them, analyze assessment results, identify and implement program improvements, and repeat the cycle.

DISORIENTING Dilemmas

Closing the assessment loop is so limiting that it might be better called "tighten the assessment noose." Dilemmas with the approach begin with *delayed results*, often a year before faculty realize any benefits of program assessment. This produces both *displaced rewards* and *faded memories.* Many students who provided work for program assessment fail to benefit from the improvements, learn their own results, take tests and surveys related to their classroom experience, or become motivated to provide their best performance. Faculty may even forget the criteria or fail to value the results. The most important dilemma, however, has to do with m*issed* *opportunities*. Major learning transformations that students undergo remain undetected. As teachers, we love to tell the stories of the moments when a student came up with a brilliant idea in one of our classes that transformed their careers. The "closed loop" misses those moments. In an AALHE discussion this year that contrasted assessment in medicine with that in higher education, Joan Hawthorne accurately defended end-of-program assessments saying that autopsies do benefit other people. The term *Academic Autopsy* is a wonderfully graphic way to label end-of-program efforts. At least, with such a label people would not be tempted to imagine that they benefit the person being assessed, even if they do offer some benefit to other students.

EXAMINING Alternative Modes of Assessment Practice

Reflection reveals that many assessment professional are uncomfortable with the mode of practice called "closing the loop"? Contrast students mentored through a year-long research project that resulted in presentation in their discipline with students pondering under time pressure alternatives to tedious questions on some disciplinary autopsy test. Surely we would prefer to have them remember their research, design, or interpretative triumph than even a few of the judgmental items on a standardized test?

The next step in examining the "closed loop" is a *critical assessment* of what it requires faculty and assessment professionals to do. Since teachers are rarely learning researchers aiming to bear the scrutiny of journal editors, a rather depressing question is "How much uncertainty about evidence should teachers accept before changing a program honed over the last few decades?" A much more satisfying question is "What kind of evidence would be valued and sought after by students, faculty, and assessment professionals?" An obvious answer includes improvement in (a) student learning and development and (b) faculty satisfaction and institutional sustainability. For students, this means faster, more accurate, more effective performance in multiple dimensions of progressively more complex tasks. For institutions this means to sustainably compete in fulfilling student needs at reasonable costs, with attractive lives for employees.

This year's AALHE conference had many presentations that *shared* ideas of what to do with weak data. Audiences enjoyed those that poked fun at "closing the loop." In contrast, imagine sharing the stories of student and institutional transformations with other faculty or assessment professionals. We remember transformational stories for decades, because we keep telling them. But the ones we tell are not often enough about all or even most of our students and few of our students remember much from any regular course they took from us. Students who participate in whole cohorts that made enduring changes in their communities remember their projects. Stories about individuals and isolated courses are not enough, if we cannot also identify what we have accomplished for all the students served by our programs.

A last step in examining the closed-loop dilemma involves *distinguishing* what we are doing from what we might do. Could we replace short term stressful challenges (e.g., tests) with student triumphs from extended work (e.g., portfolios with developmental feedback)? Could faculty replace the institutional demand to base changes in long-refined programs on weak data with transformations in performance of individual students and cohorts on progressively more complex tasks that faculty and students retell for years afterwards?

Real-Time Developmental Assessment as the Alternative to the Loop

What sort of assessment would focus on student triumphs from extended work that faculty mentor, retell for years afterwards, and identify what was accomplished for all the students a program served? To accomplish such assessment, requires that we identify transformations learners and cohorts of learners make. To do this, we must first discover each program's model of development. What are the transformations within what dimensions of our fields of expertise that we plan for students to accomplish?

With clear answers to program concepts of development, it is possible to create developmental rubrics. But developmental rubrics have restricted use if they are only applied at the end of courses as academic autopsies. If instead, they are used within minutes or days of discovering a transformation in disciplinary mode of practice that a student identifies, considers, works on, or accomplishes, they can help both teachers and learners to remember the stories.

To be transformational on even a single dimension of a program with a dozen or so dimensions a course must be designed to reveal developmental transformations. A "talking at" approach (i.e., the typical lecture) cannot work. Teachers achieve deep satisfaction from designing courses for any of the three types of transformations in learners: (1) from opening their first book in the field to seriously exploring it, (2) from exploring it to performing well enough to keep a job in the field, or (3) from keeping a job in a field to making a contribution to it. To do so, they need not only to understand the modes of practice within the dimension(s) they are teaching, but also the changing commitments that occur before such transformations are consummated.

In order to be most effective, developmental rubrics and courses designed for transformative learning need to be program-wide. A program where each teacher creates their own developmental rubrics and each course is taken by both second year and fourth year students produces an incoherent and easily forgotten curriculum. In contrast, if every program teacher uses the same developmental model, students learn the meaning of the transformations from the perspective of each teacher. With records of student progress, the impact of each course section and the reliability of each rating can be identified. But more important, students can learn to assess their own performances.

When learners reliably identify their own knowledge development, it accelerates that development in several ways. A common language to describe thirty to fifty modes of practice within a field facilitates students assessing their progress as well as sharing that progress with each other. With such clear distinctions, they plan better, know what to rehearse, and empower each other to perform. The resulting accelerated development saves students and institutions money, which ultimately improves the satisfaction of learners and teachers as well as the sustainability of the institutions.

SACSCOC Vice President Liaison Officer, Steve Sheeley, likes to quote the piano teacher who had a sign on her door “Practice on any day that you plan to breathe.” That sign encapsulates the meaning of “real-time.” Well-known assessment author and speaker, Peggy Maki, is just finishing a book called *Real-Time Student Assessment.* Effective teachers have a model of their target outcomes that they use on a daily basis to respond to students. It becomes assessment when it is articulated in student learning outcomes and recorded for later analysis. Real-Time Assessment becomes *developmental* when there is a clearly articulated model of the succession of modes of practice needed to work in or contribute to a discipline. When such a model is shared by every teacher in a program it creates a compelling community of practice that students remember as well as their personal projects long after they have completed the program. *Real-Time Developmental Assessment* (*RTDA*) allows users to focus on student triumphs from extended work that teachers retell for years afterwards and identify what was accomplished for whole cohorts of the students that each program served.

ENABLING the Use of Real-Time Developmental Assessment

Enabling a program to use *RTDA* begins with a plan to create the program’s model of development. The developmental interviewing method works. The basic plan is to learn the succession model of development, try a few developmental interviews, initiate cascading interviews with faculty, evaluate early interviews using the appended Developmental Interviewing Rubrics[1], and support their real-time use during teacher-learner interactions. Using the succession model to create rubrics is addressed in last year’s proceedings (Dirlam, 2015) which detailed four principles to “Help Faculty Make Better Rubrics:”

1. The *behavior principle*: rubrics should include descriptions of examples of complex behavior that typify learner activities at particular levels of development.
2. The *dimensions principle*: aim for 8-12 dimensions of development, so that learners can perform any possible combinations of the levels in any pair of dimensions.
3. The *succession principle:* use the model of the dynamic succession of behaviors produced by their initial frequency, growth rates, and competitive strengths.
    a. *Beginners* just try something.
    b. *Explorers* have learned some fundamentals that they tend to overuse.
    c. *Workers* have learned enough to hold a job in the field.
    d. *Inspiration* involves making innovations, discoveries, or new interpretations that get dispersed to others.
4. The *scaling principle:* apply to extremely diverse scales of times and spaces ranging from short conversations to periods of historical changes.

It is helpful to rehearse the interview process with a few friends before introducing the approach to faculty. Some who have tried it have asked for a sample interview protocol, which is included in the Appendix. Interviews should periodically be followed by a review using the appended

[1] These are appended. They were originally compiled by Dirlam and Covitz in 2010 and often alluded to, but have not previously been included in a readily accessible document.

Dirlam and Covitz rubrics for developmental interviewing (Table 1). Next, groups should be empowered to conduct *cascading interviews.* An experienced developmental interviewer conducts an interview in front of faculty. Ratings using the interviewing rubrics are discussed and the interviewee interviews another teacher in the group followed by rating and discussing that interview. That person interviews another and the rubric is applied and discussed a third time. At that point each member of the group is ready to conduct developmental interviews. Some readers assume that having one experienced interviewer produces the best results. This may not be the case. Even though the experience is less, cascading interviews work, because those involved learn the process. Ultimately, the goal is for teachers to internalize the rubrics enough to use them while interacting with students. Having faculty conduct interviews helps them take ownership of the process especially for improving the rubrics with use.

Once all the interviews have been done, they need to be combined into a large set. If there are less than 100 dimensions, careful reading can sort them into 8-12 clusters. Abstracts of each mode of practice of each cluster are then written. Next, teachers use the rubrics to rate a sample of student artifacts from the program and make notes on any rating difficulties. All raters then meet to resolve the questions with improvements to the wording of the rubrics.

An empowering motive for developmental interviewing is that no interview ends without the interviewer acquiring a better understanding of what the interviewee knows that they do not. They also help faculty to collaborate on clarifying the goals and developmental steps of their program. For students, they facilitate learning what they are supposed to accomplish. Ultimately, they help institutions create *Accelerated Development Curricula* (ADC).

PERFORMING with Real-Time Developmental Assessment

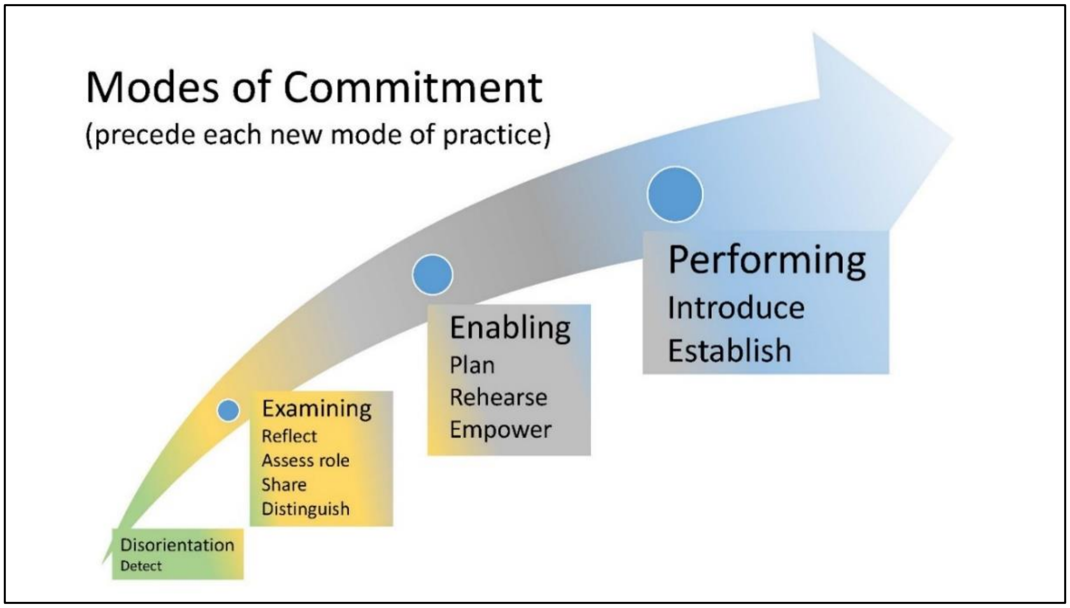
Transformations to more complex modes of practice emerge through a sequence of activities, called the DEEP modes of commitment (named for the acronym of Disorientation, Examining, Enabling, and Performing). *Disorienting dilemmas* occur when learners are faced with challenges to their currently established modes of practice. These are followed by *Examining* the practices, through reflection, assessment, and sharing with other learners that culminates in distinguishing a new, more complex and effective mode of practice. Once the new mode of practice has been clarified, the learner commits to a process of *Enabling* it through planning, rehearsing, and becoming empowered to engage in it. The final commitment begins, like opening night of a play, when the learner *Performs* what they have learned. Note in Figure 3 of the Appendix, how at any particular time point, users alternate between several modes of practice. Thus, establishing the commitment occurs gradually through frequent use of the new mode of practice with positive feedback and fewer and fewer lapses into its predecessor.

Figure 1 outlines the DEEP Modes of Commitment that enable the transformation from one mode of practice to the next, more complex and effective mode. The phase names described below were defined by Mezirow (1991) and Taylor and Cranton (2012). They were grouped into the four commitments below because they occurred at the same time in a study of more than 500 ratings by several professionals of hour long, one-on-one sessions in a series with individual learners.

Figure 2. The DEEP modes of commitment with phases of each.

Disorientation

- *Detect*: Experiencing an event that disorients one's sense of self with a familiar role.



Examining

- *Reflect*: Engaging in reflection and self-reflection.
- *Assess*: Critically assessing the personal [epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic] assumptions and feelings that have alienated self from traditional role expectations.
- *Share*: Relating discontent to similar experiences of others; recognizing the shared problems [and that others have negotiated a similar change].
- *Distinguish*: Identifying new ways of acting within the role [relationships, and actions].

Enabling

- *Plan*: Planning a new course of action.
- *Rehearse*: Acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to implement this new course of action.
- *Empower*: Building personal confidence and competence [in new roles and relationships].

Performing

- *Introduce*: Trying out the planned action and assessing the results.
- *Establish*: Reintegrating into society with new role behaviors, assumptions, and perspectives.

Besides attending to the modes of practice and their intervening modes of commitment, faculty can facilitate learner progress through intentionally designing developmentally accelerated courses. Such courses require students to show behaviors oriented to specific modes of practice within some dimensions of the discipline and some dimensions shared with the division or college. Typically, no course addresses all the dimensions of a program while aiming for a single mode of practice in each. A study of over 500 dimensions provided by faculty from sciences, humanities, and social sciences in a liberal college reported in Dirlam (Forthcoming, 2017) found that eight dimensions were shared by all divisions, while each single divisions had 2 to 5 additional dimensions. A typical course in a five-year graduate professional program addressed roughly half of the dimensions identified for the program.

One great advantage of using the same developmental rubrics for an entire program is that it gives learners the opportunity to commit to ever more complex practices from year to year.[2] Program rubrics are abstract and while not all dimensions apply to every assignment, every assignment should apply to some dimension(s). Matching rubrics to assignments can be useful even when the rubrics are not shared across other courses. Such different levels of abstractness for rubrics exemplify the practical meaning of the scaling principle mentioned above.

Another advantage of program level developmental rubrics is that student progress can be shared across an entire curriculum. This resembles competency-based education in that it identifies what learners have accomplished. The acquisition of modes of practice, however, differs from competencies, because the latter are usually all-or-nothing and exclude predecessor practices. Advanced modes of practice gradually replace predecessors after first appearing as a result of transformative learning. Currently learner progress is recorded only in course titles and grades. Recording the use of modes of practice gives a more accurate picture of learner accomplishments and opportunities for further development.

So how else might teachers help learners to discover transformative learning? Classes might begin with projects that allows teachers to identify the practice that students use when they enter the course. Designs of dilemmas that involve one or more typical practice could be evaluated on the spot by their impact on learner questioning. When learners question their actions related to who, where, or when to use their current mode of practice, this indicates that the dilemma actually did disorient their role within the discipline. Recording such events can be done by either the teacher or the learner, but in the latter case, teacher review improves accuracy. When a sizable portion of a class logs the same new commitment, it could occasion discussion involving reflection, assessment, and sharing of their experience with the mode of practice. The criteria

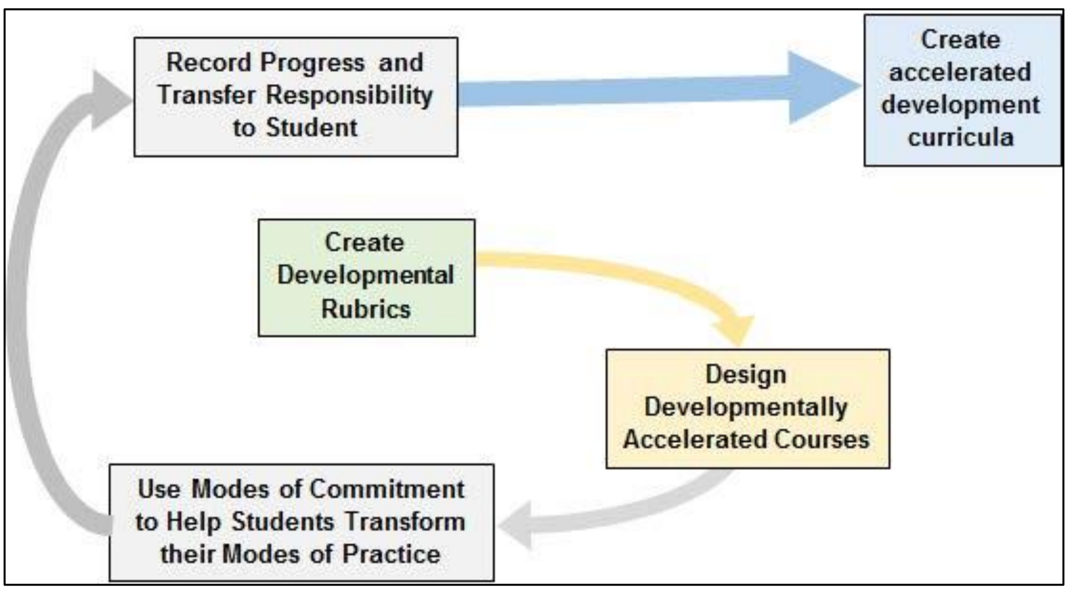
[2] Such program-level developmental rubrics do not preclude teachers from identifying particular examples of rubrics for particular assignments.

that emerge from such an examination, then, would form the basis for evaluating more complex alternative mode that has been identified by the discipline. This process can be augmented by the well-known scaffolding procedure within Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (see Vygotsky, 1978, Wood, Bruner, and Ross, 1976, Tharp and Gallimore, 1988, and Rogoff, 1990).

