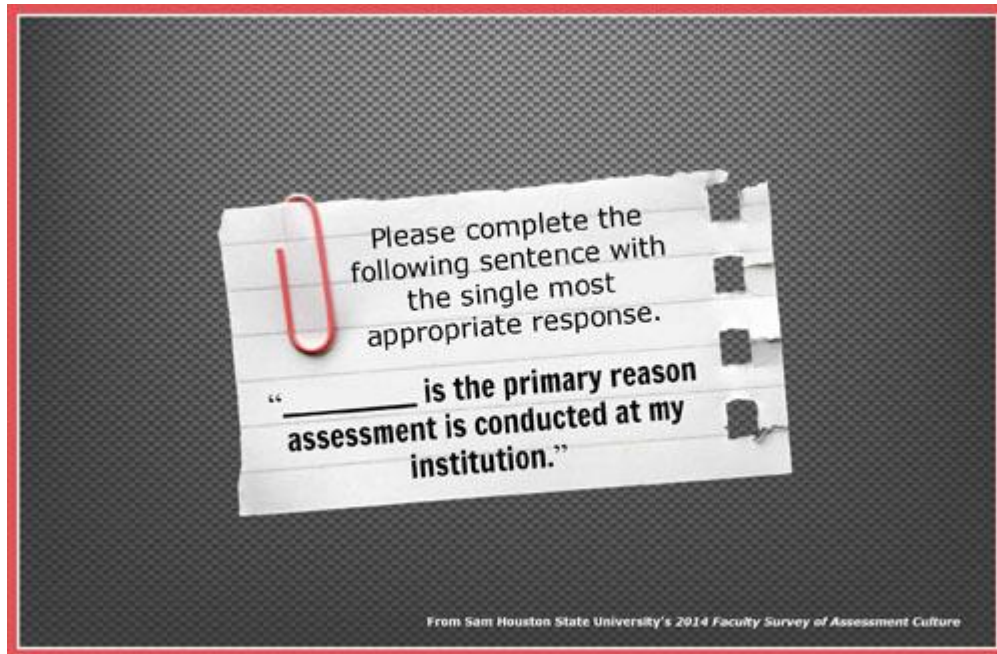


# The Single Most Appropriate Response

April 16, 2014 by Jean Downs

If you were asked to truthfully answer the following question, what would your response be?

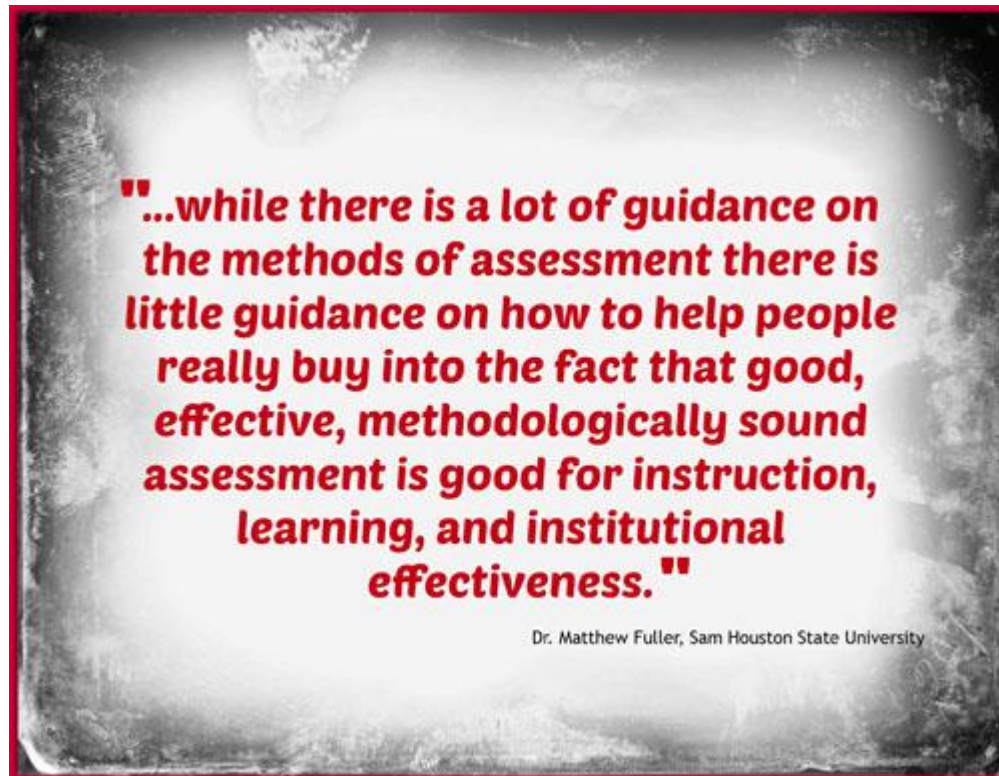


The above question is “Question #4” on Dr. Matt Fuller’s [2014 Faculty Survey of Academic Culture](#) , disseminated by Sam Houston State University this Spring. Today I submitted a list of our institution’s faculty email addresses to Dr. Fuller to participate in the survey, and I can’t wait to see our results!

