ADVANCING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT:
LESSONS FROM CAMPUSES DOING GOOD WORK

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ASSESSMENT INSTITUTE
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Overview

- NILOA Case Studies
- Summary of findings
- Institutional Examples
- Q & A
Overview of NILOA

NILOA’s mission is to document student learning outcomes assessment work, identify and disseminate best practices, and support institutions in their assessment efforts.

SURVEYS ● WEB SCANS ● CASE STUDIES ● FOCUS GROUPS ● OCCASIONAL PAPERS ● WEBSITE ● RESOURCES ● NEWSLETTER ● LISTSERV ● PRESENTATIONS ● TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK ● FEATURED WEBSITES ● ACCREDITATION RESOURCES ● ASSESSMENT EVENT CALENDAR ● ASSESSMENT NEWS ● MEASURING QUALITY INVENTORY ● POLICY ANALYSIS ● ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
Assessment, Accountability, and Improvement: Revisiting the Tension

Peter T. Ewell
Foreword by George D. Kuh

Assessment Briefs

What New Faculty Need To Know About Assessment

Pat Hutchings

As a new faculty member, you will have questions about your students’ learning—as all thoughtful teachers do. Are they really learning what I’m teaching? How well do they understand the key concepts I’m focusing on? Can they apply what they’re learning in new contexts? What can I do better or differently to help students develop the skills and knowledge they need to be effective in this class, in subsequent courses, and in their future life and work?

These questions are at the heart of student learning outcomes assessment. This short paper aims to give you a sense of the defining features, practices, and significance of assessment—a required activity on all campuses today that you can both contribute to and benefit from.

Defining Assessment

The assessment movement came of age in the mid-1980s as an ongoing process designed to measure and improve student learning. It was championed by educators who saw it as an integral part of teaching and learning and by policymakers who wanted evidence of higher education’s effectiveness.

The assessment process begins with being explicit about goals for students’ learning—in individual courses, departments, and programs, and across the institution. It means translating the kind of broad claims that often appear in institutional mission statements into concrete descriptions of what students should know and be able to do as a result of their college experience. For faculty, it means teaching toward goals that you and your colleagues have agreed upon, and ensuring that students themselves understand these goals.

Assessment also entails asking whether and how well students are achieving those goals, which typically requires that campuses use a wide range of tools and methods for gathering evidence about the educational experience and its outcomes. While these often include tests and surveys that are designed externally, local approaches like e-portfolios, senior capstone projects, focus groups, and rated performances are gaining in popularity.

Evidence generated through such activities is clearly central to assessment, but the process is not complete until results are brought to bear in making improvements. The campus community must reflect on findings, deliberate about their meaning and implications, and use new insights to design more effective teaching approaches, curricula, and policies to support students’ learning and success.

This, then, is the cycle of assessment: setting clear goals, gathering evidence, and using results to make changes—changes which, in turn, become the focus for a new phase of student gathering and improvement. At its best, assessment reflects the ethic of inquiry that informs academic life more broadly, bringing faculty’s habits and values as researchers and scholars to their work as educators and to their students’ learning.
Examples of Good Assessment Practice

- Purpose
- Selection process
- Case Study approach
- Institutions involved

http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/CaseStudies.html
Case Study Purpose

- We know far too little about what actually happens in assessment on campuses around the country.
- Highlight promising practices in using assessment data for improvement and decision making.
- Serve as examples of ways to report assessment results.
Case Selection and Design

- **Selection criteria**: CHEA Assessment award winners and nominees; Recommendations of experts in the field; Institutions identified via Webscans; Selected ten sites.

- **Design**: Interpretive case studies focus on meaning participants make of their actions and experiences.

- **Data gathering techniques**: interviews, web scan and document analysis.
1. Augustana College
2. Capella University
3. Carnegie Mellon University
4. Colorado State University
5. Juniata College
6. LaGuardia Community College
7. North Carolina A&T State University
8. San Jose State University
9. St. Olaf College
10. Texas A&M International

http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/CaseStudies
Your Thoughts on Assessment

➢ What are the characteristics of “good assessment work”? What does it look like?

➢ What is the biggest challenge you face in advancing assessment to improve student learning on your campus?
Case Study Findings

- **Value of work:** inspirational, instructive accounts of assessment to improve student learning; specific examples of practices associated with good assessment.
  
- **Case themes:**
  - Capella – assessment infrastructure and administrative support
  - Juniata – assessment as scholarly inquiry; publicly shared data
  - St. Olaf – faculty led utilization focused, backward design
  - San Jose State – tied to Gen Ed reform; course-based assessment
  - Carnegie Mellon – assessment fostered through Center for Teaching & Learning; foster creative faculty work
  - Colorado State – *coming up!*
  - Augustana - *coming up!*

Lessons Across Sites

- Assessment is a scholarly activity worthy of faculty attention and institutional respect.
- Support is necessary - *less* in assessment techniques and *more* in fostering the use of results to improve.
- Embed assessment in existing activities, no “*add on*”.
- Involve a range of faculty, staff & administrators in assessment; spread responsibility.
- Report widely on action taken on results.
- Accreditation to facilitate good work.
- Forefront assessment goals and desired changes in student learning.
Augustana College

- **Long history of data collection**
  - “Assessment Person”—Tim Schermer, Mark Salisbury
  - 1994 Assessment Committee
  - 2005, 2008, 2009 Teagle studies
  - NSSE
  - Wabash