When learners commit to the next mode of practice, they should initiate planning that provides many opportunities for rehearsal and receiving the sort of teacher and fellow student feedback, support, and encouragement that ultimately empowers them to take over and make the practice their own. When learners use program-level developmental rubrics and their understanding of the modes of commitment both to evaluate and record their own plans and progress, that is when they greatly accelerate their own learning.

Planning by program faculty for Real-Time Developmental Assessment (RTDA) begins with creating developmental rubrics and then using them to design developmentally accelerated courses. Performance of RTDA occurs when teachers use modes and phases of commitment to help learners transform the modes of practice addressed in their courses. Such performance is facilitated by recording learner commitments so that responsibility can be gradually transferred to them. When development has been made so transparent and carefully planned, it becomes accelerated—potentially doubled or tripled in rate according to some early data. The result, captured in Figure 2, is an accelerated development curriculum (ADC).

***Figure 3**. The spiral from Real-Time Developmental Assessment (RTDA) to Accelerated*



Development Curriculum (ADC).

CONCLUSIONS and one more disorienting dilemma

The goal of this paper has been to facilitate the transformation in higher education assessment away from a once-per-year activity patterned after the social science research process of problem identification, data collection, analysis, and application. The proposed alternative was to use Real-Time Developmental Assessments (RTDA) to create Accelerated Development Curricula (ADC). With the latter, all program teachers often remind learners of the major transformations in learning a field by using the same terms and interpreting them in different contexts. With RTDA every class results in students being rewarded with confirmation of what they have accomplished and inspired with opportunities of what they are ready to try next using a memorable number of terms. RTDA produces ADC because teachers improve their ability to identify developmental transformations and find ways to stimulate and scaffold them. Ultimately, the developmental transformations occur faster, reduce educational costs, and improve the experience of the learners and teachers involved.

Real-Time Developmental Assessment fits with the best that we know about learning and developmental transformations. It requires teachers to use accurate description in their classes of developmentally sequenced behaviors along 8-12 dimensions. Medical appointments are coded using 16,000 diagnoses and 76,000 procedures. The coding system improves public health, accurately classify and treat injuries and diseases, helps physicians measure performance against peers, contain costs, and accurately recognizes accomplishments. RTDA can improve higher education, more accurately classify and remediate learner development, help teachers measure performance of their courses against peers, contain costs, and get accurate recognition of accomplishments. A typical RTDA assessment involves less than 50 developmental codes. Another 50 instructional procedure codes might be used once per term per course.

Using RTDA, it is likely that students could learn and develop sufficiently to satisfy Robert Zemsky's (2013) vision of meeting all the requirements of their peers in ¾ or less of the current time. If so, it would save the economy billions and students an average of $10,000 each. To justify reducing undergraduate seat-time from 120 to 90 credits would require three steps. First, determine a baseline by every program in the college evaluating every student using a developmental rubric. Secondly, every faculty member uses RTDA often and designs Accelerated Development Curricula (ADC). Third, after every year compare the student's performance at the end of the junior year with the baseline evaluation. If within a few years the 90-credit-hour juniors fare as well as the 120-hour graduates did a few years earlier, an argument would be made to the college's accrediting agency to allow awarding baccalaureate degrees after 90 credit hours. If any college succeeded in being the first to prove that RTDA and ADC work, the discovery would lead to national change in higher education and national leadership by the college. The "one more disorienting dilemma" of this section is encapsulated in the question, "What college might commit to undertake this experiment?"

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Table 1. Developmental Interviewing Rubrics*

	Beginning	Exploring	Working	Inspiring
Identify Participants	**Protected** Interview friends or family	**Volunteers** Interview interested and willing experts encountered in daily life	**Career** Interview workplace experts needing to identify developmental patterns	**Marketplace** Interview ever expanding varieties of expert groups
Use Succession Graph	**Levels** Mention only the 4 strategy names. (levels). Interviewees apply it to themselves.	**Decision & Time** Focus on the decision and practice time (ignore the graph and needs). Interviewees apply it to a few individuals they know well.	**Dialog** Dialogue about the graph with quick and flexible recall of all details. Use it to generate questions. Interviewees apply the tool broadly.	**Enrichment** Add or modify the table or preface to facilitate interviewee comprehension or incorporate his/her ideas. Interviewees enrich the graph or definitions with new concepts.

Table 1. Developmental Interviewing Rubrics*

	Beginning	Exploring	Working	Inspiring
Collaborate	**Introduce** Introduce selves to interviewees. Explain why they were invited to participate. Expect interviewees to take care of themselves or do not think about protecting them.	**Disclose** Talk about selves, explaining why they are interested in conducting the interview. Explain that the interviews will not be confidential. Explain how they will help the interviewer.	**Take Interest** Explain how the interview will help both participants. Learn major settings of the participants' experience. Create opportunities to make formerly unarticulated voices audible to a small, known group of users. Build rapport by showing interest in interviewees' responses, being sympathetic, affirming.	**Authenticate** Explain how the interview will help people that the interviewee cares about. Authenticate the interviewee's expertise by making constructive use of it for broad audiences. Use developmental principles and interviewee knowledge to create more than either could create alone.
Define Dimensions	**Brainstorm** Ask interviewee to brainstorm the things people need to learn to become expert in their field.	**First Emotional** Ask interviewees to remember frustrating things advanced learners do. Then ask about the development of the first thing they mention.	**Multiple Emotional** Ask interviewees to remember frustrating things advanced learners do, list dimensions as they talk, and work on the list one dimension at a time after they are ready.	**Insightful** Ask interviewees to remember frustrating things advanced learners do, separate out dimensions as they talk, and pick unique insights from other dimensions to expand later.

Table 1. Developmental Interviewing Rubrics*

	Beginning	Exploring	Working	Inspiring
Discover Commitments	**Grades** Be satisfied with grading analogies that use qualitative adjectives.	**Practice Times** Accept descriptors based on the amount of practice time it takes to achieve each level.	**Commitments** Record notes after discerning how the answer relates to one of the four commitments (try, learn, become proficient, or contribute).	**Innovations** See commitments unique to the expertise being discussed which have the potential to change the expertise.
Discover Practices	**Avoidance** Interviewees try to avoid particulars by asking questions or telling what they did or felt.	**Impressionistic** Record impressions of what learners feel, think or have “talent” in.	**Behavioral** Help interviewees focus on what people do. Ask for examples and then ask them to generalize.	**Activity** Help the interviewees recall the typical settings and interactions of experts.
isten and Use Notes	**Recorded** Record the interview	**Sequenced** Record or take notes. Follow persistently the developmental order of questions even when the interviewee goes in a different direction. Ask more than one question at once.	**Interpreted** Use notes to pick up on potentially useful leads. Help interviewees interpret experiences that can be useful to others. Let them speak for themselves, unless they want help finding a word or idea.	**Constructed** Allow interviewees to process at their own pace and participate in constructing the meaning of the interview. Use notes to work together to create a way to express complex ideas, making sure the interviewees contribute more to constructing the narrative than the interviewer.

Table 1. Developmental Interviewing Rubrics*

	Beginning	Exploring	Working	Inspiring
Improvise	**Closed** Ask questions that can be answered by a single word or phrase.	**Formulaic** Ask for elaborations, using formulaic questions like, "What do you mean by that?" "Can you tell me more about that?" Be satisfied with abstractions or adjectives.	**Development Focused** Help interviewees focus on developmentally relevant information, especially, ask interviewees to describe what people actually do.	**Yes, and…** Help interviewees frame their narrative by affirming their thoughts and feelings, encouraging them to expound, and connecting their ideas with development by affirming interviewee contributions and added something to them.
Produce Flow	**Pushing** Keep the talking going even if they have to do it themselves.	**Pulling** Put words in interviewees' mouths even if it means interrupting them.	**Patient** Wait patiently, realizing that people take time to come up with ideas.	**Open** Provide an atmosphere conducive to open and undistorted communication by being receptive to being changed and describing the change when it happens.
Use Results from Others	**Personal** Talk about family, friends, etc.	**Leaders** Talk about researchers or disciplinary leaders.	**Other Interviews** Talk about other interviewees but give the interview back to the interviewee to modify.	**Community Building** Talk about ideas from other interviewees to help guide the interviewee as examples (but avoid implying that the "right answer" is known or providing so many ideas that it overwhelms them). Let the interviewees know that a "collective collage" of the interviews will be returned to the community for editing.

Table 1. Developmental Interviewing Rubrics*				
	Beginning	**Exploring**	**Working**	**Inspiring**
Clarify	**Imitative** Record whatever the interviewee says	**Stock** Use paradigm questions such as "What does that mean?" or "Can you give examples?"	**Lexical** Get definitions of disciplinary jargon and enough examples for non-experts to get an idea of disciplinary concepts.	**Expansive** Use analogies from their developmental expertise to help users connect with both the interviewees and the interviewers discipline

* From Dirlam and Covitz, Unpublished Document (2010)

Appendix: Sample Interview Protocol

The purpose of this interview is to record your memories of the modes of practice learners use -- what they do at different points in developing expertise in your field. We'll use the result to help make developmental rubrics for your program. The modes of practice within each dimension are:

- *Beginning* – Take minutes to try an activity (behavior on introductory course, day 1).
- *Exploring* – Take months to learn the basics (behaviors after the introductory course).
- *Working* – Take years to acquire job-level proficiency (behaviors of graduates; sophomore differs from senior courses by involving fewer dimensions).
- *Inspiring* – Take many years to make discoveries or innovations in a field (undergraduate students will often achieve this level on isolated dimensions).

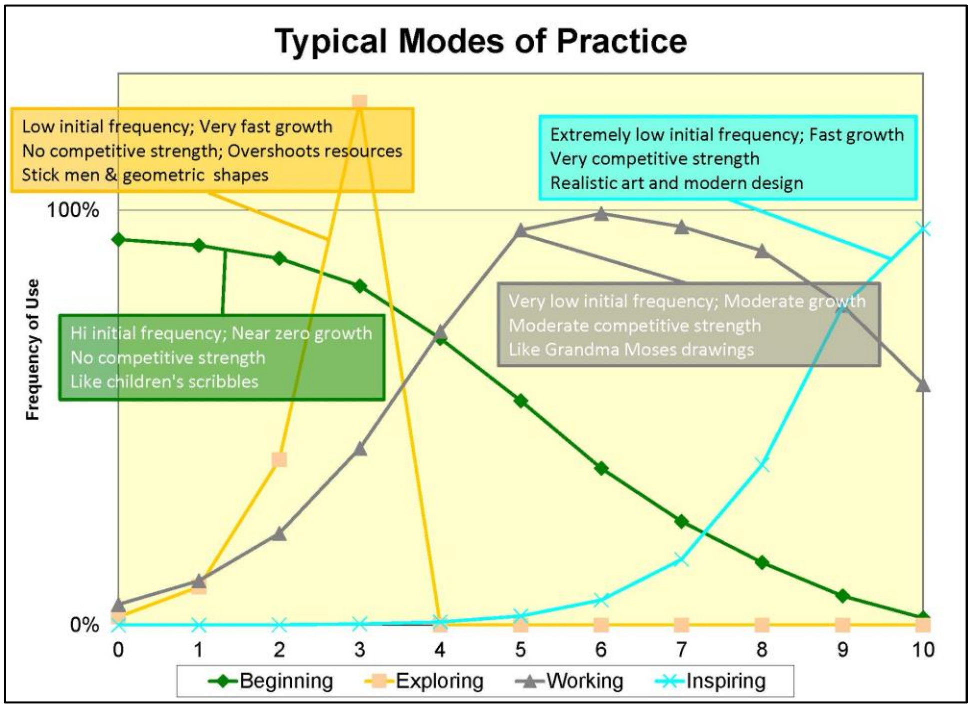

Figure 4. Modes of Practice showing how initial frequency, growth rates, and competitive strengths result in progressively more complex practices.

A common example that helps many people remember how different dimensions develop at different rates is children's drawing. Beginners scribble meaningless lines in the middle of a paper, explorers make stick men and geometric objects on base lines, workers make three dimensional objects with curved outlines on base planes, and inspiring drawers use chiaroscuro for outlines of objects with symbolic meanings, controlled proportions, true perspective or designs that control viewer eye movements. Objects, backgrounds, meanings, and designs are different dimensions of drawing development. For some, meaningful objects in the middle of the paper may precede base lines; for others it is the reverse. But in each dimension there is a dominant mode of practice at any moment in time.

If you have ideas for the dimensions already, I'll write them down. If not, tell me how learners differ with experience and I'll note down possible dimensions that you might like to talk about.

Supporting Difficult Faculty Members to Create Effective Assessment

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Abstract:

Working with faculty members to develop effective program assessment is difficult under the best of circumstances. When faculty members are not willing to work with assessment specialists or have complaints about assessment, the work can be even more challenging. If assessment specialists have limited resources for working with faculty resistance, they can find themselves stymied and assessment stalled. This paper examines some of faculty members' resistance toward assessment based on original research. Once the resistance and complaints are identified, an approach is proposed grounded in Kegan and Lahey's work (2002), *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*. Rather than using Kegan and Lahey's work as an internal process only, this process examines faculty complaints and the underlying violated values. By examining the underlying values and speaking to those rather than the complaints, the process offers an approach that furthers not only the assessment work of the institution, but encourages faculty engagement.

Keywords: program assessment**,** faculty resistance, complaints, value, assessment resources.

Introduction

Assessment specialists who have been in the field often find themselves facing faculty members unwilling to work on assessment. Practitioners and researchers in assessment have countless stories and suggestions for dealing with faculty resistance (Banta, 2011; Ewell, 2002; Walvoord, 2010). As assessment specialists understand the resistance and then create tools for working with the faculty, they can save the institution as well as assessment offices and faculty members time and money. The more resistance that is dissolved on an interpersonal level between the assessment specialist and the faculty member, the better assessment can flourish on a campus.

When assessment specialists are not conscious about their approaches, they find themselves relying on defensiveness to respond to faculty. Assessment specialists may choose to defend the usefulness of assessment, or their office, or themselves. Sometimes that defensiveness is well placed; assessment is worthy of a rousing defense, as is the work of assessment specialists and their offices. If, however, the only tool an assessment specialist has is defensiveness, they may over rely on it and miss opportunities to build relationships and advance assessment.

Instead, an assessment specialist can support faculty members in connecting with the passion that inspires them, and connecting that passion to assessment. It is worthwhile to acknowledge two limitations: one, ultimately no one can make anyone do anything. If someone is insistent on being stubbornly resistant, it does not matter what tools are employed, the person will not be moved. Assessment specialists should not take on unnecessary responsibility for those who are intent in subverting assessment. The second limitation is that while assessment is a powerful force there are faculty complaints that that assessment cannot address. However, if a faculty is complaining about assessment, it is likely that the assessment approach can likely be adjusted to encourage participation.

Faculty Resistance: What Are the Complaints?

In a qualitative study conducted as part of the requirements for my dissertation, 18 interviews were conducted with faculty from a research intensive institution from three different disciplinary perspectives: humanities, social science, and physical sciences. (Dueben, 2015). The findings from the study revealed that faculty do not trust assessment processes because they view it as taking away from activities (such as research, grant-writing, teaching, and service) for work that is not rewarded by the institution. Even when faculty were supportive of assessment, they ruefully reported that they never saw assessment results used. Worse, faculty members believed that assessment results and reports might be used by the administration to cut individual faculty positions, departments and even entire disciplines. The findings also indicated that the disciplinary perspectives of the faculty members deeply influenced how faculty responded to standardized reporting forms, processes, and even assessment itself.

