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President's Letter

by Catherine Wehlburg

Welcome to the Summer edition of the AALHE Intersection! It was wonderful to see so many of you at our annual conference this year in Milwaukee. I hope that you already have the 2017 AALHE conference on your calendars: June 12 – 14, 2017. The 2017 Conference Committee has already begun work to plan for next year. As you may know, the 2016 conference registration had to be closed early because we filled up our venue – next year we'll be in a slightly larger location and that will allow for more of us to register.

Based on the annual AALHE membership survey and on reactions from those who attended the conference, it is clear that you want more networking, more interactions for professional development, and more information at all levels – including on advanced topics. So, AALHE is working to make certain that your conference experience is filled with opportunities to get to know others and to create partnerships and wonderful collegial opportunities.

In addition, AALHE is working to create a new program that we're calling Communities of Practice (CoP). These are small groups of AALHE members who are interested in exploring a particular topic. These CoPs will be more than a single-time webinar, and will vary in the length of time, the mode of delivery, and the topic. As these are developed, information will go out to our members so that you can choose the one(s) that fit with what you are interested in discovering in greater detail. Our first CoP was created by David Eubanks focusing on "Getting More out of Survey Data and 38 members signed up. We're excited to see what other CoPs are developed. Do you have an idea for a Community of Practice? Let us know at info@aalhe.org, and we'll work with you to develop it.

At this year's conference we also welcomed in our new President-Elect, Dr. Monica Stitt-Bergh (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa). She brings a wealth of knowledge of assessment and higher education as well as a passion and enthusiasm for AALHE. Dr. Tara Rose (University of Kentucky) is now Past-President of AALHE. Her experience will continue to guide AALHE as we grow and move into the future. We also welcome four new members to the AALHE Board: Dr. Andre Foisy (Virginia Tech), Dr. David Dirlam (Changing Wisdoms), Dr. Terri Flateby (Georgia Southern University), and Dr. Jane Marie Souza (University of Rochester).

In 2015, AALHE identified several strategic objectives to guide our organization. These are listed on the next page.

President's Letter

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AALHE Strategic Objectives

Secure fiscal, human, technological and facilities resources to assure the viability of the organization.

Provide professional development for advanced assessment practitioners in a variety of ways including face-to-face, virtual, print, and other.

Provide methods to further develop the next generation of assessment professionals, including graduate students, using a variety of techniques and presentation methods.

Expand the community of assessment practitioners with augmented opportunities and venues for dialogue and reflection on practice.

Lead and advocate for good and ethical assessment practices to external stakeholders including becoming a stronger voice at the local, national, and international levels for assessment in higher education.

We hope that you see these in action by the programs and new resources that AALHE continues to develop. At the heart of all of these are our members -- this is YOUR organization. What would you like to see developed? How would you like to be involved? Send any ideas or suggestions to us at info@aalhe.org.

Finally, AALHE continues to work toward being an advocate for good assessment in higher education. Both Tara Rose and I were invited to attend a June symposium on "Reimagining Higher Education" at Georgetown University, sponsored by the US Department of Education. We look forward to many continued discussions at the regional and national levels to ensure that higher education is always meaningfully measuring what we truly value. It will come as no surprise to any of you that higher education is facing many difficult challenges. Knowing what students are learning and improving higher education is in all of our best interests and AALHE is a crucial part of this ongoing conversation.

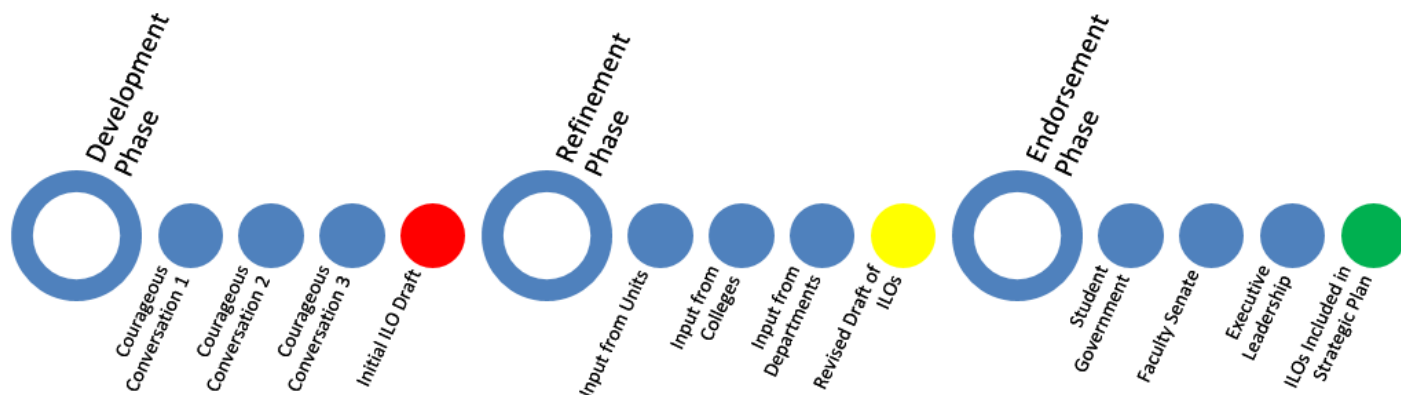
Thank you to all of you for your work in assessment and with AALHE!

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It Takes a Campus

by Jodie B. Ullman and Andrew R. Bodman

College and Universities nationwide are developing institutional learning outcomes (ILOs). The impetus for ILO development may come predominately from regional accrediting agencies. However, ILOs serve an important educational purpose beyond merely “checking a box” for accreditation. Properly framed, ILOs can lead to the development of an intentional and coherent educational experience for students by integrating curricular and co-curricular goals across a campus. When an educational community works together in support of a coherent learning experience for students, ILOs can serve a key role in transforming universities. The purpose of this paper is to outline the three stage process (development, refinement, and adoption) our university undertook in developing ILOs. This practical approach could be adapted to fit the culture of other institutions. Following a brief description of our campus assessment climate, this paper is structured in sections that correspond to our process. Within each section, we discuss our specific activities and tools as well as lessons learned.



Characteristics and assessment climate of campus. California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) is a large regional comprehensive master’s degree offering university in Southern California with approximately 18,000 undergraduates and 2,500 graduate students. When we began developing our ILOs, our regional accreditation agency was due to arrive for the site visit in a little more than a year. The majority of academic and co-curricular programs had assessment plans. Programs subject to specialized accreditation were quite sophisticated in their assessments. However, there was a considerable range in the quality of assessment in other programs.

Development. To facilitate the development of a culture of assessment, the Provost appointed an Assessment Working Party (AWP) with membership representing the entire university (academic, co-curricular, and non-academic units). Ex-officio members included the directors of institutional research and the faculty development center to provide resource support. The AWP was chaired by a faculty member on 100% reassigned time, who reported directly to the provost.

The AWP led a series of three all-university conversations we named “Courageous Conversations: The meaning of a CSUSB Education”. In all three Courageous Conversations (CC) we used an interactive approach, with small and large group activities. These conversations were spaced approximately a month apart. To facilitate our process, we used free web-based collaboration software TitanPad to allow the ongoing collection of feedback and reporting both during each conversation and in between campus conversations. A general TitanPad was posted to allow comments throughout the process so that anyone in the campus community could provide public feedback at any time.

Three All-University Courageous Conversations. At the outset, the campus community had very little knowledge about the purpose of ILOs, much less what they might look like or how to frame them.

