

# How Institutions Use Evidence of Assessment: Does It Really Improve Student Learning?

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# Value

- \* Institutions of higher education are increasingly asked to show the value of attending, i.e. impact
- \* Public and policy makers want assurance of the quality of higher education
- \* Regional accreditors are asking institutions to show evidence of student learning and instances of use



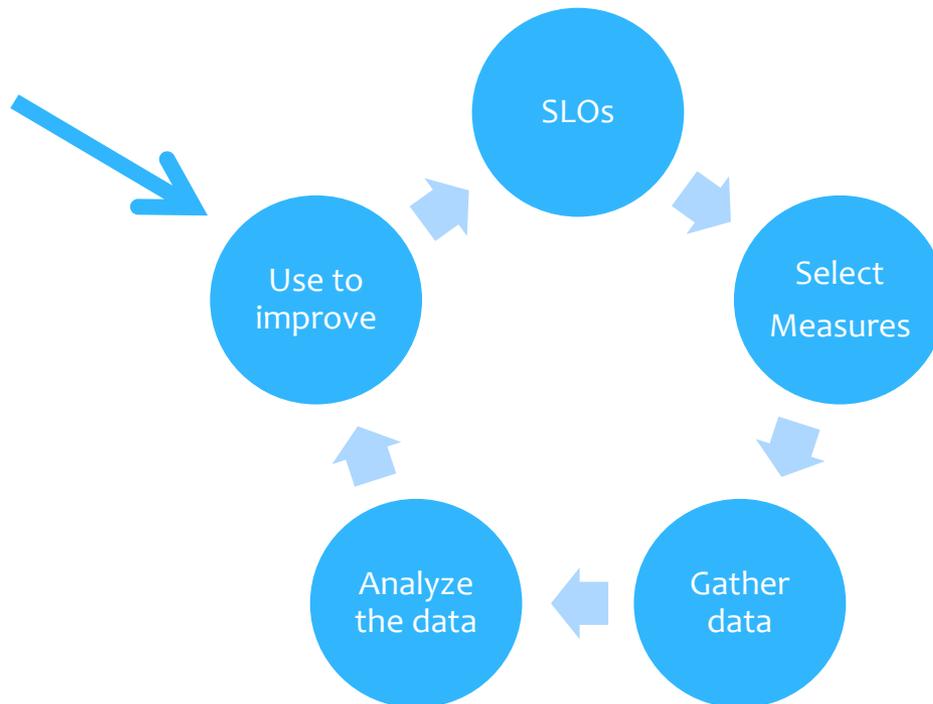
# Assessment

- \* Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. (Palomba and Banta 1999)

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment  
Making Learning Outcomes Usable & Transparent

# Closing the Loop

- \* Institutions have the greatest difficulty in the assessment cycle of “closing the loop” (Banta, 2009)



# Why the lack of use?

- \* With the majority of institutions in the US engaged in assessing student learning, why is there still a large disparity of institutions that are using assessment results ?



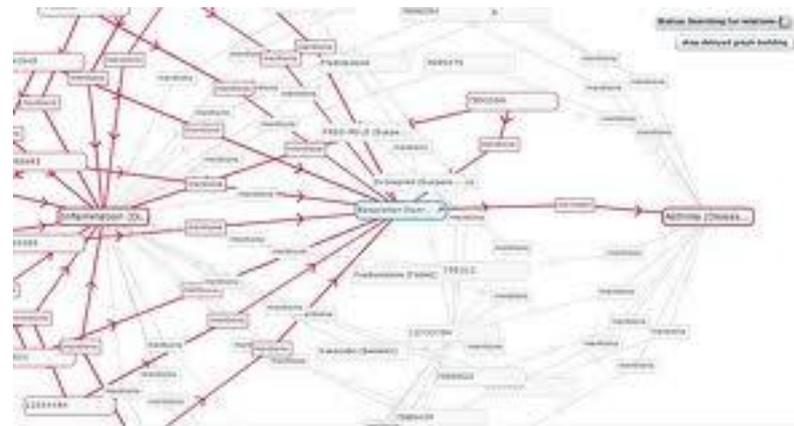
# Using Results

- \* Most assessment literature states that the reason or purpose of engaging with assessment in the first place is to USE the results to IMPROVE student learning (Banta, 2007; Ewell, 2010; Suskie, 2009; Walvoord, 2004)
- \* But what does that really mean?