With all of the negativity surrounding their experiences with assessment, faculty members in all three departments reported that they routinely employed useful assessment practices that the used to improve instruction and curriculum. Often the faculty members may not see their efforts as being assessment because, for example, they believed that their institution only valued quantitative data and they were collecting qualitative data. The significance of this realization is that even though faculty widely complained about "assessment," they were actively engaged in attempting to improve their curriculum and teaching. If assessment specialists can connect faculty with the passion that has them assess, teach, and research, time and effort can be saved while student achievement is supported.

From Complaints to Commitments

Viewing Kegan and Lahey's (2002) work in turning personal complaints into commitments, a method for working with faculty complaints is suggested. Kegan and Lahey suggest that behind every complaint is a value that has been violated: "We would not complain about anything if we did not care about something." (p. 20) While the authors recommend an individual look at his or her own complaint, the work he or she is doing, and more, this process can be used with listening deeply to the faculty's complaint.

In the first column (see the example below), the assessment specialist notes the complaint that he or she heard the faculty member make. It is likely the faculty complaint will be far longer than one, pithy sentence, but listening deeply will support the assessment specialist in hearing what the complaint is and getting to the essence of it—at least how the faculty member states it—in a sentence. Furthermore, listening deeply will also give the assessment specialist information to put in the second complain, "The Unspoken Complaint," which sometimes is context. For example, if a faculty member complains that assessment data is not scientifically significant immediately after an implication has been made that funding decisions will be based on the data, it is possible the budget information will be part of the unspoken complaint. The assessment specialist will know this information by listening closely to the faculty member as they complain. The assessment specialist can begin to form an accurate picture of what the complaint is.

Stated Complaint	**Unspoken Complaint**	**Underlying Value (Check this)**	**Connection to Assessment**

Once the assessment specialist understands the spoken and unspoken complaint, they can begin to understand what the underlying value is (see column 3). The value can be considered what the complaints are if the complaints were not phrased negatively but as a positive value. If a faculty member says, "All this assessment work is taking me away from my teaching!" and the unspoken complaint that the assessment specialist hears is "My work (teaching) is not valued on this campus!" then it becomes clearer that the underlying value is about teaching and learning. It is important at this point that the assessment specialist check his or her assumptions with the faculty member. The assessment specialist might say something like, "It sounds like what is most important to you here is teaching and learning," and then listen deeply again. When the assessment specialist is certain about the underlying value, he or she can begin to connect that value with assessment.

In the example above, the connection between teaching and assessment may seem clear. An assessment specialist might well say, "We can create assessment processes that improve teaching through the department and may even ease some of the current struggles in the curriculum." Some complaints, however, are more challenging. Consider the following:

Stated Complaint	**Unspoken Complaint**	**Underlying Value (Check this)**	**Connection to Assessment**
We never use assessment data to improve teaching or learning.	This is a useless exercise that ends with frustration and a waste of my time.	Respectful use of faculty time and effort.	Are there ways to "double-dip" by creating embedded assessments that give the department *useful* information about student learning without creating a burden to faculty?

In this case, it is the futility of assessment that produces the resistance. Instead of replying defensively that, for example, the department has responsibility for using the results, the assessment specialist can respond to the value. Are there low-effort measures, the results of which individual faculty can employ in their classes? Is there data already collected that the assessment specialist (or his or her office) and quickly analyze and provide usable results? Another example is below.

Stated Complaint	**Unspoken Complaint**	**Underlying Value (Check this)**	**Connection to Assessment**
I don't know why I have to do this. I have more classes (or larger classes) than I have ever had. I need to prepare for them.	You are trying to take me away from what really matters (in this case, teaching). Besides, the administration is already abusing me.	Respectful use of faculty time and effort.	How can we build assessment process that gives you insight—and potentially support—your teaching load while articulating your value?

This process relies on the assessment specialist's awareness: awareness of the context, the available resources, and even awareness of the specialist's own intentions. It may seem obvious that the assessment specialist's intention is to advance assessment, support the department, and more. But if the assessment specialist has already labeled the faculty as "difficult," it's possible that the intention may be clouded by resistance to the faculty member, an urge to demonstrate the usefulness of assessment, and an intention to avoid conflict, perhaps other intentions as well. The assessment specialist's awareness of his or her own intention is important because if there is an intention that does not support assessment, the specialist can minimally acknowledge his or her own resistance and refocus their energy.

Conclusion

Working on assessment with faculty members who resist assessment can require interpersonal skills and conflict negotiation. This proposed process can become a resource for analyzing in real time how to work with faculty. As much as faculty are in need of assessment, so are they assessment specialists (and other faculty developers) who work with them. Using Kegan and Lahey's (2002) process that they propose in their book supports the assessment specialist in developing skills to recognize their own intentions and competing commitments, and suggests ways to develop their own commitments. Taking this same process, as proposed here, to work with faculty members supports the assessment specialist in recognizing how to use on the unstated value the faculty member has to support the faculty member, the department and ultimately the students.

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Simplifying Assessment Reporting: A Home-Grown Solution

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Abstract

This paper introduces interested readers to SLOAP, Georgia State University's Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Portal. SLOAP was developed to address some of the problems experienced with the use of a commercial assessment reporting platform. The paper provides background on the history of assessment reporting at GSU, explaining the reasoning behind the decision to create an in-house platform. It then briefly describes the development process before presenting the key features of SLOAP. It concludes with a short discussion of SLOAP's limitations.

Key Words: Assessment, student learning, assessment reporting.

Introduction

Institutions of higher education have a variety of options for the conduct and reporting of assessment of student learning. Although many commercial products possess a wide range of impressive features and capabilities, they can be challenging by virtue of their complexity to learn and use for many of those involved in the assessment reporting process, who may use the reporting platform for only a short period of time each year. As a result, assessment reporting may be irregular, incomplete, and incoherent, and it may divert resources from the process of assessment itself. In addition, some commercial platforms are not designed with the needs of providing feedback to programs in mind.

To address these limitations, some institutions may find it useful to develop their own, tailor-made platforms for reporting on the assessment of student learning and, possibly, reviewing those reports. Georgia State University (GSU) has developed a Student Learning

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Assessment Portal (SLOAP) as one such custom-made platform that might serve as a source of inspiration and ideas for other institutions. SLOAP greatly simplifies the process of preparing and submitting assessment reports in comparison with many commercial platforms. It also offers reviewers the ability to provide feedback to interested parties. And because the platform is maintained locally, it can easily be modified.

Background

Systematic assessment of student learning began at GSU in 2005. At that time, the GSU administration decided to use WEAVEonline as the assessment reporting platform. The acquisition of a commercial platform greatly simplified the process of setting up a system of assessment reporting, and WEAVEonline itself offered a number of useful features that promised to facilitate assessment reporting, such as a detailed report template and the capacity to upload relevant documentation and link related sections to one another.

Over time, however, some of the limitations of WEAVEonline became apparent. A number of these limitations concerned the ease of use for program reporters, many of whom accessed WEAVEonline only once a year when it was time to submit the annual report. Each user was provided with a separate login ID and password, which were often forgotten and needed to be recovered or replaced. The reporting template was spread over multiple screens, which meant that some report elements were sometimes overlooked. And some of the mechanisms for entering text and data were not sufficiently intuitive to prevent errors. Overall, WEAVEonline turned out to be excessively complicated for many users.

Other limitations presented on the administrative side. One was the fixed nature of the report template, which limited customization. WEAVEonline contained two sections on separate screens that could be customized, but these screens were sometimes overlooked or caused confusion. Another was the lack of a simple mechanism for providing feedback to assessment reporters.

Development of the New Assessment Reporting Platform

Despite these limitations, WEAVEonline continued to meet our assessment reporting needs, and GSU was not actively contemplating a replacement. The costs of making a transition seemed higher than those of maintaining the status quo. Instead, the development of SLOAP was triggered by the announcement by the developers of WEAVEonline that it would be replaced by a new platform (which eventually was named Academic Effect). For some time, however, it was not clear when the new system would become available or what its features would be.

Inspired by the experience of other institutions, such as James Madison University, which maintain their own reporting systems, the GSU Office of Academic Assessment (OAA) decided to explore the possibility of developing a new reporting platform in house. OAA approached the Office of Decision Support Services (DSS), which is also located within the Office of

Institutional Effectiveness (OIE). DSS generously made available one of its programmers, who worked closely with OAA to create SLOAP using the Oracle Application Express (APEX) environment.

Features of SLOAP

One of the most important features of SLOAP is the separation of the functions of report preparation from report submission. Report preparation involves completing a Word report template, which can be downloaded from the OOA website. Completed reports are then uploaded in SLOAP, where they can be viewed and reviewed. The Word template can be easily modified (though we try not to revise it frequently), and completion is straightforward.

To submit an assessment report, a reporter logs in to SLOAP with his/her GSU campus ID and password; there is no distinct login information to remember. After selecting the "Submit Report" tab, the reporter uses several dropdown menus to identify the program, types in the name of the program, uploads the report document itself, and presses the "Submit" button. Supporting documents, like rubrics and spreadsheets with data, can also be uploaded and submitted.

Viewing submitted assessment reports is even easier, since a viewer need not even log in to SLOAP. After navigating to SLOAP, one merely selects the "Report List" tab and either scrolls down to the desired report or uses the drop down menus to limit the reports that are displayed.

An important feature of SLOAP is the ability to review reports and provide constructive feedback to reporters and units that can be used to improve their assessment practices so that they are more useful for program improvement. To review a report, a reviewer must log in to SLOAP and select the "Submit Review" tab. After identifying the report being reviewed using the drop down menus and typing in the name of the report, the reviewer completes a 15-element rubric, which also allows the reviewer to provide comments on each element. The reviews eventually appear under the "Review List" tab, which can be viewed without logging in to SLOAP.

Reviews are not immediately available for viewing, however. SLOAP requires that the reviews themselves be reviewed and approved before they are publicly posted. Submitted reviews go to a separate section that can be accessed only by authorized users. These meta-reviewers can make changes in reviews before approving them for posting on the final "Review List."

A final feature of SLOAP is the ability to identify patterns in the evaluations of the assessment reports and the feedback that is provided. Under the "Average" tab, the viewer can see the average score on each rubric element for a group of assessment reports. (Technically, taking the average of rubric scores is problematic because the rubric uses a Lykert-like scale, but it is nevertheless suggestive of the quality of the reports.) The default setting is to present the average scores for all the reports in a given year, but the viewer can use drop down menus to isolate a sub-group of reports, such as those for a particular college, department, degree, and/or program type. Likewise, under the “Distribution” tab, the viewer can see the distribution of scores for each rubric element for a group of assessment reports. And under the “Comments” tab, the viewer can see all the comments for each rubric element for a group of assessment reports.

Limitations of SLOAP

Despite its useful features and advantages over some commercial assessment reporting platforms, SLOAP is not without its limitations. Most obviously, it lacks many of the sophisticated features that many commercial platforms have to offer. Unlike many commercial platforms, moreover, it is not directly linked to other important planning and evaluation functions, such as strategic planning, academic program review, and accreditation. These limitations, however, were fully understood from the outset.

Other limitations became more obvious as SLOAP was developed and put in operation. First, the simplifying advantages of SLOAP, and especially the Word report template, become somewhat of a disadvantage in the case of reports that contain large numbers of student learning outcomes and/or assessment measures, resulting in large numbers of distinct assessment findings. In such reports, greater efforts must be undertaken to make clear which SLOs are assessed with which measures, and which SLO and measure each set of findings corresponds to. A numbering/lettering scheme is suggested in the instructions for completing the Word report template, but it is not always followed.

Another limitation concerns reports that are supplemented by documents. Many documents can be embedded in the report, but if they are not, they must be uploaded separately. The uploading process is simple, but to avoid confusion, reporters must make sure that they use the same identifiers as they use when they submit reports. Likewise, readers and reviewers must make sure not to overlook any associated documents, which appears as separate entries in the report list.

None of these limitations has been serious enough to warrant making major changes in SLOAP. We have already made one major revision and a number of minor adjustments. Indeed, the ease of revising SLOAP has proven to be one of its most useful features. We plan to use SLOP in more or less its current form for the next several years, until we have completed the 10-year reaffirmation process with our regional accreditor, SACSCOC.

Does Assessment Make Colleges Better?

AALHE 2016 Conference Panel Discussion

Dr. Megan Rodgers Good (moderator):
Director of Academic Assessment
Auburn University

Dr. David Dirlam (panelist):
Dr. David Dirlam has nearly 50 years
of experience in assessment, teaching research
methodology, and statistics.

Dr. Keston Fulcher (panelist):
Executive Director of the Center for Assessment and Research Studies
Associate Professor, Graduate Psychology
James Madison University

Dr. Joan Hawthorne (panelist):
Director of Assessment and Accreditation
University of North Dakota.

Dr. Javarro Russell (panelist):
Senior Research and Assessment Advisor
Educational Testing Service

Abstract

Many in academe question whether assessment leads to learning improvement. In August 2015 the Chronicle of Higher Education notably featured Erik Gilbert's essay entitled "Does Assessment Make Colleges Better? Who Knows?" This piece spurred conversations among AALHE members including a Chronicle rejoinder from Joan Hawthorne and lengthy pieces on AALHE website's Emerging Dialogues in Assessment. This session featured a panel of four experts addressing this important question.

Keywords: Assessment, improvement, curriculum, pedagogy, higher education.

Overview of Topic

Most assessment practitioners, at some point, are confronted with an uncomfortable question: Does assessment make a difference? When so faced, many shrug off the question as being petty or reply that “use of results” is a critical step in the assessment cycle. Rarely does the questioner get a substantive response; hence articles like Erik Gilbert’s “Does Assessment Make Colleges Better? Who Knows?

Looking to the few studies that have addressed this question, the data are not favorable. Banta and colleagues (2009) collected nearly 150 assessment reports from across the nation. Only 9 reports (6%) showed assessment-supported improvement. Blaich and Wise (2011) reported that their million dollar project, whereby colleges’ assessments were supported by top tier methodology, yielded few examples of actual improvement. Similarly, Fulcher and Bashkov (2011) revealed that James Madison University, one of the best assessment resourced institutions, produced far fewer examples of improvement than expected.

Despite sobering findings, these authors remained optimistic. Their conclusion was not that assessment per se was ineffective. Rather, they argued, the way assessment is practiced keeps it from fulfilling its potential as an improvement catalyst. Each provided suggestions of how assessment can be better used for improvement.

At the 2016 AALHE conference, Megan Rodgers Good moderated a panel discussion to explore further the relationship between assessment and improvement. What follows are the four questions she posed. Under each question are the responses provided by the panelists in alphabetical order: David Dirlam, Keston Fulcher, Joan Hawthorne, and Javarro Russell.

1. Does assessment make colleges better?

Dirlam: If assessment refers to summative, annual, close-the-loop cycles, no. Learning research is hard and results in low replication rates even for published articles. Many programs engage in amateurish learning assessment projects. But even if they consult learning researchers, the settings are different. College classrooms are not controlled labs and much student learning occurs during class preparation, not class time. Standardized tests further muddy the waters. The best they can offer is showing a need for a new course, but tests taken at the end of programs have no effect on students who took the test. That some students still put significant effort into them is more a testament to their good will than the quality of the results obtained.

On the other hand, two types of formative assessment are essential for knowledge development. The first, feedback from practice, is most effective when frequent and close to the moment of practice. The second type is identification of multiple dimensions of developmental opportunities. If faculty are armed with a collectively constructed and often refined set of progressive knowledge commitments, this type of assessment can have remarkable effects. With it, we can achieve Robert Zemsky’s[1] aim of a three-year degree costing less than today but resulting in better performance of graduates.

Fulcher: No. Regarding student learning, pedagogy and curriculum make students better, not assessment. Assessment can only help tell the learning story.

Hawthorne: I firmly believe that assessment makes colleges better, with the caveat that any reasonable answer to this question depends on how we define the meaning of "better." Over the last two or three decades in higher education, however, good things are occurring – as results of assessment – that did not previously occur. Changes in general education (GE) are a case in point. Pre-assessment, many GE programs did not identify goals, and those that did often identified goals that were more aspirational than realistic since there was nothing in the program designed to help students meet those goals. Today, virtually every general education program has learning outcomes (more descriptive language than "goals") identified, and programs are intentional about providing students opportunities to learn and demonstrate program outcomes. That's "better," in my view, than higher education (or general education) was pre-assessment, and that improvement resulted from the expectation that institutions engage in assessment of learning.