Dr. Fuller tells me that the infamous “Question 4” (\_\_\_\_\_ *is the primary reason that assessment is conducted at my institution*) *is a very thought provoking question for assessment administrators, and has resulted in cross-campus dialogues about the core purpose of assessment on their campuses. I remember staring at this very question for quite some time before answering it for the 2013 Administrators Survey of Assessment Culture. Our institution was scrambling to restructure our assessment processes before an upcoming accreditation visit. I knew why we should be conducting comprehensive assessment of student learning, but it didn’t currently match the reality of our current culture. So I answered truthfully, and joined the 49% of respondents who answered that accountability or accreditation is the primary reason assessment is conducted at my institution.*

The idea for Dr. Fuller’s culture of assessment research arose from a scenario that may be quite familiar to those of you who suddenly found yourselves in the role of Chair of the Assessment Committee, Director of Assessment, or Assessment Coordinator. He noticed that the real “meat” of most books on assessment have been methodological treatments or demonstrations of how

other institutions implement assessment, which he observed really only tell us one piece about how to instill a culture of assessment. What he had difficulty finding was information on the politics and psychology of assessment: What is the psychology behind helping a faculty member arrive at the conclusion that assessment is worthwhile? What about the politics or symbols associated with advancing assessment actually promotes and supports assessment as an institutional way of thought?



Dr. Fuller finally concluded that for all the talk about securing faculty buy-in, there has been relatively little empirical evidence about faculty perspectives on cultures of assessment. His research advisory committee confirmed his instincts that there seemed to be “something missing” in the literature.

In search of the pieces to the “something missing” puzzle, I attended the New Mexico Higher Education Assessment and Retention Conference ( [NMHEAR](#) ) in 2013, and was privileged to participate in a pre-conference workshop with George Kuh, the Chancellor's Professor Emeritus and Director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment ( [NILOA](#) ). Dr. Kuh talked in depth about his well-known research on the “high impact educational practices,” which promote deep integrative learning and student retention on college campuses. Kuh also pondered about how we could promote a culture where assessment is integral to teaching and learning, not an add-on “exo-skeleton” (Here Kuh displayed a cartoon of an arthropod with an exo-skeleton. Can't you just envision it? Drones getting armored up “do” assessment?).

Dr. Kuh, Dr. Fuller, and countless other champions of assessment are engaged in work tied to central common themes: they are investigating the shared characteristics that underlie the “high impact practices” of an academic culture engaged in – and committed to – assessment. The Association for Assessment of Learning in Higher Education ( [AALHE](#) ) is one of those champions, and designed this blog theme to promote informal dialogue on the topic ‘ *Engaging the Institution in Assessment .* ’ Specifically, I plan to devote future posts to content that promotes discussion around the shared challenges faced by anyone – at any level – participating in assessment:

- What are the specific factors that contribute to full engagement and participation in institutional assessment?
- How does different ‘messaging’ about assessment impact the level of faculty and staff engagement in assessment for learning? The ability for faculty to *own* assessment as a process central to teaching, learning, and student interactions (rather than a function of accreditation, accountability, or management)?
- What organizational structures promote success in using learning outcomes data to inform and improve teaching, learning, and program curricula?
- How do institutions build an infrastructure to support assessment of e-learning outcomes?
- How can we overcome the obstacles to fuller faculty and staff involvement in learning outcomes assessment?

### **Final Assessment**

What was your answer to the Question 4? If you are an assessment administrator, do you need to refine your message about the purpose of assessment? If you are faculty, will you talk to your assessment administrator or institutional administrators about the messages you are receiving about the purpose of assessment?

Jump in and join the dialogue!

—Jean

### **For Further Reading**

Fuller, M. B. & Skidmore, S. T. (2014). [Frequency distributions for 2013 Administrators Survey of Assessment Culture](#) . Huntsville, TX, USA: Sam Houston State University.

Hutchings, P. (2010, April). [Opening doors to faculty involvement in assessment](#) (NILOA Occasional Paper No.4). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.

Kuh, G. D. (2008). [High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter](#) . Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Maki, P (2010). *Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment Across the Institution*. Stylus Publishing: Sterling, VA.

Sam Houston State University: [Surveys of Assessment Culture](#)