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Therefore, our first conversation began with a discussion of the purpose and level of ILOs. Prior to this two-hour session, materials were sent to the entire campus including examples of ILOs from several universities, materials from the Degree Qualification Profile (Lumina), LEAP (AAC&U), and our regional accreditor (WASC). The intent of furnishing these resources was to provide the campus with guidance not only as to the development of our own ILOs, but also to guide the community in ways to think about their level and scope.

Approximately 75 faculty, staff, administrators, and students attended each of the conversations and were divided into groups. In the first conversation we began with an overview of our purpose, our goals, and a discussion of examples. Then an AWP member, using a TitanPad to record the key ideas, led each group in an exploration of the most important, broad goals for what we were seeking in our graduates. Each group developed goal statements and grouped them into like clusters, and then reported their goal clusters to the everyone. It was helpful to hear the similarities and differences in initial goals across groups. Group participants next selected their top three or four clusters and explained their choices once again to everyone. Participants truly enjoyed the process of thinking about and prioritizing what our graduates should know and be able to do. This first conversation may have been the most popular.

At the conclusion of this first conversation we had approximately 10 sets of detailed participant data and lists of top three to four goals. At the beginning we were focused solely on general ideas, knowing that the AWP could provide guidance on the appropriate assessment terminology as we moved through the process. The AWP then analyzed the responses; 45 goals emerged. These were posted on the web allowing for both ongoing ILO feedback and general update on our progress.

The 45 goals provided the basis for our second Courageous Conversation (CC2). We again used a small and large group activity format, employing collaborative Titanpad documents to develop and share ideas. Although there are many options for live feedback, we found Titanpads useful as they are free and web based. They work on most devices and allow simultaneous editing, multiple work pads, and in the full group activity portions it was easy to project the individual group Titanpads for the full group.

As a basis for CC2, we made a set of 45 laminated cards, each card with a goal, for each of the 12 tables. The participants at each table then used a Q sort methodology (see Cross, 2005 for a general example) to cluster the 45 goals developed in CC1 into up to eight broad goals. A Q sort method usually has participants sort items, in this case goals, into common clusters so that each item (goal) is grouped with other like items. All items are grouped and each item can be in only one group. So in this case each goal was grouped with similar other goals to create a broad outcome. For each goal the groups indicated what a CSUSB graduate should know and be able to do as a result of meeting that goal. As was the case during CC1, there were report-out sessions where the full group could view, listen, and contribute to the small group discussions. Groups were highly engaged in these activities and participants generally enjoyed the process. Although we allowed two hours, many felt this was too short. Pragmatically, most realized we could not extend the time allotted. As people became more invested in their "favorite goals", the dialogue became increasingly animated.

Between conversations we again reported the results to the campus community, and the AWP developed a draft set of eight outcomes from the 45 goals in CC2. This was the most difficult phase, because by this time even the AWP members were invested in particular goals and particular terminology. Also, these ILOs were for the entire university, so there was a bit of juggling back and forth between academic and co-curricular programs. The non-academic units were happy to participate but struggled a bit with the applicability of the ILOs to their particular unit (e.g. parking).

In the final CC group participants were given the draft set of eight ILOs and asked to discuss and respond to three questions: To what extent do these goals represent the meaning of a CSUSB education? What is well represented in the set of ILOs? What further recommendations did they have?

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As the process moved forward it became more difficult as people sensed the importance of ILOs and cared deeply that their favorite outcomes and specific wordings were included. There was a delicate balance between allowing time for discussion and moving forward. It was sometimes a challenge to discern when the discussion was simply about wordsmithing versus when important construct meaning required deeper dialogue. We allowed approximately a month for further feedback during which time the AWP worked to resolve differences and refine a coherent set of draft ILOs.

Student involvement in the ILO development. Although a few students had attended the CCs we felt that we needed more student input. To facilitate the gathering of additional student feedback, students staffed tables with large posters of the draft ILOs in high traffic areas of the campus and solicited oral and written comments. We received over 250 comments from students.

Survey of preliminary support. At the conclusion of this first stage, which lasted six months, the Office of Institutional Research sent the draft ILOs along with a questionnaire to the entire university community to measure the degree of support. We asked respondents to indicate whether they supported, conditionally supported, or did not support the ILOs as presented, or if respondents did not support the concept of ILOs. If respondents stated that they conditionally supported or did not support they were asked what was needed for them to support the ILOs. We had a good response rate and found that 71% (60% faculty) of the campus community supported and 22% (28% faculty) conditionally supported the ILOs as provided. We felt that these results provided ample justification for us to move forward and also provided terrific feedback for refinement. We included this draft of our ILOs together with the survey results in our WASC pre-site visit report.

Development Lessons learned. The virtue of the all-campus approach was that faculty, staff, students and administrators participated together. In any given group there were people representing a variety of roles and backgrounds. This mix was sometimes difficult. There was also the perception by some that the development of the ILOs was a top-down mandate. While we initially were engaged in the development because our accreditor was coming, more importantly, we were firmly committed to the virtues of ILOs in helping focus on our values for our students' education. We further recognized the opportunity to develop coherence and intentionality for students' educational experience. We had hoped that these all university conversations would spawn deeper discipline-based conversations. For the most part, these did not occur until much later in the process.

Refinement. Our survey indicated that there had been some unhappiness that the initial process felt rushed and too "top down". In the second phase, which took an additional six months, we took care to address these concerns. The virtue of the all-campus approach was that it focused attention and elevated the importance of the ILO development. A second virtue was that we all had different roles working together in small groups. A disadvantage was that there was a small, but vocal group who perceived that it was a top-down process and that the faculty voice was not strong enough. So during this refinement phase, strenuous efforts were made to facilitate and encourage unit discussions among colleges, academic departments and administrative units. The AWP was in constant contact with deans, department chairs, and unit heads. Every effort was made to incorporate and respond to all feedback.

Endorsement. Throughout the process, the Faculty Senate, Associated Students, Inc. (ASI, the student government) and the university president were fully informed. However, it was still necessary to ask all three groups for formal endorsement. The Faculty Senate received the final set of ILOs and voted unanimously to endorse. The President also endorsed them via letter. After presentations to the ASI Board, they also endorsed the ILOs unanimously. The campus was in the process of developing a new strategic plan and the ILOs were included as an objective ("Adopt the Institutional Learning Outcomes and use the assessment of them to guide continuous program improvement") in Goal 1 of the strategic plan: Student Success.

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Some closing thoughts. Listening, actively soliciting and responding to input, and above all maintaining transparency, were key elements in our process. As other institutions begin this process, we caution that not everyone will be happy with the timeline, the developmental approach, or even the final product. However, it is vital that everyone involved feels they have been heard and their perspectives acknowledged and whenever possible, incorporated. Given the penchant of faculty for infinite, open-ended discussion, timelines and flexible time limits are also important. Striking a balance between the need for ample discussion and the need to move forward, perhaps not linearly, perhaps not in leaps and bounds, is critical. Balance in the voices involved, in the timeline and in the type of activity also matters. Faculty tend to be vocal and we thrive on discussion, but this enthusiasm can inadvertently drown out other voices.

Development of meaningful all-university ILOs requires a variety of perspectives and insights. A vibrant process benefits from the engagement of colleagues with different roles within the university. This beneficial diversity of role and thought may create an interesting balance of competing interests and voices. Happily, despite, or perhaps because of this, the continued juggling required in development of ILOs led to a process that engaged the campus community and helped focus us on the mission of the university: educating students.