Russell: To answer this question we need to define assessment first. There are several levels of assessment, and it can take many forms. And the quality or rigor of the assessment process matters as well. Across all levels of assessment, if conducted to gather evidence of student learning for purposes of improvement, then, in theory, assessment would make colleges better. Next we need address the meaning of better colleges. By "better colleges" do we mean more effective pedagogy, better attainment of learning outcomes, better curricula? Whether it is one or all three we must note that getting better requires change. If assessment data compels faculty members to make changes in an effort to improve student learning, then yes, assessment does make colleges better. Lastly, but most importantly is the word make, which has a causal ring to it. No one would suggest that assessment causes colleges to be better. It is more likely that we would assert that engaging in assessment activities allows us to gain evidence of how the college experience could improve, and it creates opportunity for deliberate change.

2. What does improvement mean to you?

Dirlam: Improvement is mostly about student needs for faster, more accurate, more effective performance in multiple dimensions of progressively more complex tasks. However, institutions also need to sustainably compete in fulfilling these needs at reasonable costs, with attractive lives for employees.

Fulcher: Improvement means demonstrable positive impact on student learning at the program level. Let's say 2015 seniors' writing level is at a "2" or "developing" as scored using a rubric. Concerned, the program implements a powerful new writing curriculum. In 2018, seniors score a "3" or "good." To the degree that the 1 point increase is due to the new curriculum, that's impact, and that's learning improvement.

Hawthorne: This is in some ways the really interesting question, because it forces us to wrestle with what we actually expect to gain via assessment. The most obvious kind of improvement occurs when faculty in a program assess a learning outcome, identify an area where there's a gap between what the program aspires for students to be able to do and what they actually can do, implement a change designed to redress the gap, and, upon re-assessment, discover that voila, the learning has been improved. That is a wonderful kind of improvement and it's important to continue aiming at improvement defined in that way.

However, I would contend that there are many less dramatic, less clear-cut, and less obvious kinds of improvement that can result from assessment, and it is a mistake to underestimate the value of those other forms of improvement. Two examples demonstrate these other forms.

An individual teacher may assess learning in relation to course goals and discover that students are not doing as well on one learning outcome for the course as they are on the others. She makes tweaks, perhaps during that very semester or surely the next time she teaches it. Perhaps she spends more time on the troublesome area, explains it differently, gives students more opportunity to practice it, "counts" it more in the grade. As a result of the changes, students get better on that outcome – a case where simply noticing learning (or lack of learning) enables improvement. And that noticing occurs as a result of basic, course-level assessment.

At the program level, perhaps faculty discuss, yet again, their frustration with the lack of research skills demonstrated by senior students, despite the fact that evidence-based decision-making is included in the program learning outcomes. They decide to get to the bottom of the problem, starting by figuring out where the problem originates by tracking it through curriculum mapping. Upon reviewing the map, they realize that no one is teaching research in any meaningful way. Faculty in lower-division courses consider it a "more advanced" skill, and faculty in upper-division courses assume students already have been taught how to do it. As a result of the brief exercise in curriculum mapping, they agree on specific courses where research skills can be taught rather than simply "expected." Not surprisingly, seniors who are taught research skills turn out to do a better job with them than those who were not. This "improvement" in student learning comes as a result of assessment.

Russell: Setting expectations of what students should know and the extent to which they should know it. Determining the effectiveness of educational activities. Modifying those activities until expectations are met or adjusted. Holding the curricula and/or co-curricular activities you provide responsible for helping students meet your expectations.

3. What are the biggest challenges to evidencing learning improvement?

Dirlam. There is a local and a societal challenge. The local one is to improve how people identify knowledge development. I recommend a five-step collaborative process:

a) Assessment experts conduct developmental interviews with program faculty, combine them into developmental rubrics, and create on-line recording tools.
b) Assessment experts make quick on-line course design surveys.
c) Faculty frequently identify student progress to individual students, record it on-line, and annually submit course designs plus collaborate to refine the rubrics.
d) Assessment experts analyze and summarize results for program faculty, who adapt instruction and program designs in response.
e) Results are disseminated both regularly and nationally.

The societal challenge is to grasp and commit to the local challenge, by supporting and disseminating local efforts and disruptively innovating the three impediments to it: standardized tests, closed accreditation results, and trivial government oversight.

Society has explored testing for centuries and it has been a dismal failure. Tests aim to assess expertise development through problems addressed in minutes, hidden from public scrutiny and refinement, and producing no publically useful product or service beyond absurdly aggregated scores. This has not worked. In contrast, medicine, agriculture, ecology, and engineering train experts to identify the effects of long-term activities or projects using national standards, on the fly with external validation. A societal commitment to make such identification work for the acquisition of knowledge is necessary.

The second impediment is that the accreditation process hides results behind the closed door of institutional embarrassment rather than uses them to produce collective progress. Annual conferences help, but are poor substitutes for the collective, international description and scrutiny available through any academic library's on-line search tools.

Finally, simplistic governmental solutions like the College Scorecard and No Child Left Behind do more harm than good. Some check needs to be placed on abusive institutions that funnel government money from student loan guarantees into their proprietors' pockets. But that problem is more like finding and disciplining cheaters in a class than identifying and advancing the learning of conscientious students.

Fulcher: To demonstrate improvement – at the program-level – the biggest challenges are…

a) Collective will amongst faculty to improve.
b) Agreement of faculty about what should be improved.
c) Articulating student learning outcomes clearly enough that pedagogy and curriculum can be aligned with them.
d) Figuring out how to intervene beyond individual sections.
e) Capturing improvement from pre-intervention to post-intervention using the same methodology.

Hawthorne: Many challenges can be identified, but three are worth singling out. First, is the challenge of methodology. Most faculty come to their positions with very limited (if any) exposure to the methods of assessment. What they will have learned to do well is field-specific research, and, although some kinds of research skills have assessment applications, there are significant differences between research and assessment. Helping faculty understand the methods available to them – and helping them recognize the differences between assessment (designed to result in learning improvement) and research (designed to result in generalizable knowledge) – is critical.

Second, there is a lack of pedagogical and curricular expertise among faculty, despite the deep-seated commitment to students that many faculty share. It is disheartening to identify problems – often problems that faculty already recognize to some degree – that seem impossible to solve. If faculty don't know how to address the problems they see in student learning, and if they don't have time to wrestle with questions of pedagogy and curriculum, then assessment itself feels like a waste of time that simply feeds into a sense that the work is hopeless.

Finally, the pendulum swing toward retention and on-time graduation as key college "outcomes" interferes with the sense that learning is what actually matters. Measuring institutional and program achievement by metrics linked only peripherally at best to student learning has become a distraction, interfering with a focus on the kind of assessment efforts that are most likely to result in opportunities for learning improvement.

Russell:

a. Determining the types and the extent to which curricular and co-curricular educational activities are occurring across the undergraduate experience and relating those activities to the learning outcomes is a particularly tough challenge. For quite some time, the assessment field has known the difficulty of defining the learning outcomes for academic programs. Part of that difficulty arises from the complexity of describing what we believe occurs in an academic program. Articulating these educational activities and contemplating their expected impact on student learning is the only way institutions can identify opportunities to improve student learning.
    b. Sustainability is another issue that does not get enough attention. Assessment, in theory, is not episodic. Assessment processes are ongoing. Given the cyclical nature of assessment, we must consider the sustainability of this work. Those of us who conduct Assessment 101 workshops are keenly aware of turnover or the shifting of assessment responsibilities at various institutions. We also understand how monetary and people resources ebb and flow at every stage of assessment cycle. Finding ways to ensure the sustainability for assessment processes to allow for long term plans to be implemented is a critical aspect of successful and effective assessment practices.
    c. Another challenge is getting students to value assessment. To date there is not much evidence that institutions have found ways to consistently motivate students to give their best efforts during program level assessment activities. Assessment allows for students to reflect on the knowledge and skills they've gained. We hope that this reflection will allow them to better articulate their strengths.

4. As a network of assessment professionals, how can we best leverage our collective knowledge to answer Question 1 (Does assessment make colleges better)?

Dirlam: We need to help teachers accurately identify student knowledge development on the fly, and get more societal respect and support for doing so.

We cannot accomplish this goal through isolated efforts of individual colleges. We need a national AALHE database of the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education with three Board-approved surveys of Learning Progressions, Course Designs, and Assessment Practices plus reports. The surveys would solicit input from ASSESS members. The database and reports would be read-accessible to AALHE members. There would be no financial cost to AALHE. Each survey would include clickable target options of levels, programs, divisions, degrees, with an option to "describe other." Learning progressions would include descriptions of behaviors associated with several short series of progressively more complex developmental commitments. Course designs would include clickable options within each question of who, what, when, where, why, and how, plus "describe other". Assessment practices would include descriptions of problems, measures used, analyses, uses of results, reporting, how long they took to establish, and how many years they have been in place.

AALHE would openly solicit and review articles on interpretations and connections of the survey results plus produce an annual review by one or more Board-appointed contributor. AALHE would work toward getting the reports included in international library search tools.

Fulcher: Given the answer to Question 1 is no, we need to reframe the question. The question should be: Can higher education improve students' learning? The answer to that question is yes. To achieve learning improvement, we must provide students with effective modifications to curriculum and pedagogy at a program level. Our assessment needs to be built around these programmatic changes. To succeed program faculty, faculty developers, upper administration, students and - of course - assessment practitioners must strategize together.

Hawthorne: Although much of the progress in assessment was leveraged through the link to accreditation, next steps in the field will come through what is in some ways the more natural link, i.e., the link between assessment and curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching and learning. Assessment professionals need to focus on this link and promote understanding of it across campus. That will include collecting and sharing stories and cases with various kinds of stakeholders – administrators, board members, faculty, and students. Stories, much more than numbers, can help others understand why we do assessment and why it matters. That understanding is critical to better engagement in assessment for learning improvement.

If we link assessment to teaching and learning, and use stories to demonstrate the impact of that linkage, we will be naturally positioned to partner with faculty in ensuring that student learning outcomes are included in our definitions of program and institutional success. This partnership is, in the long run, the best insurance that our work in assessment continues to improve and the results are used for the intended purposes.

Russell: We must find ways to share our best practices and resources to assist institutions in improving their assessment practices. Most institutions cannot afford to send faculty and staff to assessment conferences more than once a year. A few workshops and concurrent sessions at any one conference will not materially help assessment at an institution. Our network of assessment professionals should seek opportunities to share best practices and resources outside of conferences. Writing op-eds for the Chronicle and Inside Higher Ed, or presenting on publicly available webinars in partnership with other non-profit organizations are just two ways we can bring better awareness of effective practices in assessment.

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Authentic Assessments for an Online Environment:
A Collaborative Design Approach

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Abstract

Authentic assessment provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned through professionally-aligned assignments supported by academic knowledge. To support the design and development of authentic assessments in an online environment, Capella University has established collaborative partnerships between faculty subject matter experts and instructional designers. These course design partners work together with other team members to develop the competencies—the critical skills, knowledge, and abilities required to master the subject matter—that learners are to demonstrate in their courses and their programs. The competencies then guide the design of course content, learning activities, and assessments, and learners' achievement is measured through specific criteria that support the competencies. An example of one authentic assessment is examined, specifically the alignment of the competencies to be achieved through that assessment, the need for specific instructions, and the criteria for assessing achievement of the competencies.

Key words: Authentic assessment, collaborative design, competency, competency-based education, online higher education, subject matter expert, instructional designer

Designing effective assessment for online higher education requires that we consider the three challenges indicated in the title: First, developing authentic assessment is challenging enough, but add to that a second challenge--how can it best be designed specifically for an online environment in higher education? And yet a third challenge--how does collaborative design work? Who is involved in the collaboration? Capella University, a completely online institution serving graduate and undergraduate learners throughout the United States as well as international learners, strives to set the standard for effective assessment in graduate and undergraduate programs. To accomplish such a goal, Capella engages a design team for the development of every course and every academic program. Primary players in the design effort are the instructional designer (ID) and the faculty subject matter expert (SME). The roles of each are integral to the process of designing authentic assessments for an online environment.

A Collaborative Approach

Capella University's vision for designing courses calls for a collaborative process to tap the diverse expertise of the design team. The process engages a faculty SME for his or her knowledge of the subject matter, familiarity with appropriate academic resources, and expertise in the learning outcomes that learners are to achieve. An instructional designer brings to the process expertise in instructional design and curriculum development. The ID also contributes knowledge of specific institutional requirements, such as accreditation standards, ADA compliance, program consistency, and requirements pertaining to appropriate course materials and workload. Other players in the design team are project managers, media designers, librarians, program chairpersons, and even consultants, if needed.

Competency-Based Education

Increasingly, higher education institutions are offering competency-based education (CBE). Employers, accrediting bodies, the community, families, and learners themselves want to know what learners can expect to know and be able to do with their knowledge as a result of engaging in an educational activity or course (Lumina Foundation, 2014). At Capella University, learners who complete courses and programs are expected to demonstrate specific competencies—that is, the critical skills, knowledge, and abilities required to master the subject matter in their degree programs. Working in collaboration, we define what learners are to know and be able to do with their knowledge. These competencies, which are sourced from professional standards, disciplinary expectations, and career skills, are demonstrated through the achievement of learning outcomes, measured by effectively designed assessments aligned with the course content.

In order for assessments to align with course content, it makes sense to develop them as the courses are developed. Trying to develop assessments after, rather than during, course development can easily lead to a lack of alignment of the intended competencies and effective measurement of those competencies. Capella University follows an assessment-first design model, which means assessments reflecting the competencies are created first, and the course content then supports learners' achievement of the competencies. Capella's process combines the expertise of the faculty SME with that of the other members of the design team in the creation of assessments to measure the extent to which learners have learned what was intended in the course. Capella University President Richard Senese (2014) stressed that "instruments used to measure and evaluate student competency have to be developed by the faculty, who are ultimately responsible for providing feedback to students on their competency assessments." Thus, the faculty SME who works in collaboration with the instructional designer focuses on designing assessment instruments that incorporate the competencies of the course.

Authentic Assessment

Another trend in higher education assessment is the increasing presence of authentic assessment, particularly appropriate for adult learners who are likely to be already working in the field for which they are earning a degree or will be soon. The authenticity is achieved when the assessments are designed to meet actual professional performance expectations—that is, what is expected in the professional field, or what is called a “real-world” assessment. Capella’s design teams recognize that “Only authentic, practice-based assessments can evaluate a learner’s mastery of complex skills—and assess the skills necessary for success in the work environment” (Senese, 2016). Effective authentic assessment is learner-focused, functional, and academically sound. In a typical Capella course, learners engage in a variety of authentic assessments, all designed to be diverse and engaging. For some learners, it can be difficult to make the paradigm shift to producing real-world assessments rather than the typical analytical, theoretical “paper” that some learners have come to expect. Ensuring that they have clearly defined, measurable course competencies helps to guide them toward making the transition to real-world projects.

The competencies also guide the design of assessments and learning activities, such as the online discussion forums. Each assessment—or assignment—is measured through specific criteria that support the competencies. Learners’ performance is assessed at one of four levels: distinguished, proficient, basic, non-performance. However, the level is not simply subjectively determined by the faculty member; instead, each level of achievement is defined clearly and specifically stated in a scoring rubric that the SME and ID have worked collaboratively on developing. In keeping with Capella’s principle of transparency, learners are provided with all scoring guides when they enroll in a course; thus, they know the competencies they are to demonstrate in each assignment and discussion post.

Application of Authentic Assessment

As an example of an actual authentic assessment, we are providing here an assignment that learners in an online graduate-level course on the foundations of assessment are to complete early in the course. They have reviewed the competencies of the course so that they know what they are to demonstrate through the variety of assessments presented in the course. First, we present here a selection of competencies from the course:

In order to complete the course successfully, learners are to

1. Analyze the issues contributing to the controversy around evolving assessment efforts.
2. Differentiate assessment from evaluation.
3. Communicate the value of assessment in an appropriate and effective manner.
4. Articulate the importance of a shared vision in successful assessment efforts.

Second, we create an authentic assessment that reflects the appropriate course competencies. Different assessments measure the achievement of different competencies; no single assessment is intended to measure every competency in the course. For example, the authentic assessment presented here addresses competencies 1, 3, and 4, but not 2, which is addressed in other assessments. Learners read the instructions, summarized here, and also examine the criteria in the scoring rubric, which aligns with the competencies:

> As a member of an academic department or program, develop two e-mail messages, using and citing the assigned readings to support claims and assertions.

- A response to a department head's request for a brief proposal about how to get faculty involved in assessment. Summarize what assessment is, examine common obstacles to involvement, and explain how to engage faculty members in assessment efforts.
- An appeal to a reluctant colleague who complains about "what the administration is expecting us to do now." Persuade the colleague of your understanding of assessment, the value of assessment, and the reasons to be involved.