- **Assessment use?**
  - Assessment leads to earlier Gen Ed revision
  - Student learning and backward design become mantras
  - Now trying to live into these claims!
    - On 10/27/2011 Faculty votes to revise all curriculum – with goal of improving student learning outcomes
Augustana College

- Think long term

- Have someone who knows and really cares
  - Develop “experts” in the faculty

- Actually do *something* with the data

- Think small bites
  - Faculty care about student learning
    - Convince them that “small bite” assessment helps with that
http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/ColoradoStateCaseStudy.html
Make Assessment Relevant

- A Philosophy Supporting Change Management
  - Sustainability: Making a Department/Unit Resilient
    - Characteristics of Resiliency (Social-Ecological Systems Literature)
      - Diversity & Decentralization of Change Management
      - Self-Organizing Activity
      - Adaptive Capacity and Sensing Feedback Systems
      - Organizational Learning: An Integrating Mechanism
  - Systems Thinking: Bottom Up Planning
  - Pragmatism: Truth is Made (verified constantly) not Given
The degree to which a system/organization is capable of self-organizing and is able to build and increase the capacity for learning and adaptation determines its resiliency and sustainability. Diversity in persons and functions is a key resiliency component as is “adaptive capacity,” which is the capacity to respond to and shape change. Planning and monitoring with effective feedback systems offer a greater reservoir of options.

A. Values of the faculty (provide a listing and describe prioritization of items if applicable)

Description of Values for This Section
Values have a strong relationship to quality and their use in planning supports the self-organizing activity that sustains decentralization and resiliency.

--Effective Practices and Examples for this Section (Click on link below this line.)

--CSU Department of Health and Exercise Science, 2010
--Univ. of Oregon -- Dept. of Landscape Architecture

Listing of Department Values
The primary value of the Economics Department faculty is the creation of a "learning community" which supports the intellectual development and professional aspirations of students and faculty, and which provides useful services to the larger community. Specifically:

We value teaching equally with research, which is unusual for a department with a PhD program. We integrate teaching and research, and actively promote student-faculty research collaborations in both the
The primary value of the Economics Department faculty is the creation of a "learning community" which supports the intellectual development and professional aspirations of students and faculty, and which provides useful services to the larger community. Specifically:

- We value teaching equally with research, which is unusual for a department with a PhD program. We integrate teaching and research, and actively promote student-faculty research collaborations in both the undergraduate and graduate programs.

- We want our students to understand economics in terms of its larger intellectual, political and historical context as well as its mathematical and statistical techniques. We want them to become informed citizens as well as to acquire skills that will advance their careers.
Policy Development: Purpose of Program Review

- Program review is the institution’s method to support decentralized, departmental efforts to attain unit values through systematic self-evaluation.

- At the institution level, program review becomes an integrating device that reveals the diverse problem solving streams that decentralized departments generate to achieve the University’s mission and strategic priorities.

- It develops organizational learning by sharing knowledge of how departments systematically accelerate the attainment of their values.
The data from the Internship Evaluation by employers (Criterion 1) shows that for Spring and Summer 2009 our students did not do as well on their public speaking and writing skills in the work place as we wanted. Only 79% of students scored a 4 or better on public speaking skills and 81% of students scored a 4 or better on writing skills. As such the internship coordinator will work on stressing the importance of high quality speaking and writing skills to students in the Internship Preparation course (NR 387) and will emphasize to students during the pre-internship orientation session to put more effort into their speaking and writing assignment during the internship.
# Bottom Up Planning: Action Planning Linked to Strategic Planning

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<td>Refocus of Office of Instructional Services on teaching and learning support and development</td>
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<td>Percentage of faculty participating in on-campus professional development activities</td>
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<td>International scholarship</td>
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<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
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<td>Student knowledge of content taught in AUCC-approved courses</td>
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<td>Living/learning communities</td>
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<td>PRISM system</td>
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<td>Quality assessments of learning as part of Academic Program Reviews</td>
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<td>U.S. News and World Report rankings of undergraduate programs</td>
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<td>Post-graduation student success</td>
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<td>Other assessments of learning</td>
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Q&A with Augustana College and Colorado State
Colorado State University’s PRISM project – described in “Colorado State University: A Comprehensive Continuous Improvement System” available: http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/ColoradoStateCaseStudy.html
Augustana College’s approach to assessing student learning is described in “Augustana College: An Assessment Review Committee’s Role in Engaging Faculty” available: http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/AugustanaCaseStudy.html

Augustana College: An Assessment Review Committee’s Role in Engaging Faculty

Staci Provezis

Augustana College

Augustana College, located in Rock Island, Illinois, is a liberal arts institution related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with approximately 2500 students and 250 faculty members. The stated mission of the institution as follows:

Augustana College, rooted in the liberal arts and sciences and a Lutheran expression of the Christian faith, is committed to offering a challenging education that develops qualities of mind, spirit and body necessary for a rewarding life of leadership and service in a diverse and changing world.¹

The NILOA team decided that Augustana College would be an instructive case study because of
Complementary resources:

- Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice
- Assessment in Practice: Putting Principles to Work on College Campuses
- Case Studies for Implementing Assessment in Student Affairs

A Classic!
What would make these institutional examples more useful to you?

How might you use institutional examples to understand or inform your own practice?

What else would be helpful?

What else do you want to know from campuses that have advanced their assessment and student learning outcomes work?

What would help create more assessment action on campuses?
Advancing Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: Lessons from Campuses Doing Good Work

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Assessment institute
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