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Utilizing Technology in Data Collection

Derek C. Sauder, Kelly J. Foelber, Jessica N. Jacovidis, Dena A. Pastor

Like several other institutions of higher education, James Madison University (JMU) uses dedicated Assessment Days (Swing, 2011) to collect assessment data for its university-wide programs. JMU ensures student participation by placing a hold that prevents adding or dropping courses on a student's account if he or she does not attend. Because more than 3,500 students are tested on each of our two yearly Assessment Days, we have to take the logistics of this assessment seriously. Many different data collection formats have been piloted over the years, and we currently use three techniques that rely on recent technology to various degrees. In this paper, we share ideas of how such technology can be used to maximize the accuracy and efficiency of data collection, both for large-scale, university-wide assessment and for small-scale, course-specific assessment.

The Dark Ages. The most basic method of collecting data is to have students write their responses directly on paper copies of measures. In most situations, the responses then have to be entered by hand into a database, which has several disadvantages. First, no matter how careful an individual may be, there is always potential for human error. The person entering the data might not be able to decipher a response, may misread a response, may enter the response in the wrong location, or may simply make a typo. Further, hand entry takes time, which increases linearly with both the number of students and the number of items. For example, a 10-item assessment given to all 3,500 students on Assessment Day is already 35,000 items. Because the resource requirements and potential for error make hand entry infeasible in this situation, JMU relies on the data collection methods described below.

The Industrial Revolution. Scantrons (or generic optical mark readers) provide distinct advantages over hand entry of data. First, much like the assembly-line brought about during the Industrial Revolution, Scantrons are efficient. Relative to hand entry, a scanner more quickly enters data. All items are scanned in at once, resulting in decreased demands on time and allowing for tests with more items. Second, Scantrons are more environmentally friendly relative to having students respond directly on a multiple-page measure. When examinees respond on a paper copy of a measure, it cannot be used again; however, paper copies of tests can be reused across administrations when examinees provide their responses on a Scantron. Finally, the largest advantage is the decrease in human error during data entry. With the scanner reading in all responses, the chance for error is drastically decreased.

Scantrons do have their drawbacks. Whereas paper copies of tests may be reused, Scantron score sheets cannot. Further, Scantrons do not ensure error-free data. For example, if students accidentally skip a question, their subsequent responses may not align with the correct items. Similarly, students might accidentally provide multiple responses for an item or not fully erase an unintended response. Lastly, Scantrons limit the type of items that can be on a test to those with a selected response format (e.g., multiple-choice items, Likert scale responses). Scantrons cannot accommodate responses to short-answer or essay questions.

The Computer Age. Thirty years ago, on-campus computer labs were far scarcer than they are today. With the increase in computer availability, computer-based testing (CBT) has become increasingly popular. CBT has distinct advantages over any sort of pencil-and-paper collection. First, CBT allows for immediate data storage, and thus immediate access to data. Second, metadata information, such as time to complete items or number of mouse clicks per page, can easily be collected in most platforms. Third, CBT houses both the test questions and responses in the same system, requiring no outside paper use. Similarly, because tests are on the computer, they can easily be modified and do not have to be reprinted from year to year, which is not only green, but is advantageous during test development when items are in flux. Fourth, CBT can be used to administer a variety of items, including traditional multiple-choice, short-answer, essay, and even items including media components such as pictures or videos. Finally, CBT programs can force respondents to answer each item, resulting less often in missing data.

Using CBT for assessment requires the use of computer labs on campus and thus cooperation from administration and faculty, primarily due to issues with scheduling. Administrative cooperation is also im-

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portant because CBT generally requires some sort of survey platform, such as Qualtrics (2016) or SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey Inc., 2015). Although some survey platforms are free or of minimal cost to educational institutions, others are proprietary, resulting in a cost to the university. Additionally, a quick search for survey services will provide many different choices. Each survey platform has its own oddities and idiosyncrasies that may require some time for familiarization before assessment can be conducted. Similarly, not all survey platforms are capable of the same types of assessments. Thus, some amount of research needs to be done to determine which survey platform is appropriate for the needs of the university.

Even if there is a cost associated with survey platforms, some solutions are available. For example, a survey platform account can be shared across campus, spreading the cost across departments and allowing for wider access to the survey platform. Alternatively, if a university has the resources, a survey platform can be developed in-house, which allows both for customization and reduced cost. Most CBT for Assessment Day at JMU is done through Qualtrics, though we have also developed an in-house testing platform (Adaptex; Wise & Yang, 2003) to better serve the needs of the university at large.

Going Wireless. Aside from the traditional CBT administration, recent developments in technology provide additional methods for electronic data collection. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is switching over to tablet-based administration beginning in 2017 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). As another example, JMU uses Chromebooks to assess a subset of students each Assessment Day and has experimented with hand-held response devices. These alternative technologies have all of the benefits of CBT, but allow for testing outside of computer labs if the testing location has wireless internet access. Additionally, alternative technology is usually portable and can be readily shared across campus so that many different departments can benefit from their use.

A major drawback to alternative technology is the cost. While some forms are more expensive than others, most require a rather substantial front-end expense. If alternative technology is not utilized frequently, the cost may end up being prohibitive. Although one way to offset the cost is to “rent” out technology to other departments, not much money will be saved if heavy use causes rapid deterioration of the electronics (e.g., battery life, cosmetic appearance).

Rather than buying technology that students can use to supply their responses, why not use technology students already have? To improve our data collection practices, in upcoming years we will be piloting data collection via student smart phones. Perhaps the biggest advantage to this data collection format is that it’s free. Most students have a smart phone that is capable of connecting to wireless internet. Moreover, we anticipate that students will be more comfortable responding on their own phones than they would be with other devices. However, we are also aware of several potential drawbacks. First, while most students have a smart phone, not all do. Second, there may be issues with different operating systems responding differently to the survey platform we plan to utilize (i.e., Qualtrics). Lastly, battery life may be an issue. However, we are continually trying to find ways to increase efficiency and reduce costs associated with Assessment Day, and believe this may be another step in the right direction.

Conclusion. Each data collection method has its strengths and weakness, but we advocate more technologically-advanced methods of assessing students. The benefits of doing so include increased efficiency, more accurate data entry, instant access to data, and, of course, less environmental impact. As colleges and universities come to further rely on assessment data, more creative and efficient ways to assess students will surely arise. Do not be afraid to try new ideas.

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Transparency through Real-Time Data

by Stacy L. Sculthorp, Laurie Hinze, and Karen M. Mattison

In the 1990s, evolving business practices and new interest from learners, employers, accreditors, and the US Department of Education, sparked a movement in higher education encouraging institutions to implement quality assurance plans (Burke & Minassians, 2002; Welsh, Alexander & Dey, 2001). Since then, most institutions have adopted processes that address accountability needs, and many have also documented systems to regularly monitor and act on learner performance for program improvement. Capella University has uniformly addressed both assessment-for-improvement and assessment-for-accountability in a quality assurance plan that holds the university accountable not only to external stakeholders such as accreditors, but also to its learners. Capella University is an accredited, online, competency-based university headquartered in Minneapolis, MN. Capella's approach is to "map academic and professional standards to all of our degree programs and more fully support students as they progress through their programs." The mapping of standards in all Capella University offerings include connecting the most granular level of faculty evaluation of learner performance to course competencies, program outcomes, and internal and external standards. Capella's Fully Embedded Assessment Model (FEAM) "documents the relationships between scoring guides or rubric criteria used to assess student learning on specific outcomes and the specific course competencies or learning outcomes to which they are said to align" (Jankowski, 2011).

Through these commitments, Capella uses real-time data to meet the needs of assessment-for-improvement, assessment-for-accountability, and transparency for stakeholders in one system. From FEAM's mapping and documentation activities, masses of data are created and collected. Faculty and assessment specialists use a custom Excel pivot table that facilitates the viewing of multiple, connected data sets to filter and analyze performance data, including criterion-, competency-, and course-level faculty evaluations of learner performance. The use of the custom pivot table enables faculty and assessment users and other stakeholders to identify, recommend, and make improvements to various levels of academic content, program structure, or to the learner experience in response to real-time data.