The choice of action verbs is particularly important, for it must be clearly stated what learners are to demonstrate. Verbs such as *summarize*, *examine*, *explain*, and *persuade* indicate exactly what they are to demonstrate. Verbs such as *understand*, *be familiar with*, or *learn about* lack specificity and are thus not measurable; they are what Suskie (2009) describes as "fuzzy verbs" (p.). Third, using a rubric, we develop the means of measuring achievement of the competencies. The criteria in the rubric align with the competencies and with the assignment instructions. For example, one criterion in the rubric, "Analyze the issues contributing to the controversy around evolving assessment efforts," aligns with competency 1 and with the instructions to "examine common obstacles to involvement and explain how to engage faculty members in assessment efforts." Another criterion, "**Propose strategies for engaging faculty or staff members in assessment efforts,"** aligns with competency 4 and with the instructions to "Persuade the colleague of . . . the value of assessment and the reasons to be involved." For each criterion, performance is assessed at one of four levels—distinguished, proficient, basic, or non-performance—and each designated level is linked automatically to scoring levels. Faculty can add written comments for each of the criteria and overall comments as well to guide the learner toward improvement in subsequent assignments.

This example of authentic assessment illustrates the features that set authentic assessment apart from the typical "paper" that faculty have often assigned; instead of writing *about* the "controversy around evolving assessment efforts," learners directly address the controversy in their email messages. Instead of writing *about* "the importance of a shared vision in successful assessment efforts," they persuade a reluctant colleague to share the vision. Thus, they are engaging in real-world assessments, "authentic, practice-based assessments [that] can evaluate a learner's mastery of complex skills" (Senese, 2016) expected in a professional field.

Working toward a Collaborative Design Approach

Designing effective assessment is seldom done effectively in solo efforts. Such processes are necessarily collaborative, "involving people and resources across departments and divisions" (Bresciani, 2011, p. 2). At Capella University, each member of the design team brings his or her own expertise to the development of assessments to enable demonstration of the competencies that learners need as they work toward achieving their degrees. No one member can do it all. While a faculty SME may be an expert in the subject matter and know what learning outcomes learners need to achieve, the instructional designer brings to the process skills and knowledge that the SME may not, such as knowledge of accreditation standards, ADA compliance, program consistency, and university requirements for appropriate course materials. A collaborative design approach "will not only garner collaborative ownership in the program's success, it will promote . . . collaboration on improving the program" (Bresciani, 2011, p. 2). While there may initially be numerous obstacles to a collaborative team approach, ultimately it is our students who will benefit most by our efforts to work together to develop effective assessment.

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Assessment as Telling Your Learning Story

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Abstract

Many assessment cycles reveal reports which merely show results that staff and faculty feel are required in addressing results and using those results the following year. Consequently, submitting an annual assessment report has become, for some, a perfunctory exercise. Qualitative and historical data can and should be expressed in meaningful ways to convey a program's or department's unique and unfolding "story" of growth, change, achievement, and possibility. Communicating the formative changes that take place in students, staff, and operations consistently contributes to a continuous history that is valuable for faculty, administrators, and accreditors as well. It also becomes a valuable exercise for those who do so if they understand how to do so meaningfully.

***Key Words*:** Assessment, story, learning, narrative, meaning, conversations.

When we talk about reporting the results of our expected outcomes, whether it be in academic programs or in co-curricular administrative or educational support departments, many often recount merely the very basic of information, taking the form of acquired numerical data or simple, summative statements relative to the outcome itself. In like manner, it isn't much different when reporting how those results will be used to make improvements and what may need to be done to prepare for the following year. Irrespective of the assessment platform an institution may utilize, it has been found that many reports lack depth, length, or breadth in their response. It's not that these aren't results in the technical sense. It is that these results are missing many valuable aspects of deeper reflection on good questions and issues, shared conversations about those questions or issues, and inclusion of the incremental decisions that create a richer picture of their on-going history and development.

Stakeholders, both internal and external, often miss the on-going, continuous "story" of so much that is occurring across respective institutional units when we treat such reporting as an annual duty to recount numbers or fulfill the needs of an assessment office and thus, check off another box in an otherwise meaningless exercise. Yet, it needn't be so. Each institutional office and program has a "picture" to paint and a "story" to tell in terms of the many previous and continuing dialogues, exchanges, and events that take place formatively throughout any given year. Tracking numbers and percentages are only a small part of that story.

Faculty members and key staff are in the best position to collectively recall, gather, and interpret these important exchanges and, as business storyteller Michael Margolis has stated, "Whether you're succeeding or failing, just look at your story…If you're not telling your story, somebody is telling it for you" (Nagpal, 2013). These broader narratives can reveal the data that is never shared; the department's journey, the main "characters" and supporting "roles"; the "dramas" and challenges that are being faced, the hopes and aspirations of the department, and the learning taking place among staff or faculty—the *real* experience of a department and its people. These narrative stories need not be lengthy, but we needn't skimp on important details either.

"Assessment," as Larry Braskamp and Mark Engberg emphasize, "is a special type of story—one that includes judgments of quality based on evidence." These assessment results should be linked "…to key issues and decisions…based on multiple experiences… and perspectives of related stakeholders," and which reveal the conversations and show a "variety of dissemination strategies" (Braskamp, p.3). Thus, we can paint a picture of the kinds of relationships we have with the key players and support roles that help us, as a program or department, and the kinds of decisions being made because of these relationships and is reminiscent of Peter Senge's systems discipline for "seeing wholes." That is, the "framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static 'snapshots'" (Senge, p.68).

There can be challenges among many programs and departments when it comes to reporting the annual results and plans related to them. For some administrative and support offices, this task can be even more confusing, if not onerous. We can help by clearing one large hurdle in defining the terms we use. The term "outcome," for instance, can be rather muddy for those administrators not accustomed to using it in their line of work. Good assessment leaders often need to recast the definition of such terms so that such terms, like "outcomes," can be understood as ongoing activities, services, or expected products provided by their department. Even the concept of "assessment" needs to be expanded to include the many activities that these departments actually perform, but never consider including in an assessment report.

Once past the question of determining what they are trying to do, we then help others define how well they are doing it. In other words, we need to define the data points that are the most meaningful for them. Relatedly, they should (depending on the nature of the office) be encouraged to include and capture the many events and consultations that occurred with others and those whom they assisted or with whom they collaborated. Additionally, it is helpful for them to explore other questions that engender other kinds of data: What important conversations did you have? What concrete contributions did your office make to the university? How does the unit monitor satisfaction with the services rendered? What do you do for the continuing instruction and empowerment of staff during the year? What challenges did you overcome? Maybe just as importantly, we can ask, what and how does your unit contribute to the development and growth of students? When such departments as IT, Accounting, and Bursar can see that the needs and satisfaction of their "stakeholders," be they students or staff, contributes to retention, satisfaction, and thus, a true return on investment for the University, the stakes are raised in terms of what should be reported.

Now, capturing crucial conversations, emerging decisions, and incremental, but meaningful, feedback can become very important on an annual basis because it may reveal unexpected and valuable information. Following a recent visit by Mercer's business school accreditor, AACSB, the visiting team stated that the quality of measures was not a problem, but that the assurance of learning should focus more on changes that are likely to result in improved learning. All those modifications and adjustments, large or small, over which faculty collaborate and share, needs to be taken into account. The associate dean of our business school clearly saw this as a mandate that their narratives will have to be stronger and more encompassing!

This is closely related to what Catherine Wehlburg calls, Emergent Assessment. In reference to academic assessment, Wehlburg asserts that faculty should be looking for "…emergent learning—the things that they might hope for…that would surprise them…this type of learning event are the stories that faculty will often talk about and share with colleagues—but these are almost never included in annual assessment reports" (Wehlburg, p. 93). Educational consultant Ephraim Schechter, in response to an ASSESS Listserv discussion on faculty and learning assessment, writes that, "…encouraging faculty curiosity about student's learning, asking questions that matter to them, and then coming up with strategies to answer those questions that will yield data they find meaningful, fits right in here. A faculty member once said to me, 'Oh, I see—you want us to document our hallway conversations.' Right on. We can help with those conversations, providing tools to clarify the discussions, add information, and so on" (Schechter, 2016).

One of my many roles for the last 20 years on numerous campuses has been, as mentioned earlier, that of a "translator." That is, helping others—particularly in co-curricular administrative offices—understand the concepts and the nomenclature of good assessment. One of the other important roles is that of being an encourager of new ways of thinking. And I've had many fruitful conversations with others on campus where re-thinking and re-contextualizing can take place. One such conversation was with one of our librarians who mentioned that she was encouraging her colleagues to share with one another the feedback and conversations they each have garnered from the many times they work individually with students throughout the year. It seemed then that these "micro stories" when compiled, are the kind of data that become useful in making improvements in their services. And, when we think about it, "micro stories" are what comprises a department's cumulative "story." And these departmental stories are then what contributes cumulatively to the overall "story" of an institution.

This now compels us to ask how this notion of narrative story affects the way we develop our assessment plans and consequent assessment measures. By rights, it should. Should we encourage that reports might disclose areas of experimentation with new methodologies in classrooms or in marketing and advertising with external stakeholders? Should we encourage the keeping of journals by faculty members and staff to help remember those crucial conversations and turning points? Should our assessment plans make more room for measuring the interaction and team performance of program faculty, as well as the engagement with students? These seem like probable and natural practices if we value the capture of moments in learning, connectivity, innovation, research, and improved learning. My guess is that it will likely leave a rich trail of emergent thinking.

John Gardner emphasizes that, "Reams and reams of reports already exist on most of our campuses that 'should' inform curriculum and instruction but have not and never will do so because the data have not been related to the day-to-day concerns of faculty in their interaction with subject matter and students…Assessment involves judgment, not just measurement. Values permeate considerations of data on effectiveness. This is an interpretive enterprise" (Gardner, p.259).

Conclusively, it seems that assessment plans, for both academic and administrative units, should make room to:

- capture and evaluate their own development and growth as a department
- include all incremental changes toward continuous improvement, not just numbers
- share reflections on their past performance and the ongoing work and conversations with stakeholders
- consider these narratives as the context and historical explanation for other types of data
- build an unfolding history, a "learning story," that lends value to future practitioners

I have learned that as I engage more with assessment professionals and interact with those I help on my own campus, I learn more about how to build and improve my own narrative story. In fact, in this next cycle of reporting, I need to set the bar for myself by exemplifying the role of storyteller; how might I increase the narrative about the personal feedback and interactions I've had with others? How might I increase the conversation about formative and emergent assessment on campus? How might I include the importance of narrative in our annual assessment reviews? How might I be an advocate in enabling others to tell their "story?"

Our objective here is not to require everyone to simply write more prolifically. It is to compel everyone to think more deeply about continuous improvement and learning—the way many of us might think about our LinkedIn page. Why would we not want to show the world what we're learning, and how we're growing and contributing? We should be writing more thoughtfully and inclusively. When we emphasize the importance of chronicling our learning, we capture significant pieces of our academic or operational history and we consequently, create a legacy of information for accreditors, administrators, and successors to see the "whole" unfolding picture and its many contributive moments. This is the "happily ever after" that keeps evolving; making our assessment reports more viable and valuable.

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Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes: Effective Organizational Infrastructure

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Abstract

This paper provides results from interviews conducted with Southwest University educators, and includes information about the infrastructure the university created to work on assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs). At the institution level, Southwest University rotated the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to provide evidence of student learning. At the program level, Southwest University purchased an assessment management tool, established an office of assessment and provided professional development in assessment for faculty members. The participants also shared their achievements such as student outcomes above the Carnegie average on a national normed survey and assessment reports that met the requirement of accountability. The most significant challenge Southwest University faced was gaining faculty engagement in assessment activities. Suggestions for improving assessment of SLOs at Southwest University are drawn from the research.

***Key words*:** institutional assessment, core curriculum, national normed survey, program assessment, faculty engagement, assessment management tool.

Introduction

Outcome assessment has been emphasized in the U.S. since 1985. At the micro level, assessment addresses the knowledge and skills of the individual students. Assessment at the macro level focuses on educational program performance and successes, and results are typically combined into whole groups of learners (Anderson, Moore, Anaya & Bird, 2005). According to Gill (2006), studies have shown that the objectives of outcomes assessments are to make a judgment about whether the institution meets its mission and fulfills its goals, and uses assessment results to improve the curriculum and to make curricular change more in line with the institutional mission. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to learn about the experiences of a U.S. university in the Southwest when documenting the assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs). Some recommendations are made to improve institutional and program assessment at Southwest University (a pseudonym for the university).

Methodology

A qualitative research study was selected, as this type of inquiry process enables the researcher to build a holistic picture, analyze the data inductively, report the views of participants and conduct the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014).

Data were collected using documents and interviews. Public documents, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC) principles of accreditation, helped to uncover meaning, develop a deeper understanding into the phenomenon of interest and discover information that is not accessible in other types of data sources, such as beliefs and context factors (Merriam, 1998). In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three faculty members and three administrators who were purposefully selected. All participants were involved in assessment at the institution and program levels.

Thematic and content analysis are the two major techniques used to analyze data. The process of analyzing data from the participants' interviews involved transcribing, coding and interpreting the data. The analysis is presented at the narrative, descriptive, thematic and interpretive levels.

Findings and Recommendations

Institutional Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

To conduct the assessment of SLOs for core curriculum across the institution, Southwest University participated in multiple national normed surveys. According to the assessment website, nine types of direct and indirect assessments have been used, such as College Senior Survey (CSS), CAAP, CLA+, Core Curriculum Essay (CCE), Distance Learning Survey, NSSE, Online Senior Assessment (OSA), and Outreach and Engagement Inventory (OEI). Southwest University participants shared their achievements and challenges, as well as their suggestions to improve institutional assessment.

Institutional Assessment Achievements

Institutional assessment at Southwest University had made some progress such as rotation of various popular types of national normed surveys (e.g., CAAP, CLA, NSSE), achievement of institutional assessment results above Carnegie average and posting the assessment reports on the website to comply with accountability requirements. Administrator C confirmed this information: "In terms of student learning, we have demonstrated students perform well at the institutional level. . . . since it is above the Carnegie average."

Institutional Assessment Challenges

First, faculty buy-in appeared to be the most troubling issue related to institutional assessment at Southwest University. For example, Administrator A indicated that only a small percentage of faculty members are actively collaborating in the process of standardized institutional assessment of student learning. The second challenge was insufficient resources. Faculty Member III pointed out one reason for faculty resistance to being involved in assessment--insufficient resources. She perceived that staff members at Southwest University seemed to have more resources to work on assessment than faculty members.

Participants' Suggestions to Improve Institutional Assessment

As for the challenges of insufficient resources for faculty, Faculty Member III suggested providing more resources and tools to faculty members, such as allocating travel grants to faculty to present at assessment conferences. To address faculty engagement in assessment, Administrator C mentioned Administrator A's initiative "to work with faculty in order to get a voluntary relationship so that faculty members are willing to work with you." Administrator A made three suggestions. First, "it is necessary to increase their [faculty] involvement by matching the institutional assessment content with a specific class." This will provide accurate feedback to faculty members and they will see the value of institutional assessment for their instruction. Second, Administrator A recommended increasing engagement in institutional assessment by having a competition for the colleges with the highest student participation. Lastly, Administrator A encouraged adding institutional assessment results to the students' grades to get more student involvement.

Program Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

To conduct program assessment for all academic programs within Southwest University, it purchased an assessment management tool, established the office of assessment and provided professional development to faculty members.

Assessment Management Tool

In order to collect evidence of student learning for all academic programs, Southwest University purchased an assessment management tool. However, Faculty Member II stated the assessment management tool was designed for people who are good at assessment, therefore, not all the functions on the assessment management tool were used. He suggested that Southwest University needs to better support people so they understand how to work more effectively with the assessment management tool.

Office of Assessment

The office of assessment is in charge of collecting evidence of student learning outcomes. Providing feedback to assessment activities has been an area of deficiency in the assessment office. Comments from the regional accreditor provided evidence that the office of assessment should do evaluation of the Unit Assessment Report and provide the units with feedback regarding what they have done well and what needs to be improved. This would demonstrate best assessment practices by having a more systematic assessment process.

Professional Development for Faculty Members

In order to engage faculty in assessment of SLOs for academic programs, Southwest University organized workshops about outcomes assessment. In the process, it encountered some challenges such as lack of assessment specialists to teach assessment workshops, limited faculty attendance to assessment workshops and, as shared by Administrator C, lack of faculty engagement in assessment because they do not internalize assessment as a way of informing changes in their courses.