# Causal Statements

- \* The ability to make causal claims about our impact on students and their learning
- \* Institutional structures and support + student = enhanced learning



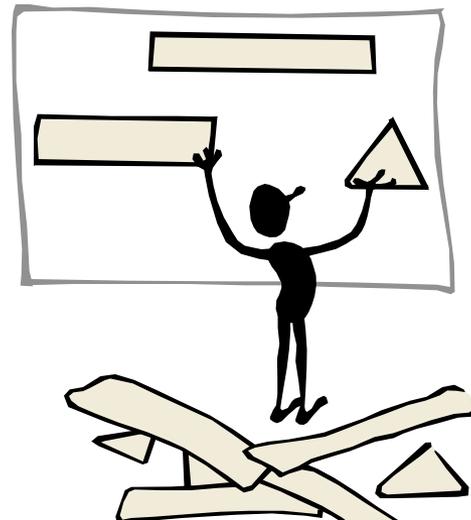
# Difficulty of Causal Statements

- \* Mobility of students
- \* Untracked changes
- \* Changes in courses add up to program level change
- \* Levels at which use occurs
- \* Longer than a year cycle
- \* Loosely coupled relationships
- \* Life



# Theories of Change

- \* Why do we think the changes we make will lead to better outcomes?
- \* What is assumed in the changes we select as it relates to how students understand and navigate higher education?



# Theory of Change (TOC)

- \* A process of outlining causal pathways by specifying what is needed for goals to be achieved (Carman, 2012)
- \* It requires articulating underlying assumptions which can be tested and measured (Jones, 2010)
- \* A Theory of Change provides a roadmap outlining how one thinks or conceptualizes getting from point A to point B over time (Ployhart & Vandenburg, 2010)

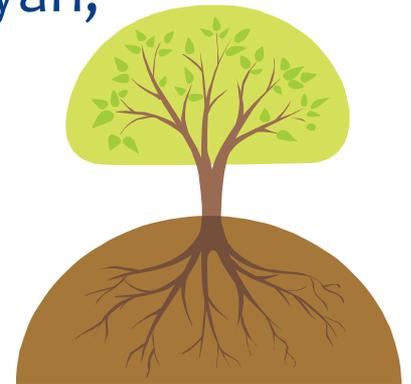


# For instance...

- \* Coverage and content
- \* Opportunities and support
- \* Intentional, coherent, aligned pathways
  
- \* Within each of these is the belief about a **root cause** – why students were not learning or not meeting the outcome and the mechanism by which the institution can help them succeed

# Root Cause

- \* A process of exploring not only that something happened, but why it happened the way that it did (Rooney & Heuvel, 2004)
- \* Moves beyond surface-level problem identification and examines assumptions in order to prevent reoccurrences (Taitz, Genn, Brooks, Ross, Ryan, Shumack, Burrell, & Kennedy, 2010)



# But...

Toulmin (2003)



- \* Warrants
- \* Arguments

# What does it look like in practice?

## \* Case Studies and Cross-case report

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
July 2012

**Using Assessment Results: Promising Practices of Institutions That Do It Well**

Gianina R. Baker, Natasha Jankowski, Staci Provezis & Jillian Kinzie



**Cross Example Analysis**  
learningoutcomesassessment.org

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
June 2012

**LaGuardia Community College: Weaving Assessment Into the Institutional Fabric**  
Staci Provezis

LaGuardia Community College

LaGuardia Community College, located in Long Island City, New York, is a nationally recognized associate-degree granting institution. Founded in 1971, the college now has over 50 majors in areas such as business management, accounting, fine arts, nursing, engineering, biology, psychology, environmental science, literature, and liberal arts. Among the college's 325 full-time faculty and 796 part-time faculty, 54% have doctorates.<sup>1</sup> The institution supports 18,625 credit-seeking students, of which 56% are working full time toward a degree while 44% are part-time students, and it also serves over 40,000 non-credit-seeking students. The institution's stated mission is as follows:

LaGuardia Community College's mission is to educate and graduate one of the most diverse student populations in the country to become critical thinkers and socially responsible citizens who help to shape a rapidly evolving society.

A federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution, LaGuardia Community College serves an overwhelmingly minority and first-generation college student population "from diverse cultures, ages, and educational and economic backgrounds."<sup>2</sup> Its students come from 160 different countries and speak more than 120 different primary languages. LaGuardia's commitment to educational excellence has been acknowledged by Excellence in Education, the Belknap Award for Exemplary Instructional Programs, and the Community College Excellence Award from the Merit Foundation. Because of its reputation as a leader in learning outcomes assessment, particularly through the use of electronic portfolios (ePortfolios), LaGuardia was selected by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NIILOA) as an *Example of Best Practice*. This report features LaGuardia's commitment to assessment, the collaboration across units at the college, the ePortfolio as the foundation of the assessment efforts, and the institution's robust program review system including assessment.<sup>3</sup>

**Institutional Context**

A range of factors converged to establish LaGuardia Community College as a leader in student learning outcomes assessment. The creation of a general education curriculum, an accreditation mandate, a Title V grant, and the active role of its academic leaders are especially relevant. In 2001–2002, LaGuardia defined a general education approach for all students—an unusual

<sup>1</sup> See the 2011 Institutional Profile for information on students, faculty, and the institution at <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/about/institutional-profile>.  
<sup>2</sup> See the 2011 Institutional Profile for information on students, faculty, and the institution at <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/about/institutional-profile>.  
<sup>3</sup> For more information about the students, faculty, or institutional awards, see <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/about/institutional-profile>.

<sup>4</sup> The data gathered for this case study involved phone interviews with the Director of Outcomes Assessment, the Director of Institutional Research, and two faculty members as well as a systematic review of the institutional website and document analysis. Interviews took place over May 2011 and continued through May 2012.

**Case Studies: LaGuardia Community College**  
learningoutcomesassessment.org/casestudies.html

LaGuardia Community College

# Evidence-based Storytelling

Evidence of student learning is used  
in **support of claims or arguments**  
about **improvement and**  
**accountability** told through **stories**  
to **persuade a specific audience**

(Jankowski, 2012)

# Discussion and Reflection

- \* Making sense of results – **Meaning Making**
- \* Multiple individuals across the institution critically engaging with assessment data
- \* Make sense of data to determine what, if anything, to do

\* 70%

- \* Examine multiple data points
- \* Group data by theme not method

# Tell the Institutional Story



# The Brian Barton Story

A faculty chair in business examined the results of program outcomes for learners who completed the program capstone course and found that on one of the outcomes, learners were performing below what he regarded as the minimum threshold. Through the curriculum maps and alignments linking learning activities in individual courses to program outcomes in the capstone, he was able to identify across the entire program which courses had the strongest alignment to the outcome in question. From there, he was able to delve deeper into individual learning activities, to combine that information with additional data including course evaluations, and from the combined data to make detailed changes in specific courses and specific learning activities or assignments within courses. By the time participants in the revised courses and learning activities completed the capstone course, there was a measurable improvement in the particular outcome in question. The faculty chair involved in the process stated, “The concept of having an outcomes-based approach and having a strong theory of alignment all the way down to individual learning activities helps facilitate the use of assessment data.”

# Veterinary Technology

Veterinary technology students did not score as well as needed in quantitative reasoning, for example, so veterinary technology faculty redesigned several key assignments to build and document that competency in students. Whereas previously students only read an article to learn about monitoring glucose levels in felines, the new assignment asked them to read the article, to take a reading of a cat's glucose level, and then to use both sources to write an analytical report. This curriculum redesign created a more robust and discipline-specific quantitative reasoning experience for students and a richer set of documents to be collected and examined through ePortfolio. Addressing general education requirements throughout the program, according to the veterinary technology program director, means that “programs need to decide where they are addressing general education within the curriculum,” and using student artifacts collected through the ePortfolio “brings assessment to the forefront of the classroom.”

# Writing Across the Curriculum

The religion department wanted to know if their students were writing at a desired level, and so the faculty developed a writing rubric, gathered a random collection of student essays, and had a faculty panel rate them. A report was generated from the rating that outlined where students demonstrated or fell short on the outcomes in question. Areas where students fell short were used to refocus teaching and also to rethink the sequence of courses and assignments within courses so as to better reinforce the desired outcomes and help students improve. A faculty member involved in this effort remarked, “It seems so modest to state it now – we identified an intended learning outcome, made rubrics, looked at essays, and altered teaching – but that fairly modest process generated a holistic view of what students were doing well and what they were not doing so well, which allowed for minor adjustments. In a year or two these adjustments showed that students are doing better on a given outcome.”

# Questions?

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