The creation and use of Capella's real-time data system begins with curricular alignments in the course definition and design phases, where a curriculum specialist partners with subject-matter experts to define course learning goals, or competencies and aligns them with program-level goals and relevant internal and external standards. The resulting alignment maps are updated whenever there is a significant course revision in response to a change in the field of study, professional standards, or expectations by employers. For example, a program's alignment map was updated following a program review to ensure compliance with a specialized program association's standards update. During a review of data where learner performance of the aligned criteria fell below expected standards, faculty and external advisory board members worked together to improve the curriculum. Advisory board members provided field-specific examples to departmental faculty as they revised a collaborative assignment and scoring guide. Other departments modifying curricula in response to assessment data across the University have benefited from counsel of advisory boards, several of which have advocated successfully for increased focus on practical skills such as financial literacy and familiarity with legal practices in the workplace.

Faculty evaluate student performance in the learning management platform known as the *courseroom*. Faculty also judge the scoring criteria by noting problems or inconsistencies as they grade assignments. Review of scoring criteria often leads to course improvement ideas. For example, counseling faculty evaluating written communication skills of their students flagged a double-barreled scoring criterion that required faculty to evaluate both APA style and writing mechanics in a single criterion. Separating the elements enabled faculty to identify a specific deficiency responsible for students' lower levels in written communication. When systematic review of learner performance data in other programs showed that learners across the University were struggling with writing expectations, faculty developed a synchronous writing studio and writing workshops to help student improve their written communication skills.

Additional data points such as learner and faculty end-of-course evaluation results and faculty feedback comments are used in triangulating the data. For example, when learner performance on three assignment criteria in a capstone course failed to meet expectations, faculty reviewed end-of-course evaluations and

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identified workload as a barrier to students' ability to demonstrate their skills. As a result, some of the course content was moved to a different course in the program.

The same system of real-time data and tools that are used for improvement can be used for accountability. For example, one program's accreditation standards focus heavily on diversity competence. Reviewing performance data, faculty concluded that low levels in this area represented a lack of reflection and self-examination of learners' own diversity competence. As a result, faculty revised the diversity self-reflection assignments so learners were more comfortable exploring their own competencies and biases. Another program used the system to examine alignment maps for breadth and depth of content as part of the program review process. An analysis of the alignment map revealed a gap in technology instruction. The faculty improved the curriculum to meet internal and external standards by modifying course competencies and including technology assessments with scoring guides.

Thus far, it's clear that alignment mapping, reporting, and connecting alignment data to faculty evaluations of learner performance are powerful tools for internal and external assessment for accountability and improvement. But what about the learners? Learner performance data—the same data used by faculty for improvement to teaching—is translated into a learner view called a competency map (see an example in figure 1 on the next page). The competency map is a personalized dashboard that shows learners their academic progress on each competency. Learners can identify their strengths and focus their studies to improve in weaker areas. One learner remarked that the competency map's visual images and color codes helped her understand what to work on during the next assignment in the course. Another learner said he used the competency map to track his progress throughout the course. Faculty use learner competency maps to monitor changes over time, personalize feedback, and identify systemic challenges for learners during a course. Academic advisors use competency maps to collaborate with learners on setting long-term mastery goals and creating educational plans. For example, an advisor responding to a learner struggling with a writing competency reviewed the learner's competency map and directed the learner to the appropriate resources in the writing center where the student used available resources to improve his scores. After reviewing the maps, many advisors direct learners to their course instructors to have more substantive discussions about the scoring criteria, assignments, and course competencies. Learners also use their competency map images as supplements to transcripts and resumes to show potential employers their areas of mastery as judged by expert faculty.

Following and reporting on external requirements are sound ways to practice accountability, but true accountability includes transparency. Paul Ballard, quoting Burke and Minassians, suggests, "how well colleges and universities meet the needs of students, states, and society is the true test of accountability" (2013). By way of NILOA's Transparency Framework, Capella University has embraced accountability and transparency by publishing learning outcomes achievement data on a public Web site (www.CapellaResults.com). Learners, parents, employers, accreditors, policy makers, government officials—anyone with interest and access to the internet—can examine Capella's program level results and trends. Capella University has developed practices that use just one framework—our assessment cycle—as a quality assurance plan that addresses both assessment-for-improvement and assessment-for-accountability as we move from accountability to transparency.

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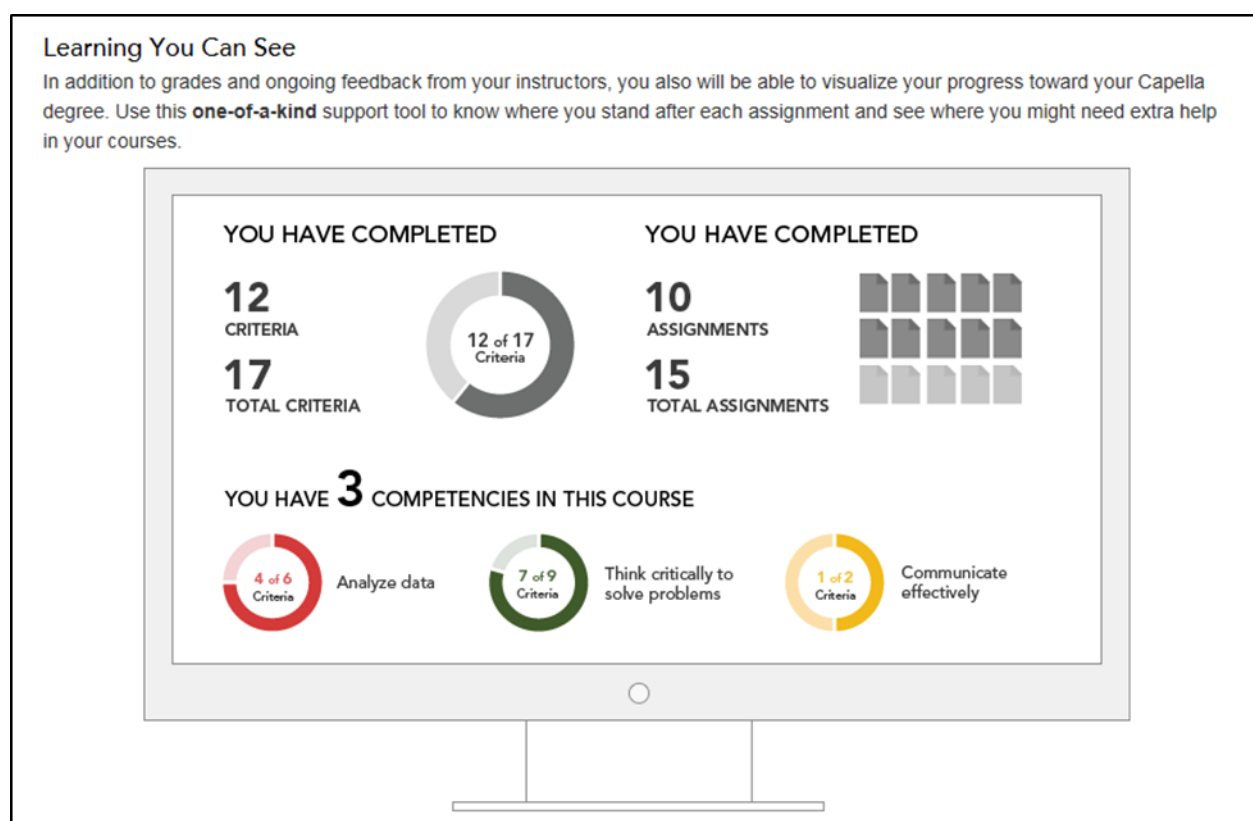


Figure 1. A student competency map

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Exit Surveys for Course Improvement

by Benjamin M. Drury

I recently began a new assessment strategy aimed at capturing student indirect measures of learning and attitudes towards assignments as a means to modify courses I teach. This tool is hugely beneficial to me for two reasons: (a) the ease of construction and (b) the ability to assess student attitudes regarding specific parts of the course including assignments, lectures, and overall attitudes toward the course. My reasons for collecting the data include capturing student learning experiences in an effort to improve learning experience and documenting data-driven decisions in an effort to support my tenure portfolio.