Recommendations for Southwest University to Improve Assessment of SLOs

Several recommendations can be made based on the study's findings and the literature that would enable Southwest University to improve assessment of SLOs at the institutional and program levels.

Recommendations to Improve Institutional Assessment of SLOs

One recommendation for improving institutional assessment is to implement capstones, a type of course embedded assessment (University of Florida, 2015), or E-portfolio, and use an adapted Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubric to assess students' artifacts. The institution should encourage core curriculum faculty to use capstone projects, a culminating course or experience that requires review, synthesis and application of what has been learned or E-portfolio for class assessment. Kuh (2008) asserted that capstone is a high impact educational practice, develops as a whole person and lifelong learner and makes it easier to align its classroom instruction with the institutional mission (Gree, Peterson & Strong, 2014). Johnson (2014) stated that E-portfolio enables the assessment of students' skills at the institutional level. He suggested informing and engaging faculty and students, developing assessment rubrics, evaluating E-portfolio artifacts, and using assessment evidence in decision-making when implementing E-portfolio. This suggestion fits with the cycle of assessment such as setting the goals, identify desired outcomes, assess outcomes and make changes for improvement

Southwest University should assess the common skills of student learning in critical thinking and communication which are commonly assessed by 80% of U.S. institutions (Kul et al., 2015). To make this idea feasible, an advisory committee should be established (Cunliff & Skelton, 2014) to help core curriculum faculty adapt the VALUE rubric because faculty resist building rubrics to assess students and become disengaged (Dirlam, 2014). The committee's support also can reduce the workload for core curriculum faculty. In addition, the advisory committee can serve as evaluators or raters for capstone activities or E-portfolio and increase the reliability of assessment results.

Recommendations to Improve Program Assessment of SLOs

To improve assessment of SLOs at the program level, first, it is necessary to ensure the department chair believes in the value of assessment for continuous improvement. Second, one person should not do the program assessment because successful assessments need much collaboration. A director of assessment at each college should be responsible for overseeing all assessment activities, such as developing processes and policies for programmatic assessment (Helvey & Aitken, 2014). Also, the college can have an assessment committee to support curriculum mapping and sequencing of course work in the program (Cunliff & Skelton, 2014). Stakeholders also could be included on the assessment committee because stakeholders can bring "real world problems" they face into the classroom as living case studies, especially in the capstone projects. In addition, this committee can also serve as an outsider to evaluate the students' artifacts for more reliable assessment results.

To address the issue of faculty engagement in the assessment of SLOs, first, it is most important to provide academic support such as continuous training and workshops in assessment. The training can be on how to align course learning outcomes with program learning outcomes and curriculum, and the assessment measures that have high impact on educational practices. Second, it is of great importance to create a culture of assessment by ensuring that course learning outcomes (CLOS) and program learning outcomes (PLOs) are understood in the same way by all faculty members. Allen (2015) suggested faculty and staff should work together to develop program goals and student learning outcomes; they need to reach consensus. Wehlburg (2013) recommended faculty annual reports should ask how the course and academic programs have been improved and enhanced based on assessment of student learning outcomes. Also, most importantly, budgeting should reflect assessment goals and processes. Lastly, assessment activities should be recognized in the department or college meetings to reward faculty that have embedded assessment into their instruction. Merit should be awarded because teaching changes have been made based on data collected in previous semesters (Wehlburg, 2015). University of Florida (2015) had an initiative to recognize faculty efforts in assessment by posting success stories on the website. Each narrative was about faculty success with using assessment in the classroom and their contribution to program assessment.

Southwest University can also consider the initiative of Senior Assessment Week to make the assessment of program improvement meaningful. For Senior Assessment Week, students are recruited from capstone courses to generate work products outside of class. This flexible assessment can also address the general education goals and motivate students to complete thoroughly and thoughtfully. Senior Assessment week can help to avoid the use of different assessment measures from different faculty members to assess the same skills. Senior Assessment Week can (a) engage faculty in planning an assessment strategy, (b) create assessment tasks that are intrinsically motivational for students, (c) supervise and carry out the assessment process, and (d) after the semester ends, score the student work products and determine the meaning of the findings (Hawthorne & Kelsch, 2014).

Conclusion

A culture of evidence in the research associated with institutional assessment and the measurement of student learning outcomes are the two foundations of institutional effectiveness (Conner, 2011). The experience of Southwest University to document the evidence of student learning outcomes at the institution and program levels provided valuable information about the achievements and challenges that may also be faced by peer institutions. Participants' suggestions for assessment of SLOs provide good strategies to engage more faculty members who would benefit from applying assessment results when making changes to their core curriculum classes. A culture of assessment needs to be demonstrated in the university's budget, the symbol of institution priorities. Budget allocation to assessment activities, more workshops and training for faculty members and human resources to support faculty when conducting assessments would facilitate the implementation of assessment across the institutions.

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Faculty Perspectives on Program Assessment

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Abstract

This case study explored the impact of faculty perspectives on academic program assessment as a factor for implementing an effective evaluation system of student learning at the college level. Through the four-step transition plan, efforts were made to impact faculty members' affective and cognitive responses to assessment.

Key Words: assessment, accreditation, faculty, leadership, professional development, inquiry

This paper outlines the process undertaken as Sul Ross State University to transform many faculty members' perceptions of academic assessment as an external mandate to a professional commitment for the benefit of students and instruction. Indeed, the human reaction or response to the task has a tremendous impact on the outcome. Faculty opposition may be strong, as evidenced by the following statement posted in a recent survey of SRSU faculty program coordinators: "Assessment is a thankless task to get us out of the hole we have been in since the last accreditation site visit" (Qvarnstrom, 2016). However, the effort to change perceptions is worth the time, as pointed out by Black, et.al, "Benefits from assessment may include improvement in student academic achievement, better pedagogical decisions by instructors, and elevated teaching and learning standards" (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Williams, 2003).

During the 2015-2016 academic year, SRSU Office of Institutional Effectiveness implemented a four-step transition plan, with the goal to develop both cognitive and affective support for a culture of assessment on campus. The guiding principles include the following: 1) organizational leadership; 2) knowledge levels among faculty; 3) learning community for assessment; and 4) recognition and reward. The purpose of this case study is to outline the institution initiatives using these guiding principles and to present resulting positive changes in faculty perceptions.

Organizational Leadership

There are many dimensions to organizational leadership, and each of them is vital to the success of transforming the culture. First, SRSU's commitment to academic assessment was publicly embraced by the University President and all members of his Executive Cabinet. The President spoke frequently and forcefully for academic assessment at faculty convocations and public meetings. Furthermore, the university allocated resources to support assessment. A

Faculty Liaison for Assessment position was hired from among the faculty. The Liaison was provided a stipend for services to the assessment efforts. In addition, the university invested in an electronic assessment management system based upon faculty recommendation. Finally, faculty excellence in assessment methods was recognized on the Institutional Effectiveness website. It is critical that "leaders within colleges and universities articulate the vision, set the tone and model the values and priorities of the institution" (Emil & Cress, 2013).

Knowledge Levels among Faculty

The second guiding principle focuses on the faculty. "Successful practices have indicated that assessment programs are better integrated and employed if faculty members are involved in the design, implementation, and analysis of student learning assessment that assessment will only be effective in improving teaching and learning when faculty fully embrace and own the process" (Wang & Hurley, 2012). Faculty needed to know what components must be included in the academic assessment process. All faculty program coordinators were provided a template for completing the academic programs that included statement of purpose, student learning outcomes, measurements, targets, findings, action plan, and evidence of improvement. During professional development meetings, models of academic assessment plans were provided, and faculty teams analyzed each one using a scoring rubric that was developed to evaluate our own reports. Smaller training sessions also were held at the departmental level to promote exchange, questions, and greater understanding of the continuous quality improvement cycle (Chapel, 2016). Finally, funding was set aside for faculty to attend assessment conferences of their choice and bring back ideas for their colleagues.

Learning Community for Assessment

Faculty members were encouraged to collaborate on assessment strategies and techniques. The Faculty Liaison for Assessment led discussions among program assessment coordinators. An annual Learning Outcomes Review fostered intra-departmental understandings and collegiality, as each program was reviewed by a team of deans, department chairs and faculty. Heinerichs, Bernotsky & Danner (2015) observed that "A comprehensive communication plan appears to be one of the keys to the success of the assessment initiative." The Learning Outcomes Review became an important part of the communication plan.

Recognitions and Rewards

Faculty members respond to the institution's identification of what has value on campus. Wang and Hurley (2012) make the point that "the institutional culture can be an influential factor in faculty engagement in assessment." When assessment is not recognized by the university as a valuable use of time, as research and teaching, then faculty are not motivated to embrace the process. By introducing recognitions and rewards, assessment gains a higher prestige on campus. Recognition may range from stipends for innovations in assessment to letters of recognition.

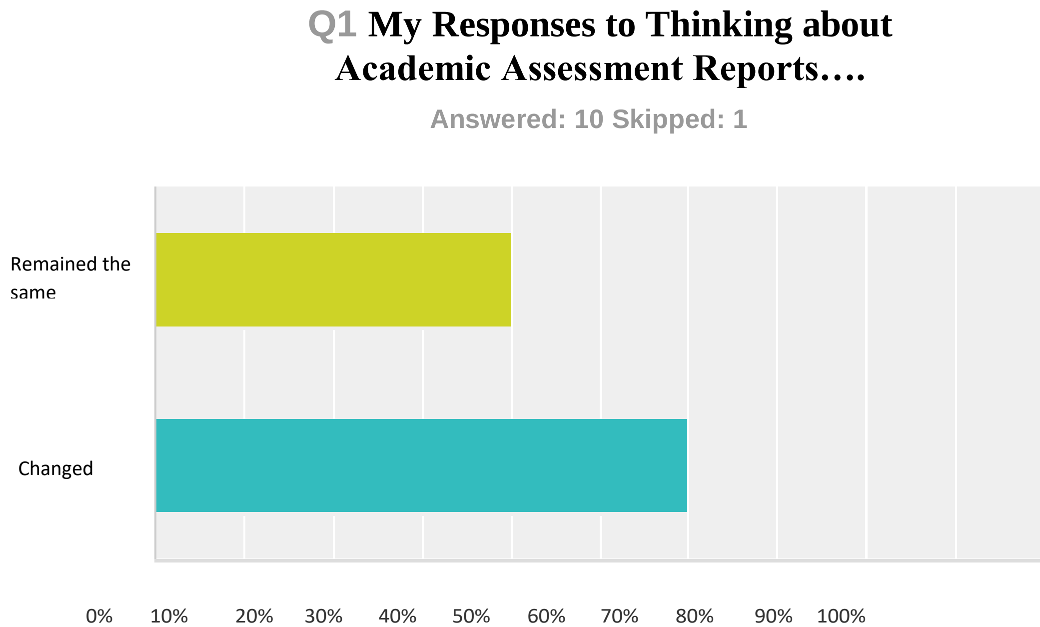
Progress Made

Several measures were implemented to evaluate the impact of the four-step transition plan on faculty perspectives of assessment. On April 8, 2016, at the beginning of a professional development training, faculty were asked to create a name tag and write one or more words to describe their attitudes toward assessment. Figure 1 records the range of responses.

Figure 1: Attitudes toward Assessment

Attitudes varied from positive to very negative when the training started. During the training, participants analyzed models of academic assessment reports and discussed the benefits for improving instruction.

Chart 1: Academic Assessment Report

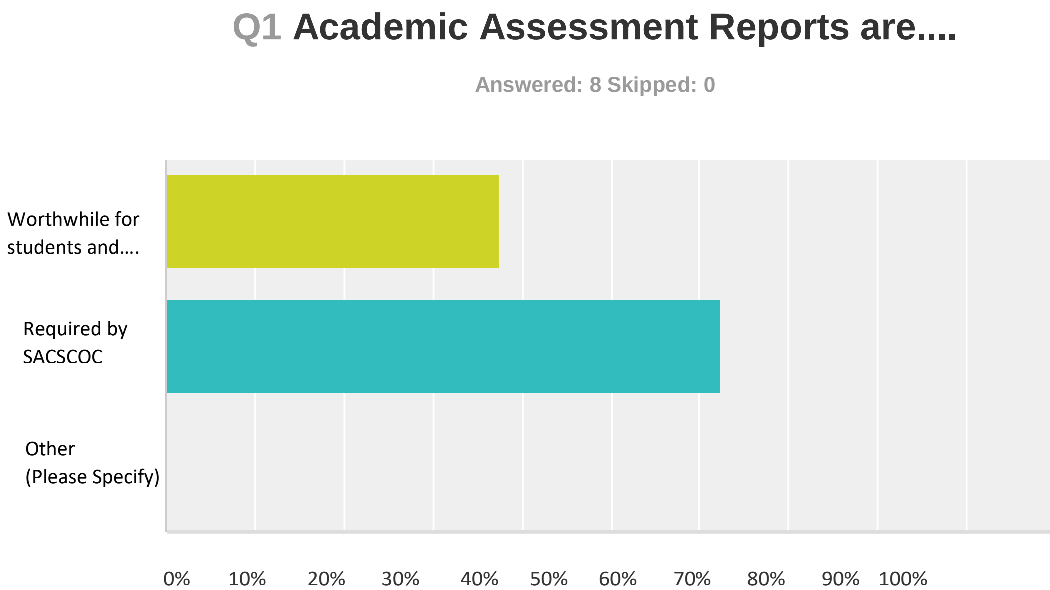


Answer Choices	Responses	
Remained the same.	**40.00%**	4
Changed.	**60.00%**	6
Total		**10**

#	If changed, please explain:	Date
1	Seeing the TX State Report was helpful. Discussing action plan was helpful.	4/11/2016 12:20 PM
2	I think tracdat will make this more user-friendly.	4/11/2016 12:13 PM
3	more positive	4/11/2016 12:12 PM
4	in the time we had, clarification for some issues occurred.	4/11/2016 12:11 PM
5	the tasks seem more manageable. Important questions were answered.	4/11/2016 12:09 PM
6	learning	4/11/2016 12:08 PM

Later, during a May 5, 2016 training session, faculty were asked to describe academic reports as a) worthwhile for students and faculty; b) required by SACSCOC; or c) other. Thirty-eight percent (38%) selected a; while sixty-two percent (62%) selected b.

Chart 2: Purposes for Academic Assessment Reports



Answer Choices	Responses	
worthwhile for students and faculty	37.50%	3
required by SACSCOC	62.50%	5
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
Total		8

Although the majority still perceive academic assessment reports as a mandate, close to 40% recognize their value for students and faculty. The Institutional Effectiveness Office will continue to administer surveys on an annual basis, to monitor faculty changes in their perceptions of academic assessment reports.

Conclusion

Recognizing that faculty buy-in is critical for the success of any academic assessment program, the Institutional Effectiveness Office created and implemented a plan that would positively affect faculties' perspectives towards the process and results. The four-step transition plan yielded some positive results, as evidenced in the survey data. Thomas Chapel (2016) suggested that, "Sometimes, what counts can't be counted. And what can be counted doesn't count". This case study demonstrated that faculty perceptions do count, and the four-step transition plan can help to promote greater openness to the assessment process for the ultimate benefit of students.

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Creating Comfortable Conversations with Faculty about

Using Assessment Results for Improvement

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Abstract

This paper focuses on practical strategies institutions can adapt to create an inclusive and comfortable environment to engage faculty in conversations about analyzing and using assessment results. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for institutions to continuously collect data for accreditation requirements and accountability, but these institutions struggle when it comes to using the assessment results. As evidence these strategies work by planning effectively and garnering stakeholder buy-in, the paper focuses on Broward College as the case study because it has created a comfortable environment for faculty to have conversations about assessment results with the goal of continuous improvement.

Keywords: faculty engagement, student learning, assessment results, improvement, effective planning, stakeholder buy-in

According to Kuh, G.D., Ikenberry, S.O., Jankowski, N.A., Cain, T.R., Ewell, P.T. Hutchings, P., & Kinzie, J., "assessment will lead to improvement only when its evidence speaks to faculty and engages them" (2015, p. 47). Broward College embraces this statement and models it by hosting an annual meeting it calls *Let's RAD: Rendezvous Around Data* that focuses on engaging faculty and other college stakeholders in using assessment results for improvement.

Background

Broward College is one of twenty-eight state colleges in Florida. It is a majority-minority institution that offers workforce baccalaureate degrees, associate degrees and certificates. In 2014-2015, there were 49,144 credit enrolled students (unduplicated headcount); 85.4% were part-time students. Broward College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). A component of the reaffirmation of accreditation process is the submission of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which is a carefully designed course of action that addresses a well-defined and focused topic or issue related to enhancing student learning and/or the environment supporting student learning and that accomplishes the mission of the institution (SACSCOC, 2012).

