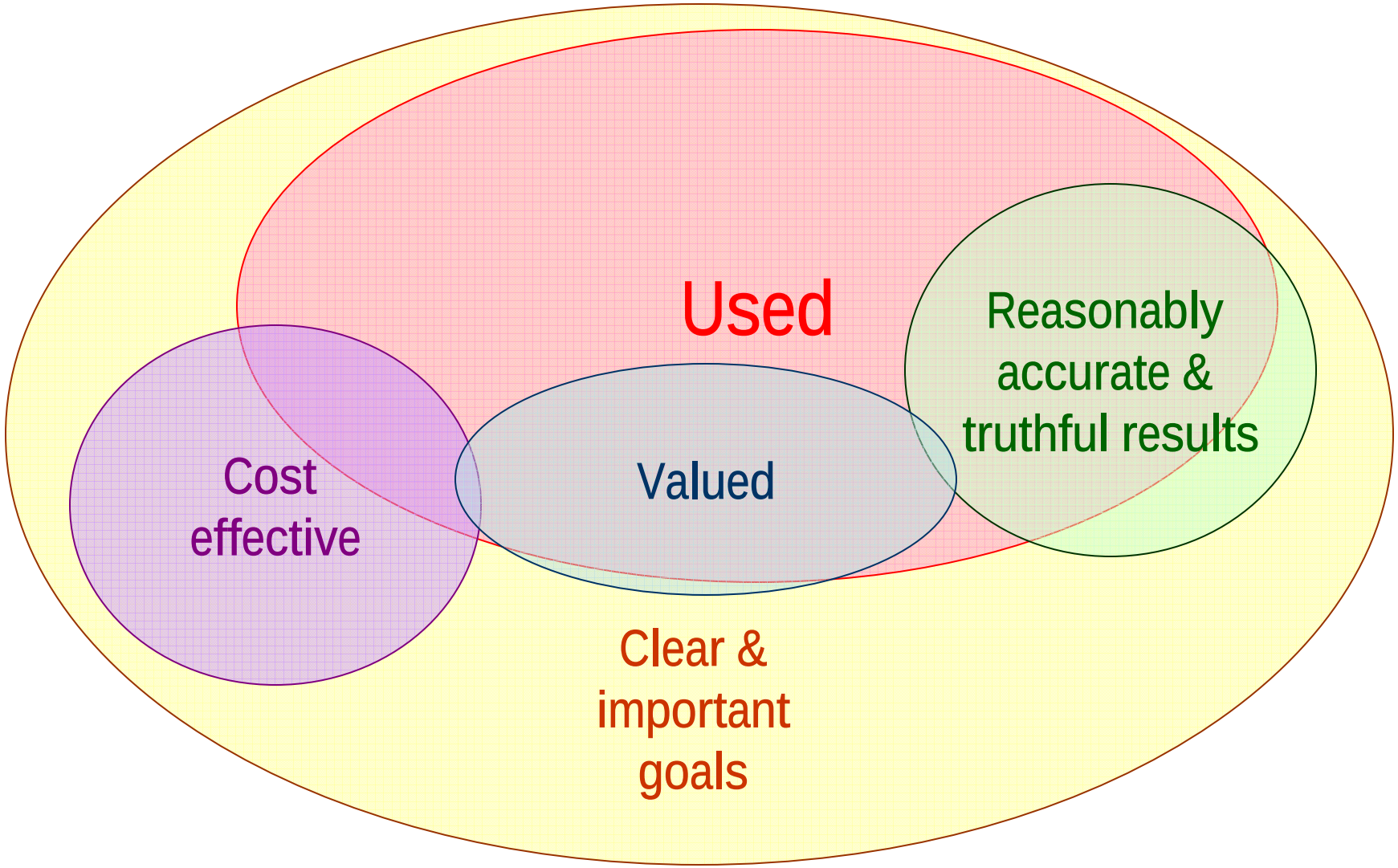
Five Dimensions of Good Assessment



What is "Good" Assessment? A Variety of Perspectives

Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning (American Association for Higher Education, 1991)

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

Student Learning Principles (Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, 2004)