The “Exit Surveys” – as I call them – are a simple two-sided document that I create using a template taken from a sociological survey I created during graduate school (see Figure 1 on the next page). Many of the questions on the actual survey are a Likert-style questioning format aimed to assess students attitudes toward their personal growth in the following areas: (a) Learning Objectives for the course, (b) Morton College General Education Outcomes, and (c) specific assignments or new strategies tried during the semester to determine student views on the success or failure of these assignments as they were presented in the course. Aligning learning objectives with course material is a challenge itself, and this assessment method can give educators an indication of how students believe they are meeting the goals of the course. Additionally, at the beginning of the course, I ask students if there is anything that they believe does not belong in the course learning objectives, or is missing from it. To date, no amendments or modifications have been offered, perhaps because I conduct the bulk of these exit surveys in an introductory course. However, I believe offering students an opportunity to contribute to the construction of the course gives them ownership over their learning experience.

In my experience, I see three specific areas where this tool is effective as an educator: (a) improving assignments, (b) improving lectures, and (c) improving overall attitudes toward the course. Regarding improving assignments, one terrific example from last semester involves a student blog project. Students were assigned to groups and required to post discussions on various sociological topics of interest to them and then to present their completed product at the end of the semester. Throughout the semester, I had no problems. Few students came to my office with questions, and even fewer expressed discontent with the project as a whole. However, at the end of the semester when they were asked about their attitudes toward the assignment, a different story unfolded. Apparently, the students were dissatisfied with a multitude of the requirements of the assignment, but none more than the fact that their groups were assigned to them. In the future, I intend to give students the opportunity to select their own groups. Also, I intend to have individual meetings with the groups to monitor their success and provide more detailed feedback on their progress with the assignment. In terms of lectures, I have an internal debate going regarding whether or not to use a PowerPoint lecture-based approach to teaching, or including more active learning strategies and using the chalkboard in the room to write down important concepts. What I have found through these Exit Surveys is that students want a balance of both.

Results from three semesters of qualitative study indicate students both enjoy and believe they truly benefit from the active learning components, and they rely on the PowerPoints to emphasize specific concepts of importance to the students for exam purposes. Additionally, at the end of the Exit Survey, I ask students to reflect and report on a significant learning experience for them in the course. This qualitative component gives students the opportunity to share something that had a significant or transformative effect on their perspective on themselves or society, or both. What I find here is that students really enjoy the overall format of the course, and they particularly enjoy my availability. Typically during my office hours there is a line of students waiting to ask questions about the course and other topics. In other words, were it not for this question, I would have never realized the connection between student perceptions of value in the course and my willingness to connect with students on a more personal level. As a result of conducting this survey, I became more intimately aware that student success is deeply rooted in their sense of community and connection with their institution; and this is even truer at a Community College where I currently work.

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Overall, this Exit Survey strategy is an easy way to document student learning experiences as a means to continually improve instruction. Results from these surveys may also be used to document learning experiences for purposes of tenure promotion or support for pedagogical statements. Whatever your intended purpose, a simple exit survey can yield a wealth of knowledge about student learning, teaching effectiveness, and student perceptions of assignments.

Please indicate how you feel about the following statements concerning the GROUP PROJECT ASSIGNMENT:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. This was one of the most challenging assignments of my college career because many members of my group did not contribute to the project.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
2. The assignment made me hate blogging.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
3. I think this assignment was tremendously beneficial to me because it gave me a new skill set in blogging.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
4. This assignment gave me a deeper understanding of how to use sociology to view social issues.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Overall, I would recommend keeping the assignment for future courses because it was a great learning experience.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of instruction you received in this sociology course?

1 Very Satisfied 2 Somewhat Satisfied 3 Somewhat Dissatisfied 4 Very Dissatisfied

Please indicate how you feel about the following statements concerning the LECTURES:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I looked forward to attending every lecture.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
2. I believe the lectures adequately prepared me for the applied thinking (e.g., Theory-based) questions on the exam.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Many lectures seemed irrelevant to the topic making it challenging for me to find connections to the material.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
4. I can honestly say that I learned something new by the end of every class meeting I attended.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 1. Excerpt from the Exit Survey.

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Assessment, a Mouse, and a Cookie

By Nicole Lesher

You may be familiar with the contemporary classic children's book written by Laura Nueroff, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. This delightful book is a brilliantly illustrated tale about a little boy who gives a mouse a cookie. Eating the cookie leads to the mouse wanting a glass of milk, which leads to asking for a straw and so on until the ever-so-energized mouse eventually arrives back to wanting a cookie again, while the boy is left exhausted. Over years of doing assessment for my university, I have often thought of this story. Assessment for us, just as in the story, has turned out to be quite circular, typically taking us right back to where we started.

Our university assessment program includes the use of faculty-developed, course-embedded signature assignments to assess program learning outcome competencies. These assignments are evaluated using four-point, analytic rubrics (modified AAC&U VALUE rubrics developed by faculty). Curriculum maps have been developed for each program to identify where competencies are introduced, reinforced and mastered. Courses are selected in the beginning and at the end of each program to allow for both formative and summative assessment. Assignments or artifacts are embedded in these courses to gather data to assess learning outcomes. Throughout each program, faculty are tasked with assessing artifacts within their courses. Assessment data are collected across all programs and evaluated in accordance with our assessment calendar.

An assessment team made up of faculty from each program met to assess the quantitative reasoning core competency in undergraduate programs. We assembled artifacts (with student names redacted) and assessed them ourselves - the "cookie." While faculty had already collected and assessed artifacts across programs, participating in actual assessment and using the rubric was an excellent way to immerse the team into the process. Initially, the development exercise was created to expose the team to the rubric and the types of assignments to assess, but instead became an integral part of the assessment process.

The AAC&U rubric was developed by teams of faculty and other educational professionals from over a hundred higher education institutions engaged over many months. Even so, the quantitative reasoning results were surprising due to a number of artifacts that could not be adequately assessed by the quantitative reasoning rubric used. In these cases, the assignments either did not effectively measure the outcome or the instructions needed to be modified to enable sufficient measurement. For example, one assignment required students to examine the termination of marriage, including divorce, annulment and issues of child custody and support. Students were also required to evaluate the division and allocation of property, as well as the tax implications of a divorce and to examine miscellaneous, but important issues tied to the practice of family law. These issues included the legal rights of women and the status of children, as well as the interplay between torts and other aspects of law. Having three parts to the assignment made this extremely complex for assessment purposes. Students did need to apply rules to a factual scenario, leading to a conclusion, and they were required to use math skills and the communication of quantitative information. However, the rubric is designed to assign ratings to the traits *Interpretation, Representation, Calculation, Application/Analysis, and Communication*. To assess the assignment was difficult, since the rubric required the use of data presented in graphs and/or the presentation of mathematical information, and the assignment did not.