Broward College's QEP is titled *Question Every Possibility—Think Critically*. The goals of the QEP are to enhance students' critical thinking skills and pedagogical practices that focus on critical thinking. The participating faculty primarily teach in general education disciplines, but there are also faculty from accounting, nursing, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The faculty develop a minimum of four learning experiences that explicitly focus on critical thinking skills using a common model of critical thinking. The fourth learning experience designed by faculty is a performance-based, authentic-based, or traditional assessment, which is used as a summative assessment for the QEP program. The faculty grade the learning experience on the course-level, but this grading is separate from the QEP's assessment process. For the QEP, faculty submit ungraded copies of the students' fourth learning experiences to the Office of the QEP. At this point, 40% of each faculty member's submitted learning experiences is sampled using stratified sampling. The student and faculty information is redacted and the student artifacts are scored by a team of scorers who are not the same faculty participating in the program. The assessment process occurs during Fall and Spring terms.

Since Broward College's SACSCOC on-site visit was in October 2013, it has hosted an annual *Let's RAD: Rendezvous Around Data* meeting to engage faculty and other college stakeholders in a conversation about its QEP assessment results and how to use the results for continuous improvement. While planning for a meeting to discuss assessment results, whether it is on the course, program, or institutional level or for an initiative such as a quality enhancement plan, the ability to create comfortable conversations is easier when there is institutional commitment, stakeholder buy-in, and effective planning (see Figure 1). The session at the AAHLE conference focused on creating comfortable conversations through effective planning and stakeholder buy-in.

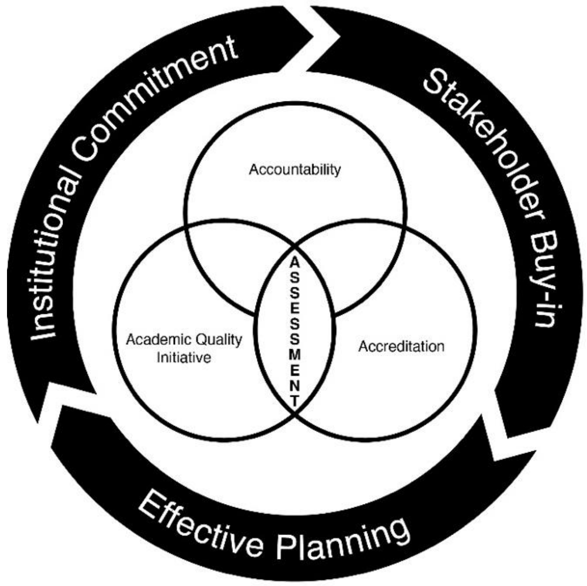

Figure 1: Rodriguez, B.J.'s Quality Reassurance Model

Effective Planning

Broward College has developed a procedure it finds extremely beneficial as it prepares to share data with faculty at its annual data discussion meeting. The procedure is broken down into three phases: (1) Pre-meeting, (2) During meeting, and (3) Post-meeting.

Pre-Meeting

The Office of the QEP prepares the data in charts and tables and solicits input from faculty about the layout of the charts and tables. The faculty reviewing the information come from multiple disciplines, such as Economics, English, Mathematics, Philosophy and Psychology. Their input is invaluable because they are representative of the intended audience, so they have a good sense of how their colleagues will respond to the visual depictions of the data in an effort to minimize the questions and potential confusion.

Part of creating a comfortable conversation is creating a comfortable environment, so the room is large enough to set up roundtables. Even though it is a small gesture, light refreshments are provided and are always appreciated. Each roundtable has a faculty member who serves as a table facilitator and no more than six participants. The facilitators have access to the assessment results prior to the meeting, so there is some familiarity. Each table has a laptop, so the facilitator uses it to record the discussion.

The meeting is advertised college-wide via email and faculty who attend receive professional development credit.

During Meeting

The meeting is guided by the QEP Director. She uses a PowerPoint presentation to facilitate the discussion. Prior to sharing and analyzing the data with faculty and other college stakeholders, the director frames the conversation by telling an abridged version of Broward College's assessment story and by getting ahead of any naysayers by defining what assessment of student learning is and what it is not. To combat naysayers, the director defines assessment; makes the distinctions between grading and assessment and between assessment and empirical research; and explains the QEP's summative assessment process as action research. The diagram solidifies the relationship of summative assessment and action research (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Rodriguez, B.J. & Frederick, J., Miami Dade College, 2013

Setting the stage in this manner provides a safe space for faculty to ask questions of inquiry and clarification about the assessment process. These questions are answered by the faculty facilitating the roundtable discussions and the director. After answering questions, the meeting transitions to sharing the data and responding to it based on four guiding questions. These questions are used to analyze the data for both direct and indirect measures. They are tweaked to parallel the data being presented. These questions are:

1. What are the major conclusions you would draw about the students' skills? [student and faculty perception for indirect measures]

2. Do the results indicate any strengths; if so, what are the strengths?
3. What concerns, if any, are raised by the results?
4. What are some recommendations for using these results to improve learning?

The faculty facilitators use the laptops to compile the responses to the questions in a template and depending on the energy in the room, the tables report out per question or after responding to all four questions for the data being presented. This process continues until all direct and indirect measures are shared and analyzed. The meeting last approximately three hours and is held on a Friday morning.

Post-Meeting

The faculty facilitators email the completed template with the responses to the QEP Director. The director reviews and compiles the responses. Once these responses are compiled, the director emails to faculty and asks them to review recommendations and work to incorporate appropriate recommendations in the classroom. The director reviews the recommendations that are non-instructional and responds accordingly. Faculty are also encouraged to share recommendations in discipline meetings. The compiled responses to the guiding questions are located on the QEP's website at www.broward.edu/qep. Broward College uses NILOA's Transparency Framework to provide evidence of student learning.

Stakeholder Buy-In

The stakeholder buy-in started from the beginning of the QEP program when faculty were integral to all conversations that took place about the development of the evaluation and assessment plan. The approach to garner faculty buy-in depends on the institutional culture. At Broward College the buy-in happened because of the multiple conversations and faculty development opportunities offered to faculty to assist in their understanding of the significance of assessment to the betterment of student learning. In this program, faculty are not confided to one type of assessment; they have the flexibility and some would argue "academic freedom" to create learning experiences appropriate to their discipline that align with the student learning outcomes being assessed. These student learning outcomes support the goal of enhancing students' critical thinking skills. These learning experiences are assessed using a scoring guide (rubric) that was developed by cross-disciplinary faculty, primarily from General Education disciplines. The creation of this scoring guide took a year of discussions, negotiations, and massaging. The final version approved by the faculty was the eight version.

From the beginning of the QEP implementation to the faculty engagement in the *Let's RAD: Rendezvous Around Data* meetings, faculty support the efforts Broward College has made and continues to make in enhancing students' critical thinking skills.

Summary

The goal of this AALHE session titled, *Creating Comfortable Conversations with Faculty about Using Assessment Results for Improvement*, was to provide participants with strategies they could adapt to engage faculty at their institutions in comfortable conversations about using assessment results. In order to do this, the presenter used her institution as the model because it has worked and is working. Fortunately, Broward College has been able to create energy and excitement among faculty for improving teaching and learning.

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Responding Constructively to Criticism in Assessment

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Abstract

In the past year, several articles have been published that have been very critical of assessment in higher education. In addition to these criticisms, the federal government, via the Department of Education, has published an open letter to U.S. accreditors that levels its own, more subtle, criticisms of learning as the most important outcome higher education assesses. The higher education community quickly responded to these articles, both in support of and opposition to the criticisms. In this paper, we explore the criticisms and the responses, and also delve deeper into the following question: are these responses constructive and if not, how can we, as assessment professionals, respond more constructively to criticism of assessment in higher education?

Keywords: Assessment, Responding to Criticism

Over the past year, several articles containing sharp criticisms of assessment in higher education have been printed in higher education publications. The two articles we will discuss are Eric Gilbert's "Does Assessment Make Colleges Better? Who Knows" and Robert Shireman's "SLO Madness" (based on the longer work he completed for The Century Foundation, "The Real Value of what Students do in College"*)*. We also touch briefly on the recent open letter from the U.S. Department of Education to the country's regional accreditors.

In his *Chronicle of Higher Education* commentary, "Does Assessment Make Colleges Better? Who Knows," Erik Gilbert equates assessment with a study about the risks of unnecessary medical testing. The essence of his argument is that assessment of student learning has real costs – primarily, faculty time, but also the cost of hiring administrative positions to manage the process – without any solid evidence that engaging in the assessment of student learning has any long-term effects.

Gilbert makes several primary arguments. The opening argument is that assessment is unimportant to incoming students and their parents because it has little to no effect on the educational quality of an institution. Gilbert also argues that assessment is problematic because we are using precious and limited resources, not least of which is faculty members' time, on an endeavor that has not lead to any positive long-term effects. He points out that there is no research or documentation of the effectiveness of assessment on the educational quality of an institution, and because of this, he argues that resources currently being devoted to the assessment of student learning could be used in better ways. Woven throughout these arguments Gilbert raises an important question: do the benefits of the assessment of student learning outweigh its costs? Ultimately, he concludes that assessment does not provide any measurable benefit for higher education's stakeholders, especially in light of its steep costs.

In an April 2016 *Inside Higher Education* article, "SLO Madness," Robert Shireman questions higher education's focus on the assessment of student learning. He argues for more important foci in higher education, including student access to higher education and degree completion, and wonders whether the focus on assessing student learning outcomes hinders, rather than enhances, these more important goals. Shireman also makes several primary arguments. His first, overarching argument is that the emphasis on both writing and assessing student learning outcomes by U.S. accreditors misses the mark in terms of evaluating the quality of learning in an institution of higher education. He feels that while writing student learning outcomes should trigger a meaningful review of what students have learned, it is a pointless exercise that detracts from an actual meaningful review. Shireman argues that institutions should be able to determine their own processes for ensuring quality, using a focus on student work, and accreditors' responsibilities should be limited to ensuring that the institutionally-determined quality assurance processes are "comprehensive and valid" (including review of student coursework, rather than standardized tests, and involvement of external reviewers). He also argues that student learning outcomes-driven assessment fails to capture that students have unique strengths and backgrounds and ignores that factors that keep students in college involve both curricular and co-curricular experiences.

Also in April 2016, the U.S. Department of Education issued an open letter to U.S. regional accreditors with the stated intent of helping institutions "focus their resources most heavily on standards that are particularly important to student achievement…" (p. 2). This letter identifies standards they deem appropriate, including licensing exam results, course completion, job placement rates, student retention rates, graduation rates, "some measure of student learning," and student loan default rates. This letter encourages "close scrutiny of institutions' processes to evaluate and validate student learning in meaningful ways…" (p. 5), and goes on to criticize qualitative measures and encourage "adding objective, transparent, comparable, and actionable quantitative measures" (p. 5). These measures do not necessarily include review of student coursework, but rather emphasize the aforementioned standards (e.g. retention rates, graduation rates, and rates at which students pass licensure exams) as evidence that student learning is occurring.

Responses to these articles and document from the higher education community both supported and disagreed with these criticisms. We collected responses from three primary sources: the comments sections of these articles and a blog post reacting to this article by Linda Suskie; the responses to ASSESS listserv discussions about these criticism; and responses we requested from our local community of practice, the Chicago Area Assessment Group.

Responses in support of these criticisms came primarily from faculty and included comments such as: “maybe quality of learning is best determined by those who get students post-graduation,” “the emperors of assessment have no clothes, but they sure have a lot of highly paid admin positions, and they are seriously getting in the way of teachers,” “who wags the dog? Accreditors or the federal government?,” and “faculty autonomy is not respected in current assessment systems.”

Those who responded in opposition to these articles were primarily assessment professionals and their responses fell into several broad categories: defensive, dismissive, or attacking. Those in the defensive category tended to argue that those in opposition to the assessment of learning in higher education are not doing assessment “right” or do not “understand” assessment, the nature of higher education, or the political environment, etc. Those in the dismissive category tended to argue that these articles are reductive, i.e. they judge all assessment processes and assessment standards based on a few. Those in the final category, attacking, include responses such as faculty are not trying hard enough, resistant faculty are probably from poor-performing programs, “Gilbert seems to admit that he’s not choosing the institution based on the quality of the education…,” and our favorite, “you are possibly the dumbest commenter I’ve seen on the Chronicle.” When we talked to the Chicago Area Assessment Group, their responses tended to mirror these broad categories.

While the responses in opposition to these articles are satisfying on a certain level, we ultimately had to ask whether these responses are productive. It seemed an important point that while opposition can be a force that brings people together, it can also operate negatively by bringing people together to complain (when the people being brought together agree on a viewpoint) or to fight (when the people coming together do not agree on their viewpoints). We, however, wanted to focus more on how the force that brought us together could operate positively, such as when that force leads to discussion, constructive planning, and, ultimately, to action toward improvement.

When we were honest with ourselves, none of the criticisms of assessment raised in these publications were new to us. We felt we had to ask ourselves a very important question: how can we respond to criticisms in assessment in a more constructive manner? First and foremost, we thought about mindset in our responses. It seemed to us from the initial reactions to these very public criticisms that the mindset from assessment professionals might be more of a call to arms, but we wanted to take on the mindset of seeing this as an opportunity to learn. In other words, how can criticism be an opportunity to make our practices better?

We started our efforts at the February 2016 meeting of the Chicago Assessment Group (CAAG), a community of practice primarily made up of assessment professionals in the greater

Chicago area. First, we asked this group to identify the most common criticisms they hear in their own institutions, which included all of those we have previously identified as well as additional criticisms (see Table 1). Next, we asked them to identify constructive ways we, as assessment professionals, might be able to address these criticisms. The group identified 11 such responses, including: working to keep assessment simple; giving faculty and staff as much autonomy as possible; and more clearly connecting assessment and its value (see Table 2 for the responses and their respective criticisms).

Table 1: Criticisms of Assessment Identified by Chicago Area Assessment Group (CAAG)

Common Criticisms
1. What's the value? Assessment takes up time and resources – is it really worth it?
2. Assessment has no connection to day-to-day work ("real work") – it is busy work that faculty and staff don't have time to do.
3. Assessment is complicated and not accessible (faculty/staff don't understand)
4. We don't assess the right things.
5. Assessment is Reductionist.
6. Faculty/staff don't have time for assessment.
7. Big Brother – what happens to the data? Who sees the data? Is assessment secretly evaluation? (someone pointed out that maybe it partly is and should be – and that faculty/staff should be open to constructive feedback)
8. Academic Freedom is being challenged.
9. Faculty will do it, but only because they have to.
10. Assessment is meaningless – there is no value and no reward in doing it.
11. Assessment actually causes harm.

Table 2: Constructive Responses to Criticism (Identified by CAAG)

Constructive Activities	**Addresses Criticisms:**
Working to keep assessment simple	3, 6
Giving faculty and staff as much autonomy as possible	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10
More clearly connecting assessment and its values	1, 5, 9, 10
Avoiding inappropriate use of assessment data.	7, 11
Building capacity among faculty/staff around assessment	1, 2, 5, 8
Making assessment work shorter/less tedious	3, 6
Helping everyone understand assessment as a dialogue, rather than a product	3, 5, 7
Helping faculty/staff engage in the process rather than the product	1, 5, 7, 10, 11
Ensuring assessment processes are sustainable	2, 10
Helping faculty/staff make meaning of assessment data	1, 7, 10
Connecting assessment o meaningful structures within the university (ex. promotion/tenure, budgeting)	1, 2, 9, 10, 11

In addition to these responses, we would like to offer four broader strategies that we feel will help assessment professionals respond more constructively to criticism: realizing and acknowledging the commonalities between assessment professionals and our critics; improving communication; avoiding dogma; and incorporating more reflection, introspection, and diversity of perspectives in higher education's assessment perspectives.

Realizing and acknowledging the commonalities between assessment professionals and our critics: We understand that learning is not the only important outcome of higher education – we need to acknowledge the importance of other, often related, outcomes such as graduate rates, retention numbers, and job placement. Also, we all want autonomy for everyone. We welcome, and actually need, faculty to have autonomy – autonomy in using the assessment methodology (including data collection and analysis) that makes the most sense for their programs and autonomy in the approach they take to assessment, including the questions that are most important to them as they conduct learning outcomes assessment. Assessment professionals and their critics also share a wariness about assessment gone wrong – including the misuse of assessment data and assessment that lacks intention. Finally, we have also no desire to be "the Man." As David Eubanks so eloquently stated in an ASSESS listserv post, we'd rather be doing much more than "convincing the English department I'm not Satan."

