

DEVELOPMENT OF NILOA'S TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK

A team of research analysts examined over 2,000 websites to determine the types of information shared regarding student learning, the location of the information on the website, if actual evidence of student learning was shared, how results were presented, and whether instances of use of assessment results was apparent. Originally, the team attempted to develop a rubric informed by the gathered data which could be used by institutions to review their website in regards to transparent communication. Yet the variety of institutional types, diverse array of websites, and potential ability or inability of an institution to update, modify, or manage websites made the development of a common rubric difficult. Through the utilization of draft rubrics and conversations with institutional representatives, NILOA's national advisory panel, and other transparency scholars, it was determined that a more fitting approach would be the development of a framework informed by the types of information found on websites rather than of an evaluative rubric incorporating standards of performance. A framework would be more useful to institutions because of its ability to help outline a structure, yet offer more flexibility and adaptability to institution specific culture and websites.

To build the framework, the research team returned to the webscan data and identified six components of assessment related information shared across institutional websites. The six components emerged from the information on the sites, but only rarely did a website possess all six components of assessment related information shared externally online. Some websites had two or three of the components while others had four or five. Once the six components were identified, website data was then reexamined for transparent examples of each of the components. The research team examined websites that were deemed highly transparent as well as websites that were not as transparent to determine what elements or aspects of the sites led to such classification conclusions. Pulling from the transparent examples, a variety of component specific transparency elements were developed with a focus on how to present information in a transparent manner for each of the components. In addition to examples from institution websites, the research team examined literature on effective website communication within a variety of fields including marketing, business, communication, media, and education in order to develop statements of transparent communication for each of the components. The components, definitions, and transparency sub-criteria were tested through in-depth webscans of institutional sites to ensure that components were comprehensive in nature. The research team also discussed whether to include additional information that was not currently found on institutional sites but should in fact be considered for inclusion in the framework and found the six components inclusive of any additional information.