In this assignment, mathematical results were used only minimally. The focus in the assignment is on applying the rule and while quantitative data is used in the question, it did not call for real interpretation or analysis of data. Therefore, there was a mismatch between what the assignment was asking for and what we needed to measure. In another assignment, students were instructed to research a specific aspect of social psychology and write an in-depth explanation of the perspective and how it affects groups and individuals. However, the actual student work did not provide a sufficient amount of quantitative evidence to support the student's thesis and the data used did not strongly connect the purpose of the work. With more specific instructions on what is being measured, this assignment could have been used to measure quantitative reasoning.

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This is why I had the team assess the assignments rather than just evaluate instructions and the rubric. The practice of actually reviewing multiple assignment instructions and assessing multiple assignments with the rubric is the only way to accurately determine if the assignment can adequately measure the outcome. Doing this allowed the team to view multiple students' interpretations of the assignment instructions, which allowed us to determine if the instructions were sufficient. In some cases, they were not.

The findings from the assessment of the embedded signature assignments led to many discussions about just what it was we were trying to measure. The energy of the committee, much like that of the mouse, increased as we moved further into our analysis. As posited by Suskie (2009), "without clear goals, both our students' learning experiences and our assessment of them are ambiguous and unsatisfactory. Our students don't know what to learn, and we don't know what to assess" p.116. This assessment made us wonder if we needed to better define the learning outcomes to be specific enough to effectively reflect the desired skills for the programs. This brought us right back to the beginning of the assessment cycle.

We went to the academic deans and faculty and asked them what they valued in quantitative reasoning. We asked them to evaluate our accreditor's definition of quantitative reasoning: "The ability to apply mathematical concepts to the interpretation and analysis of quantitative information in order to solve a wide range of problems, from those arising in pure and applied research to everyday issues and questions. It may include such dimensions as ability to apply math skills, judge reasonableness, communicate quantitative information, and recognize the limits of mathematical or statistical methods" (WASC Accreditation Handbook, 2013 Revised).

They were also tasked with evaluating the university's institutional learning outcome for quantitative reasoning: "Apply the use of logic, numbers and/or mathematics to a scientific system of inquiry from which to draw logical conclusions." They were challenged to think about whether this outcome truly reflected what they want our graduates to be able to do when they complete their programs. During these discussions, faculty expressed a concern about teaching students to determine what is critical to solving a problem. Conversations focused on looking for skills essential for each program, as they may vary based on the university's different offerings.

These discussions led to revisions of program learning outcomes. Once we were able to identify clearer expectations in each program, it was time to go back to the quantitative reasoning signature assignments and make revisions so they could be adequately measured. With high energy, the team began evaluating all of our curriculum maps which identify the assignments for each program. We then collected all assignment instructions from course syllabi. We examined these instructions along with the rubric. In some cases, the assignment instructions simply needed to be refined so that students would know how they were being assessed. However, in other cases, entirely new assignments were needed so that the learning outcome could be effectively measured. This was a major challenge since some of the courses identified didn't have appropriate assignments for assessment.

As in the story, this brought us to yet another task: re-evaluating the rubric, making modifications and then informing faculty on how to use the new rubric. As described by McClendon and Ho (2016), "the use of rubrics in the curriculum is valuable not only because of their utility in measuring learning outcome and in communicating expectations of these outcomes, but also because of their design as a reliable, valid instrument for assessment." Therefore, having faculty developed rubrics designed to communicate the revised expectations for the outcomes was critical to our ability to produce reliable assessment results p. 8 (McClendon and Ho 2016). The new quantitative reasoning rubric is shown below.

During this process, we realized that while the rubric was available to the students, it was not attached to the actual assignment so students were unlikely to look at it when completing their work. By simply including the rubric with the assignment, the students are able to clearly see what they are being assessed on.

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This, combined with more detailed instructions within the assignments, has dramatically improved our process. We also identified the need to create clear guidelines and train faculty on how to create signature assignments that enable the measurement of learning outcomes.

So, like the mouse, we moved from task to task and, in the end, we modified our learning outcomes, signature assignments and the assessment rubric, ending up right back where we started at assessment (the cookie). The moral of this tale is assessment often takes you on an adventure that ends up right back where you started, but improvement happens every step of the way. I must admit that, like the boy in the story, I felt exhausted and a little discouraged at having to go round and round to obtain valid results. However, the team forged ahead from task to task with high energy and, like the mouse, surprisingly was hungry for another cookie in the end.

	Commendable 4	Proficient 3	Marginal 2	Not Proficient 1
Interpretation <i>Ability to explain information presented in mathematical forms (e.g., equations, graphs, diagrams, tables, words)</i>	Provides accurate explanations of information presented in mathematical forms. Makes appropriate inferences based on that information. <i>For example, accurately explains the trend data shown in a graph and makes reasonable predictions regarding what the data suggest about future events.</i>	Provides accurate explanations of information presented in mathematical forms. <i>For instance, accurately explains the trend data shown in a graph.</i>	Provides somewhat accurate explanations of information presented in mathematical forms, but occasionally makes minor errors related to computations or units. <i>For instance, accurately explains trend data shown in a graph, but may miscalculate the slope of the trend line.</i>	Attempts to explain information presented in mathematical forms, but draws incorrect conclusions about what the information means. <i>For example, attempts to explain the trend data shown in a graph, but will frequently misinterpret the nature of that trend, perhaps by confusing positive and negative trends.</i>
Representation <i>Ability to convert relevant information into various mathematical forms (e.g., equations, graphs, diagrams, tables, words)</i>	Skillfully converts relevant information into an insightful mathematical portrayal in a way that contributes to a further or deeper understanding.	Competently converts relevant information into an appropriate and desired mathematical portrayal.	Completes conversion of information but resulting mathematical portrayal is only partially appropriate or accurate.	Completes conversion of information but resulting mathematical portrayal is inappropriate or inaccurate.
Calculation	Calculations attempted are essentially all successful and sufficiently comprehensive to solve the problem. Calculations are also presented elegantly (clearly, concisely, etc.)	Calculations attempted are essentially all successful and sufficiently comprehensive to solve the problem.	Calculations attempted are either unsuccessful or represent only a portion of the calculations required to comprehensively solve the problem.	Calculations are attempted but are both unsuccessful and are not comprehensive.

Figure 1. Revised Rubric Excerpt

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Negotiating Flexibility and Structure

by Laura Ariovich, Zornitsa Georgieva, and Sadé A. Walker

Thomas Angelo wrote in the 1990s that “we need to find better ways to embrace assessment contraries.” He was referring to the enduring tension between improvement and accountability, but also to “other ‘assessment contraries,’ such as quantitative vs. qualitative, and locally developed vs. standardized” (Angelo, 1995, p.11; see also Ewell, 2009). As assessment practitioners who have helped build, implement, and evaluate a large-scale assessment process at Prince George’s Community College (PGCC), we would like to bring to the fore a related ‘assessment contrary,’ namely the tension between flexibility and structure. This tension emerges and resurfaces in every aspect of the assessment process, from design and data collection to discussion and use of assessment results. Our experience has taught us that remaining aware of this tension, and asking ourselves at every turn whether we are striking the right balance, is crucial for an effective and meaningful assessment process.