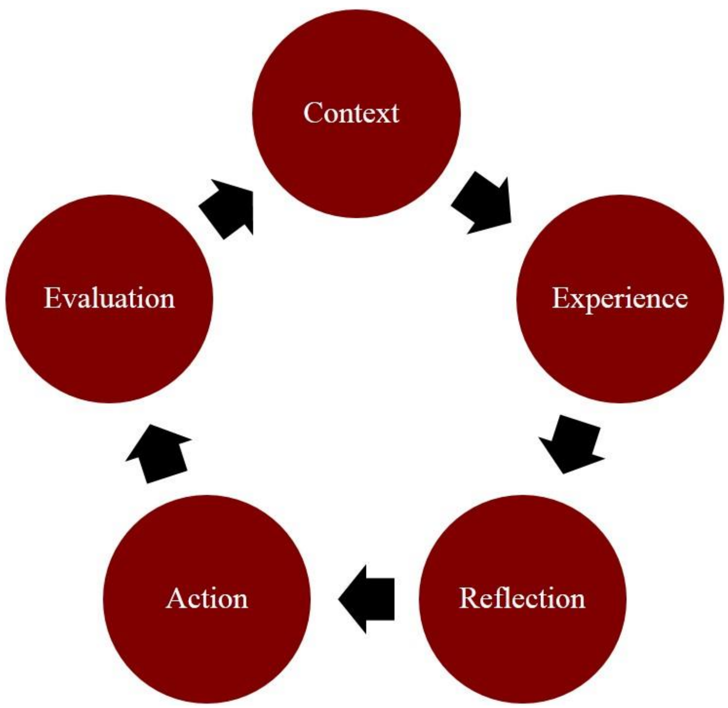
Improving communication: This strategy is one offered by Linda Suskie in a blog post responding to Robert Shireman's work. In this blog post, Suskie says, "my chief takeaway from your report is not about [assessment's] shortcomings but how the American higher education community has failed to tell you…what we do and how well we do it. Part of the problem is, because American higher education is so huge and complex, we have a complicated, messy story to tell. We have to figure out a way to tell our very complex story in short, simple ways that busy people can digest quickly." We agree with this shortcoming – not just our failure to communicate about assessment to faculty, but also with our other stakeholders (e.g. students, employers, parents, and policymakers). An illustrative example is Shireman's argument that learning outcomes jade students to the point of education when we would argue that student learning outcomes actually provide clear communication to students about what they are expected to learn.

We offer a few suggestions in terms of assessment professionals having better communication with our stakeholders. First, we need to think about our discourse in the age of outrage and the outrageous by making sure our responses are based not on emotion, but on science, facts, and intellectual discourse. First and foremost, this requires that assessment professionals listen and take on the mindset that criticism is an opportunity for us to learn, no matter how inflammatory or outrageous the criticism. We also need to think about how we communicate and how this might change depending on our audience. For example, can we, as Linda Suskie suggests, make our communication more accessible to students by making it shorter and easier to digest, perhaps by leveraging social media?

Avoiding dogma: We believe that it is important to consider the need for flexibility and adaptation in assessment. To accommodate the huge, complex, and messy story of higher education, our assessment processes require flexibility and adaptability with a focus on what is most important (i.e. not whether we call something a learning goal, learning objective, or learning outcome). We also think that assessment professionals need to approach our work with a generous dose of humility, thus allowing us to give everyone a seat at the table when it comes to discussing and making decisions about assessment at our institutions.

Incorporating more reflection, introspection, and diversity of perspectives in higher education's assessment perspectives: An example of how we might think about this is the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP)[4] (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP)



The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, as with assessment processes, is often presented as a cycle, capturing the developmental nature of situations and reflection. That is, what we learn from reflecting on one situation almost certainly helps to inform how we react in subsequent situations.

We model the use of the IPP through application to how we respond to criticism. In this case, the **context** includes not only our current climate (both nationally and at our own institutions) but also our own previous experiences and dispositions, both of which inform how

[4] For an excellent resource on Ignatian Pedagogy, please view *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (https://www.rockhurst.edu/media/filer_private/uploads/ignatian_pedagogy_a_practical_approach.pdf)

we have reacted to criticism in the past and how we may react in the future. The **experience** includes our work in assessment and criticism we face personally, but also the work done by others and the criticism they face, as well as criticism that is leveled more broadly.

Our **reflection**, then, serves to bring together our context and experience, in order to determine how we react. Our reflection is guided by a series of questions, meant to inspire deeper consideration of meaning and intent for both ourselves and for others. These questions may include:

- What is the truth of the situation?
- Why do I feel this way about it?
- What might motivate how others respond or feel in terms of assessment?
- How could we move forward in a way that acknowledges both how I feel and the reactions of others?

Action is thus how we respond to criticism, guided by the insight gained from reflection. Perhaps the response is to shrug off the criticism, or to engage our critics in dialogue about how we can work together toward a common goal of improving student learning. Regardless, the final step of the IPP is to **evaluate** the results of our chosen action(s). Did it go as planned? Fail spectacularly? Either way, we are invariably changed by this situation and our response, which in turn impacts how we respond in the future.

Ultimately, we see criticisms of assessment - from these recent publications, from the U.S. Department of Education, and, most importantly, from our own faculty – as a call to action for assessment. We need to think about what agency we have to affect perception about the assessment of student learning in higher education. Since most assessment professionals are not magicians, lottery winners, or independently wealthy, we need to collaborate with our critics on taking action on these criticisms. We can do this by thinking carefully about how we can improve not only ourselves as assessment professionals, but also our assessment practices and procedures.

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Assessment as a Dialogue towards Transformation in Higher Education: Can We Use This for Change?

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Abstract

Higher education is in a time of transitions. We are hit by many sides – economic forces, legislative mandates, accreditation requirements, under-prepared students, uninformed boards, and faculty frustrations. What can we do as assessment professionals? We can stick our heads in the sand or we can use our roles as change agents to make a real difference. This paper will identify methods and theories of change and how we can use these to make meaningful transformations on our campuses.

As of June 2016, it is quite clear that higher education is in a time of transition (Morrison, 2003; Ehrenberg, 2012; Baker & Baldwin, 2014). There are many factors to this – they include political and governmental calls for accountability, differing student preparation levels, changes in technology, and even on the faculty workforce. Specifically, this paper will discuss ways in which the field of assessment can focus on the changing requirements for higher education institutions and ways to balance the need for accountability and accreditation with the necessary and ongoing desire for improvement of teaching and learning.

As one who has been in the field of assessment for over 20 years, I have seen the requirements for higher education become more and more complex. In the 1980s, there were requirements for assessment within academic programs through most of the regional accrediting bodies – but those early requirements look now to be almost laughable in their simplicity. Now higher education must provide data not just to our accreditors, but to our states and to our government. We are now required to track students in a variety of ways and report on retention rates, graduation rates, licensure passing rates, and more. With so much focus on these types of reporting, it is easy to understand why the accountability side of assessment gets the most attention at most of our institutions.

Dr. John Newell, one of my major professors in graduate school, used to always say that "minimums become maximums" in education. And he was right. As the requirements for reporting become more strict and onerous, these mandated reports become our focus and we lose the rest of what we can discover from good quality assessment of student learning. I believe that assessment professionals can do more than simply comply with the reporting requirements of our states, the federal Department of Education, and our accreditors. I believe that we have an ethical imperative to gather, disseminate, and discuss the results of our assessment so that we can constantly be working to improve and enhance education.

This imperative makes us “assessment change agents.” And, as we know, change is hard and many of our colleagues don’t like to talk about it. Because of this, we often get responses about assessment being a negative and bothersome requirement that is only for bureaucratic purposes. Randy Swing (2008) gave a presentation to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education that identified a typology of assaults on assessment efforts. These included:

1. Attack the instrument/measurement
   - (bad survey, doesn’t measure the brilliance of my program)
2. Attack the methodology
   - (response rate, timing, sample, “not a perfect experimental design”)
3. Attack the analysis
   - (“the data was tortured into submission”)
4. Cry, Whine, Pound Fist on Table
   - (why not give it a try?)
5. Attack the Assessment Officer
   - (he/she/it isn’t qualified to evaluate me!)

Swing (2008) went on to show that a successful assessment plan will create actions that lead to change and improvement. Moreover, this change must be intentional, sustainable, and measurable. And, since assessment practitioners often work with others on campus that collect data on learning (faculty departments, institutional research offices, student affairs assessment, etc.), those in assessment often have access to data that is important to the ongoing mission of the institution. In addition, because those of us in assessment work with colleagues from across campus in almost every area, we tend to know who has data, who needs specific data, and how to gather that so that it can be used.

However, even with the vast amounts of data on our campuses, it is quite difficult to pull these pieces of information together and analyze it so that it becomes meaningful to those who need it. And, even when we have that analysis, often the departments and programs that we give it to don’t use it or even ignore it. So, why is that? Why disregard the very information that can make a difference? Often these reasons differ by the role that a person is playing. Perhaps an even better question is “why would they WANT the information that might lead to change?”

<u>Faculty</u> - Why would faculty want change? First of all, faculty really care about student learning. Our faculty are at the front lines of teaching and they see the student learning that occurs first hand. Our faculty are regularly changing their courses, the program curriculum, and even institutional-level programing such as general education. Faculty often have the institutional knowledge and the history to know what will work, who needs to be in on the conversation, and what really needs to change. Our faculty have direct access to students and

they can often be an influential voice for change to the campus administration. But there are barriers to faculty use of assessment data. These include:

- Faculty are very busy – asking them to collect, analyze data, and use data on student learning can be asking a lot. Faculty teach, they advise, they do research, they do service for the institution and for their disciplines – and some even have a life outside of the institution. So, it is a difficult task to engage faculty with assessment in many cases.
- Faculty often focus first on their department and their discipline. Therefore, expecting that they will give up their time for research in their field or mentoring of their majors to work on a campus-wide assessment committee may be a wrong assumption to make.
- In addition to this, faculty are often rewarded for their teaching and research (and maybe a bit for service to the campus), but are rarely given credit for work in assessment. It simply often does not count toward tenure, promotion, or merit.
- And, faculty do not often see "assessment" as part of their job. As assessment has been often defined as something that is done for accreditation, faculty have not viewed this as an important aspect of teaching, learning, or scholarship.

So, given these difficulties, what can those in the assessment field do to engage faculty in the change process? One thing that can be done is to create faculty learning communities (Wehlburg & McNertney, 2009). These engage the faculty with the hands-on work of assessment but do it in the form of a learning community. As part of this, faculty need to see the issues that are identified in assessment as relating to student learning. The use of the faculty senate or other faculty governing body can be useful in this process. There are often "academic improvement" or other committee structures in place that already focus on improvement. These can be ideal partners with assessment practitioners as actions are planned based on assessment findings.

In order to do these things, assessment practitioners need to visit faculty and listen to what they have to say. I often ask to be invited to program or department chair meetings so that I can hear what is happening or what issues are developing. Then I can sometimes provide useful data and information that is relevant and leads to improvement and change.

<u>Administrators</u> – Why would administrators want change? In many cases, they do. They want what is best for the institution and they often have the power (and the influence) to create change. For administrators, maintaining accreditation is a huge issue and often framing things in this way can get an administrator to really hear and more deeply read assessment data. But there are barriers to change for administrators. For example:

- Administrators are also very busy. They are often pulled in many different directions by their boards, their state and system legislative governing bodies, not to mention the faculty, staff, students, and community members. Sometimes responding to these constituencies takes all the time and energy that they have.
- Administrators often also see only their part of the institution. Those in student affairs may not be as interested in general education outcomes as the academic affairs

administrators. And, often those in academic affairs are not at all focused on what happens in the residence halls, the dining areas, or the athletic fields.

- Administrators often don't have the time or the trust to hear what is really being said across campus. They don't hear the rumors, the "talk", or the whispers. So, they may think that there is no need for changes even though the assessment data clearly demonstrates that there is.

So, how can these barriers be overcome? How can assessment professionals work with administrators to use and implement good change based on solid data? One way to do this is to provide data and the interpretation of that data to the administrator. Because administrators often come from different disciplinary areas, they may not be comfortable reading charges or graphs. Some like to see bullet points that are laid out in a logical and straightforward manner. Some like longer narratives to better understand the "story" that the data tell. Knowing how particular administrators like to see assessment results is essential so that evaluative information can be provided to them in a way that makes sense. It is also often very helpful to provide data to them in ways that also point to possible solutions to existing problems. By keeping the administration informed about what is happening, why it might be happening, and where the problems may arise, the assessment professional can help to promote positive change and improvement on campus.

Therefore, the change that can happen as a result of good quality assessment of student learning is essential. It can be transformative and, truly, meaningful. But, in order for this to happen, the changes that are made should be meaningful. The changes need to be based on real assessment data that is of good quality. And these changes should result in long-lasting improvements rather than just "shot in the dark" modifications that last only until the next "fad" hits.

This, of course, begs the question – "How?" How can assessment professionals do this? We are often middle level managers and sometimes we are the only one in our "office" or area. How can we lead the transformation of our entire institution? We must question everything. We must ask "why" when we see data. We have to ask the hard questions. Why are our graduates not graduating in time? Why do they score so low on tests of quantitative reasoning or critical thinking? Why don't we measure the quality of undergraduate student research? These questions will lead into discussions that can make a difference.

But again – "how?" How do we do this? I suggest the following ways to be in position to make a change:

- Get yourself on campus-wide committees.
- Get involved with strategic planning and implementation.
- Know your institutional budget – and budget managers. That often tells you more about institutional values than the mission or values statement ever will.
- Speak to your faculty senate, President's councils, or any possible group to share data, plans, information, etc. Make yourself available and open to sharing data.

- Tie assessment questions (and results) to strategic plans, institutional programs, and decision-making data points. This will often get the attention of those with decision-making power.
- Get involved at the state and national level, too! Become an evaluator for your regional accreditor, attend state, regional, and national meetings that focus on higher education.
- Read the Chronicle of Higher Education regularly and share with your faculty and administrators. Show that you have an understanding of the many different pressures that impact our institution.

It is also important that you are able to ask the important, crucial questions. These include:

- Are our students meeting our mission statements? Is our Mission Statement any good?
- Do faculty teach with the mission statement in mind? How do we know? What does this do for student learning?
- Are our students becoming more global? More able to solve problems? Better able to think critically?
- What do our constituents want to know? Why?
- How do we know? What do we know?

And, yes, it is hard. Change is difficult and it takes time. And, when you talk with your colleagues across campus, many will want to seek out change. So, you'll need a sense of humor and you'll need good supportive colleagues. Because in order to improve, assessment needs to make a difference. We need to measure learning in ways that allows us to identify what works and, more importantly, what isn't working. And, if we don't identify changes and then work to implement them, someone else will make those changes and we probably won't like the way that it is done. Few of us in higher education want more legislative or federal reporting requirements. But this is what will happen if we cannot demonstrate the importance of higher education.

C.S. Lewis has said; "it may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at the present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad" (p. 198-199). So, my fellow assessment professionals, let's get hatched!!

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About AALHE

The **Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE)** is an organization of practitioners interested in using effective assessment practice to document and improve student learning. As such, it aims to serve the needs of those in higher education for whom assessment is a tool to help them understand learning and develop processes for improving it.

AALHE began to take shape in late 2009. Formed in part because no other organization had emerged to replace the range of resources and opportunities for interaction that the Assessment Forum of the American Association for Higher Education had offered until it closed in 2005, AALHE's Founding Board of Directors launched this organization with the intention of providing much richer resources and a wider range of interactive opportunities than the Assessment Forum did, largely because much of its content and conversations will be online.

The organization has been designed to constitute a wide range of resources for all who are interested in the improvement of learning, from assessment directors who organize and manage programs, to faculty and Student Affairs professionals who use assessment strategies to understand their students' learning, to graduate students and others who are conducting research on the effectiveness of assessment processes and instruments, to institutional researchers who want to develop effective learning data systems. Through its largely virtual design, AALHE proposes to stimulate discussions both within the groups described above and within the larger community of assessment practitioners. AALHE intends to offer assessment practitioners a variety of ways to learn and share their thoughts about assessing and improving learning.

The annual AALHE Conference Proceedings will be published each year following the annual conference. Members whose proposals for a conference session have been accepted will be invited to submit a manuscript for the Conference Proceedings.

AALHE is housed at the University of Kentucky, which provides generous technical and staff support, but the organization remains an independently incorporated, member-funded, non-profit entity recognized by the Commonwealth of Kentucky.