

NILOA Track Keynote

Past as Prologue: Advancing the Assessment Agenda by Avoiding Pitfalls of Our Own Making

Assessment Institute
October 17, 2016



NILOA

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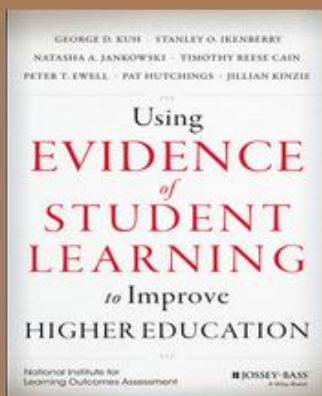
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Our August newsletter featuring NILOA updates, news, and upcoming conferences and programs is now available.

- [Occasional Paper 24](#)
- [New NILOA Report](#)
- [NILOA Newsletter](#)
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University of North Carolina Wilmington

University of North Carolina Wilmington's assessment website is this month's Featured Website in the category of Centralized Assessment Repository.

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Keeping Up with Competency

Tue, Sep 29, 2015 - 08:00 am
Paul Fain in Inside Higher Education

Competency-based education continues to expand in practice and conversations. College officials even plan to get together at a meeting called CBExchange to further discussions about the benefits and usefulness of competency-based education. This is a timely meeting given that the meaning of competency-based education is still evolving.

Produce Thinkers, Not Docile Workers

Tue, Sep 29, 2015 - 08:00 am
David Gooblar in Vitae

David Gooblar made a passionate case for faculty members to embrace student-centered learning rather than credential-centered learning, reflecting on the insights of professor Cathy Davidson from the Graduate Center at the University of New York.

The New College Scorecard

Tue, Sep 29, 2015 - 08:00 am
Michael Stratford in Inside Higher Education

Have you seen the new college information website called the College Scorecard? Visitors to the website can see information about how much federal loans former students at college and universities have been able to pay back in addition to achievement data and students average incomes after graduation.

NILOA Calendar						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

NILOA Track

Monday, Indiana Ballroom E

- **12:30-1:30** Excellence in Assessment Designation: Sharing our Success Stories
- **1:45-2:45** Using Intentionally Designed Assignments to Foster and Assess Student Learning
- **3:15-4:15** Assessment for Learning That Matters
- **4:30-5:30** Alignment and Mapping: Helping to Make Meaning

NILOA Track

Tuesday Indiana Ballroom E

- **10:15-11:15** Involving Students and Their Perspectives: A Student Panel Discussion
- **11:30-12:30** Future Directions of Assessment: Movement on the Field
- **2:00-3:00** Engaging Faculty: A Disciplinary View
- **3:15-4:15** Updates from the Field: What have we learned from the Degree Qualifications Profile?



*Past as Prologue:
Advancing the Assessment Agenda by
Avoiding Pitfalls of Our Own Making*

Peter Ewell

NILOA Track Keynote

Assessment Institute in Indianapolis

October 17, 2016





Central Theme of this Talk

- The Unconscious Choices We Make in Assessment—Conceptual and Methodological—May Decisively Determine Our Future
- Review How This This Unfolded Over Past 35 Years
- Make the Case that This is Not Inevitable—*If* We Adopt the Proper Attitude...



Birth of Assessment in the Mid-1980s (1)

- Significant Call for Information on Higher Education Performance
 - Reform Reports of 1984-86 (*Involvement in Learning*, AAC's *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, NGA's *Time for Results*)
 - Emergence of State “Assessment Mandates” from 1986 through 1990, Followed by Increasingly Aggressive Accreditation Requirements



Birth of Assessment in the Mid-1980s (2)

- Improved Instrumentation, Mostly in the Form of Standardized Tests
 - ETS Proficiency Profile (Originally MAAP)
 - ACT CAAP
 - ETS Major Field Achievement Tests



Birth of Assessment in the Mid-1980s (3)

- Inability/Unwillingness to Rely on Grades as a Trustworthy Measure of Academic Achievement
 - Awarded by Individual Faculty Members in Isolation from One Another
 - Validity Issues
 - Reliability Issues





The Policy Response: An “Exo-Skeletal” Approach to Assessment

- The Modal Type at Most Institutions:
 - Learning Outcomes Goals Established (Unique to that Institution)
 - Develop and Deploy Assessment Methods (Unique to that Institution)
 - Report Results as Required





Drawbacks of this Approach

- Learning Goals Not Connected to Curriculum or Pedagogy; Used Instead to Inform Assessment Design
- Assessments Mostly Administered to ***Samples*** of Students
- Neither Goals nor Assessments are ***Comparable*** Across Institutions





A Significant Consequence: Faculty Ambivalence Toward Assessment

- Principal Motivation to Do it Comes from Outside the Academy in the form of Government or Accreditation
- Data Collection Has Little to Do with the Classroom, Where Faculty Spend their Time





Some Other Important Consequences

- Reification of “Technique” as the Most Important Thing to Know About Assessment
- Prevalence of Fixed Targets (“75% above X”) and Central-Tendency Measures in Most Assessment Discussions
- Little Knowledge About the Contexts in Which Learning Takes Place



Some Breaks in the Pattern in 1990-2006

- Move Toward More “Authentic” Assessment Approaches:
 - In Standardized Testing, Essays and Constructed Response (e.g. NJ COEP)
 - Use of Actual Student Work (assembled in portfolios and/or scored by rubrics)
- But Still, in Essence, an “Add-On”




Some Breaks in the Pattern in 1990-2006


- External Stimuli Escalate and Remain Compelling
 - Accreditation Requirements More Focused on Learning and Institutional Engagement (e.g. SACS QEP; WASC Senior *2001 Handbook*)
 - The “Spellings Commission” and Its Aftermath





Major Change in the Last Decade

- Emergence of Potential **Common Standards** for Learning (e.g. AAC&U LEAP Goals, the DQP and Tuning)
 - Standards that **Everybody** Should Meet (not just samples of students)
 - This Means Assessment Should Be “Embedded” in Regular Student Work (emergence of “signature assignments”)
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Advantages of This Approach

- Faculty Engaged Directly in the Actual Work of Assessment at All Stages (Design, Evidence Gathering, Interpretation of Results)
- Avoids Duplication in Scoring
- Allows Benchmarking and Comparison Across Institutions and Settings



The Choice Before Us Moving Forward

We Can ***Proactively Engage*** Assessment as a Basis on which to Improve Teaching and Learning or We Can Grudgingly Let Compliance Demands Determine What We Assess and How We Do So

- External Compliance Demands Are a Given in the Current Accountability Environment
- But Compliance is a Natural Byproduct of Proactive Engagement—It's Free!






Some Opportunities for Action

- Take Advantage of Accreditation as an Occasion to Mobilize, Not a “Requirement” to React to
- Treat Every Assessment Finding as an Occasion to Ask Further Questions
- Engage Everybody in this Process
- “Close the Loop” and Assess Again



Finally, Remember What Assessment is Not

- Not “Measuring Everything that Moves”
 - Not Just “Checking up After the Fact”
 - Not Searching for “Final” Answers
 - Not Always Being as “Precise” as Possible
 - Not Ever Expecting to be Done
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Questions & Discussion



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