In 2012, Prince George’s Community College launched a large-scale assessment process that we call “All-in-One” (Richman & Ariovich, 2013). Our approach to assessing student learning stems from a small set of core principles: 1. We believe that assessment should be faculty driven, and thus have relied on an extensive network of faculty to shepherd assessment at the department, division, and institutional levels; 2. We are advocates of “authentic assessment” and collect data on student learning through locally developed instruments deployed to evaluate students in real classroom work; 3. We strive for integrated assessment, which we accomplish by connecting and assessing simultaneously course outcomes, program outcomes, and general education outcomes; and 4. We believe in collecting student-level data, which can then be used to improve the actual courses in which data were collected. Following these principles, we have expanded from thirteen courses assessed in spring 2012 to fifty-three in 2015, with every general education and program outcome assessed throughout the cycle, often more than once.

As we have grown from an incipient to a fully developed and now mature assessment process, we have been challenged to accommodate the calls for greater flexibility with the need to preserve a certain degree of structure. Assessment scholars have found strong arguments for both flexibility and structure. Banta and Blaich (2011), for example, remind us that “assessment is a learning process—that is, it takes trial and error for institutions to figure out what and how to assess” (p.26). As such, assessment requires flexibility and openness from everyone involved, including students, faculty, and administrators. Furthermore, the need for flexibility is rooted in the translation of general assessment frameworks to local conditions. You need to put your own “stamp” on general assessment models in order to create a local meaning for assessment (Angelo, 1995, p.11). However, as Angelo and others have emphasized, effective assessment requires a degree of structure “so that energies and resources aren’t dissipated in myriad efforts that add up to little or no change” (Angelo, 1999, p.61). In other words, without agreement on “shared visions and goals” and “shared language and concepts”—all of which amount to building common structures—it is not possible for practitioners to “collaborate productively” (p. 62).

How can the tension between flexibility and structure be negotiated? One way to examine the “flexibility versus structure” tension is to engage in a critical examination of the assessment process itself. The need for assessing the assessment process is not new. In the same article where he wrote about “embracing assessment contraries,” Angelo called for “reassessing the assessment,” e.g., for taking a critical look at how we do assessment (Angelo, 1995). As we neared the end of the first four-year cycle of our assessment process, we faced a unique opportunity to engage in a systematic examination of our assessment practice and asked ourselves: Were we working at an optimum balance between flexibility and structure? What was working well and what were the challenges that we faced? Could those challenges be addressed through introducing more flexibility or structure into the process?

The guiding principle in our “assessment of the assessment” was to capture faculty’s views and experiences. It is well recognized in the assessment world that faculty participation and engagement are critical for effective and meaningful assessment (Braskamp & Engberg, 2014). At the time of our evaluation, faculty had worked on the assessment process for eight semesters, coinciding with the completion of a full cycle, and we believed that their experiences and insights would be invaluable going forward. We went into this

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process with an open mind and conveyed to participants that we wanted to hear their honest opinions, the good, the bad, and the ugly about the process currently in place. Their feedback guided our decisions about how the current process should be retooled, with the goal of making it more meaningful to those involved while continuing to improve teaching and learning.

The evaluation consisted of a four-pronged approach. First we administered a survey to examine faculty's views about their knowledge of assessment, involvement in the process, availability of support, use of assessment data, and the impact of assessment (see excerpt from survey). There were 142 survey respondents, the overwhelming majority of whom were full-time faculty. The survey was followed by conversations with department chairs, which centered on the resources needed to conduct assessment, their communication with colleagues about the process, and their efforts to facilitate the discussion and use of data during departmental meetings. We also conducted twelve in-depth interviews with faculty with different roles in the assessment process in order to examine their perspectives of the strengths and weaknesses of our assessment system (see excerpt from interview protocol). Once the interview comments were analyzed using qualitative research software and a report was developed, we shared the findings with a faculty taskforce. The taskforce provided valuable input and assisted in developing recommendations and making improvements to our process.

Our examination revealed a need to shift the structure-flexibility balance. Faculty wanted greater flexibility in certain areas of the process and more structure in others. Interviewed faculty expressed a need to have greater flexibility when it came to our procedures and the timeline for reassessment. In their view, the existing requirements embedded in the process created expectations for changes in teaching practices to happen fast and show an impact too quickly. This was neither practical nor realistic, and posed the risk of creating an environment conducive to "assessment for assessment's sake." As one faculty member explained, having just three semesters to assess, develop and implement an action plan, and then reassess was not enough time to introduce meaningful changes:

I just don't feel like that's enough time to implement, say if we needed to do professional development for instructors around you know effective teaching and strategies for that course... That action plan, once we put it in place it's not like we automatically go back and, you know, have time to go and implement everything we want to implement within that semester.

To make the assessment process more valuable for faculty, we extended the cycle from four years to five. A longer cycle allowed for departments to have additional flexibility in crafting their own timeline for action plan implementation and reassessment. Further, we also introduced greater flexibility in the rationale for reassessment. Beyond creating action plans directly focused on improving student achievement of learning outcomes, faculty may design an action plan focused on improving assessment tools, ensuring consistency in student performance across semesters, or raising standards.

While there are voices in higher education that speak against assessment of student learning being "one-size fits all" and call for less prescriptive models, our participants asked for more structure in some aspects of the process. Data analysis, understanding, and acting upon results were areas where faculty wanted a more structured approach. They identified these aspects as weaknesses and felt they were lacking the necessary skills and training to be left to their own devices. In the survey, faculty were asked to rate their knowledge about different assessment activities, with 1 being "very knowledgeable" and 5 being "not knowledgeable at all." The survey data showed a big contrast in how knowledgeable faculty felt about different assessment tasks. For example, the majority of faculty rated their knowledge about using assessment tools and connecting different levels of outcomes at the highest scores (1 or 2). However, less than half of the faculty rated their knowledge at the highest scores when it came to using data to develop an action plan (see figure 1 on the following page).

The in-depth interviews confirmed the survey results related to faculty's perceptions about using assessment data. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that faculty looked for guidance in a more prescriptive

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way when interpreting and using assessment results. As one faculty member stated, “I know people need assistance, I know I do in analyzing and understanding the data and what it means.” Using data has often been identified as an obstacle for other institutions (Blaich & Wise, 2011) and has remained a challenge for us as well.

In the past, we had organized hands-on workshops with faculty devoted to the exploration of assessment data. In these workshops, we distributed graphs from previous assessments and we supported faculty by providing guiding questions and feedback. Faculty were asked to consider what the data were telling about student performance in the assessments, but also to reflect on the validity of the assessment instruments used, and the consistency in how they were applied. The design of the workshops was appropriate, but they fell short of fostering full faculty ownership of the data. These were isolated instances with small groups of faculty and little or no follow-up. Realizing that more structure was needed in this area, we decided to implement a more systematic and concerted approach. Going forward, we will build on the model of the workshops by meeting with each department individually on a semester basis to facilitate the interpretation and analysis of data and the adoption of meaningful interventions informed by assessment results.

These were two areas where the evaluation of our assessment process resulted in new accommodations in the balance between flexibility and structure. Through the evaluation of the process, we have learned that the flexibility-structure balance is fluid and may change as the assessment process evolves. The need for embedding greater flexibility or structure in the assessment process depends on the faculty’s skills, training, and experience with assessment. At the beginning of our process, there was a need to have a more structured approach as many were learning both about assessment in general and our local procedures. As the assessment process developed and faculty gained greater experience, they felt prepared to make more decisions. At the same time they looked for more direction about utilizing the assessment data. Almost like the training wheels on a bicycle, less support is needed as the biker learns to keep their balance. However, regular “check-ins” are still necessary to determine when and where in the assessment process we can remove the “training wheels.”

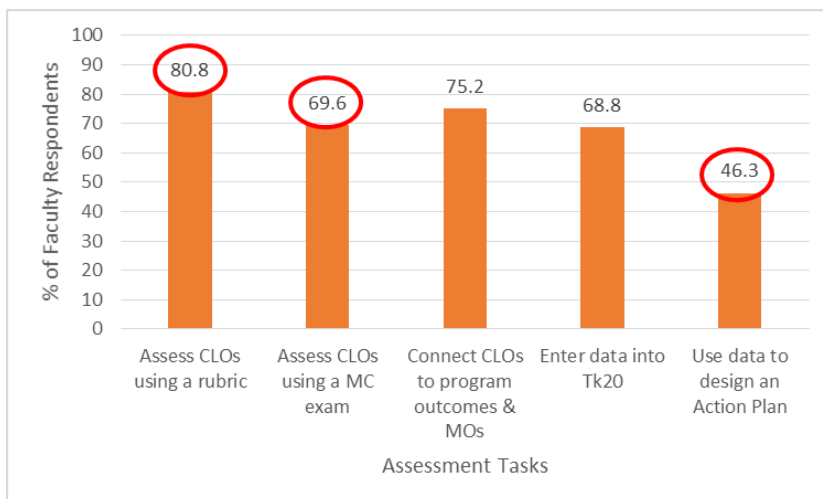


Figure 1. Item “Knows How to do Assessment Tasks” (% in two highest levels)

Linked Resources

[Assessment of Assessment Interview Protocol](#)

[Assessment of SLOA Process Survey](#)

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Q&A with Barbara Johnson

By Josie Welsh

Barbara J. Johnson, Ph.D., joined the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in 2013 as a Vice President for Accreditation Relations. Her previous professional experience includes student affairs administration, community college and adult education, marketing research and consultation in both higher education and corporate environments, and tenured faculty positions in higher education. Through her extensive experience in various roles as an administrator and faculty member, she possesses a wealth of experience with program evaluation and assessment, specialized accreditation, and institutional effectiveness. I interviewed her by email.

Q: HLC published revised criteria for accreditation in 2013. As you reviewed team reports since that time, what are some areas of emphasis that you found to be problematic for institutions regarding assessment of student learning?

A: Since HLC implemented new criteria in January 2013, we have reviewed the concerns identified by teams across several areas. For the 2014-15 academic year, a review of comprehensive evaluation team reports found assessment of student learning was the most cited core component for institutions in the HLC region with over 40% of institutions not fully meeting this core component. Key themes delineated in team reports relative to assessment can be categorized into five areas of concern: institutional culture, planning/process, outcomes, data, and analysis. The most common issues surround planning/process; specifically, institutions are routinely cited for the absence of a comprehensive or systematic assessment process, coupled with limited or non-existent, tangible evidence demonstrating utilization of data to improve student learning. It is also worth noting the scope of projects institutions voluntarily choose to work on in HLC's elective institution improvement program, the Assessment Academy, can similarly be categorized into the same five clusters, demonstrating institutions understand the need for improvement in these areas.

Q: Could you expand on some of the concerns teams have identified as problem areas for institutions as it relates to assessment of student learning?

A: As you might suspect, some of the other major challenges include: limited or lack of faculty involvement, unclear linkages between budgeting, planning, and assessment institution-wide, and creation of new assessment plans without enough time for full implementation. It typically takes four years to go through a full cycle in which an institution can demonstrate and provide documentation of continuous improvement. When institutions attempt to do something two years before their reaffirmation it is unlikely they will have sufficient evidence of continuous improvement.

Other areas of concern include co-curricular activities not being considered or accounted for in the assessment process or cycle and the lack of a relationship between course objectives and program objectives or college level assessment (gen ed). I would also like to mention other core components related to assessment of student learning include program review, linkage of assessment to budgeting and planning processes, and utilization of data to improve student persistence and completion. The related core components build on and inform a comprehensive assessment process.

Q: Great segue. Other than assessment of student learning, which core components do institutions find problematic?

A: The other core components institutions find challenging include the institution's resource base, systematic and integrated planning, program quality, and persistence and completion. With respect to financial resources, the fiscal base at the institution is diminished often with an increasing debt load, lack of reserves and poor fiscal management.

As mentioned previously, systematic and integrated planning should encompass assessment of student learning and institutional operations in the planning and budgeting process. However, institutions are often

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unable to provide documentation to show how data have been used to make improvements or inform decisions. When it comes to program quality the program review process has often not been completed or has not been fully implemented.

Similar to assessment of student learning, what we often see with persistence and completion is a lack of data and/or evidence relative to how data are used to make improvements relative to persistence and completion.

Q: Tell us about the engagement of faculty in assessment of student learning.

A: Generally, faculty are engaged in some form of assessment, so we want to acknowledge their current efforts while discussing how to enhance and formalize what they are doing. It is important to help faculty understand assessment is not being done just because an accreditation visit is approaching, but to focus on improving student learning as a priority for the institution. Faculty need to be able to point to evidence of their own that demonstrates something positive resulted because of their contributions, as that will bring about commitment to assessment of student learning.

Engaging faculty involves a sustained dialogue about the purpose of assessment and helping faculty to view improvement of student learning as a benefit to students first and foremost. The pedagogy utilized may be enhanced due to the focus on assessment of student learning. Finally, the institution benefits from improved student learning and engaged faculty and students in the learning process. Thus, accreditation can be viewed as a by-product of faculty doing their job.

Q: In 2013, HLC moved to new methods to evaluate the Criteria for Accreditation, could you talk about the new evaluations teams utilize?

A: Teams make a determination on all 21-core components of the Criteria, which is different than how the criteria were evaluated prior to 2013. The team determinations provide three judgments teams can make with regard to the core component: met, met with concerns, not met.

A team may determine a core component is “Met” when they are able to demonstrate an institution is in compliance with the expectations of the core component. Even with a determination of “met,” teams can note opportunities for improvement; these are not “concerns” if the institution is aware of these opportunities, has identified the need for improvement in their documents, and has a plan or process to implement to improve upon the area for improvement.

A team determines that a core component is “Met with Concerns” when an issue is identified that must be improved in order to be in full compliance with the expectations for the core component. Teams may also express “concerns” when the institution is not aware of the issues identified, has no plans or processes to implement any improvements, or may not possess the capacity or inclination to improve.

When a team determines a core component is “Not Met” it does so because of an inability to demonstrate the institution is in compliance or because the team identifies a systemic problem. As a side note, if one of the core components for the Criterion is not met or met with concerns, then the entire Criterion is not met or met with concerns, respectively.

Q: Discuss the role of peer reviewers and benefits to serving in the peer corps.

Our diverse group of peer reviewers represents different functional areas and institutional types, reflecting the makeup of our membership. With their primary responsibility being the certification of organizational quality and improvement, they are essential to the work of the Commission in evaluating institutions.

Benefits of joining the peer corps include professional development and ongoing opportunities to learn

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from others with different perspectives, values, and knowledge. Consult the following website for additional information: <https://www.hlcommission.org/Peer-Review/peer-reviewer-application.html>.

Individuals interested in serving on the peer corps can submit a letter of application, CV/Resume', and two references by the spring deadline for consideration. New peer reviewers must attend an on-site training in the fall with supplemental training opportunities provided throughout the year.

Q: Any final thoughts you would like to share?

A: At HLC, we are genuinely invested in the evaluation of the institution's performance and its efforts to improve, and to us, assessment of student learning represents just one part of overall institutional effectiveness. Commitment to quality begins with the leadership of the institution and the value that is placed on continuous improvement. The value placed on assessment efforts ought to be demonstrated regularly through the consistent and clear communication of expectations and processes, proper allocation of resources, participation of a cross-section of stakeholders in assessment work, and engagement of individuals in dialogue that allows for multiple opportunities to contribute and share promising practices.