1. The institution is clear and public about the learning outcomes to which it aspires for its students.
2. The institution uses learning goals as well as knowledge about learning as drivers for organizing instruction.
3. The institution provides an environment which signals support for student learning at all levels.
4. The institution promotes an atmosphere of critical reflection about teaching and learning.
5. The institution sets clear learning goals, which speak to both content and level of attainment.
6. The institution collects evidence of goal attainment using appropriate assessment tools.
7. The institution applies collective judgment as to the meaning and utility of the evidence.
8. The institution uses evidence of goal attainment to effect improvements in its programs.
9. The institution derives evidence of student learning from multiple sources, such as courses, curricula, and co-curricular programming, and includes effects of both intentional and unintentional learning experiences. Evidence collected from these sources is complementary and demonstrates the impact of the institution as a whole on the student.
10. The collection, interpretation, and use of student learning evidence is a collective endeavor, and is not viewed as the sole responsibility of a single office or position. Those in the institution with a stake in decisions of educational quality participate in the process.
11. The institution uses broad participation in reflecting about student learning outcomes as a means of building a commitment to educational improvement.

Characteristics of Effective Outcomes Assessment (Banta, 2002)

1. Involves stakeholders (faculty members, administrators, students, student affairs professionals, employers, community representatives) from the outset to incorporate their needs and interests and to solicit later support
2. Begins when the need is recognized; allows sufficient time for development. Timing is crucial.
3. Has a written plan with clear purposes that is related to goals people value—to a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment is a vehicle for improvement, not an end in itself.
4. Bases assessment approaches on clear, explicitly stated program objectives.
5. Has knowledgeable, effective leadership.
6. Involves recognition that assessment is essential to learning, and therefore is everyone's responsibility.
7. Includes faculty and staff development to prepare individuals to implement assessment and use the findings.
8. Devolves responsibility for assessment to the unit level.
9. Recognizes that learning is multidimensional and developmental and thus uses multiple measures, therefore maximizing reliability and validity.
10. Assesses processes as well as outcomes.
11. Is undertaken in an environment that is receptive, supportive, and enabling—on a continuing basis.

12. Incorporates continuous communication with constituents concerning activities and findings. Effective outcomes assessment produces data that guide *improvement* on a continuing basis.
13. Produces credible evidence3 of learning and organizational effectiveness.
14. Ensures that assessment data are used continuously to improve programs and services.
15. Provides a vehicle for demonstrating accountability to stakeholders within and outside the institution.
16. Encompasses the expectation that outcomes assessment will be ongoing, not episodic.
17. Incorporates ongoing evaluation and improvement of the assessment process itself.

Characteristics of a Good Assessment Program (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
A good assessment program does the following:

1. Asks important questions
2. Reflects institutional mission
3. Reflects programmatic goals and objectives for learning
4. Contains a thoughtful approach to assessment planning
5. Is linked to decision making about the curriculum
6. Is linked to processes such as planning and budgeting
7. Encourages involvement of individuals from on and off campus
8. Contains relevant assessment techniques
9. Includes direct evidence of student learning
10. Reflects what is known about how students learn
11. Shares information with multiple audiences
12. Leads to reflection and action by faculty, staff, and students
13. Allows for continuity, flexibility, and improvement in assessment

Hallmarks of Successful Programs to Assess Student Academic Achievement (Huba & Freed, 2000)
Successful assessment:

1. Flows from the institution's mission.
2. Has a conceptual framework.
3. Has faculty ownership/responsibility.
4. Has institution-wide support.
5. Uses multiple measures.
6. Provides feedback to students and the institution.
7. Is cost-effective.
8. Does not restrict or inhibit goals of access, equity, and diversity established by the institution.
9. Leads to improvement.
10. Includes a process for evaluating the assessment program.

Assessment Guidelines (Driscoll & Cordero De Noriega, 2006)

1. Define and clarify program goals and outcomes for long-term improvement.
2. Make assessment-for-improvement a team effort.
3. Embed assessment into campus conversations about learning.
4. Use assessment to support diverse learning abilities and to understand conditions under which students learn best.
5. Connect assessment processes to questions or concerns that program decision makers or internal stakeholders really care about.
6. Make assessment protocols and results meaningful and available to internal and external stakeholders for feedback and ultimately improvement.
7. Design an assessment model that aligns with the institutional capacity to support it.

Attributes of Meaningful Assessment (Bresciani, 2003)
Assessment must be:

1. Meaningful: useful to faculty and co-curricular specialists
2. Manageable: considering the varying resources of the institution or program engaged in the process, including financial resources committed to the process, the institution's assessment expertise, and faculty and co-curricular specialists' time

3. Flexible: accounting for institutional culture and the learning curves of people involved with implementation
4. Trustworthy: characterized as truth-seeking/objective/ethical
5. Accountable: informs decisions for continuous improvement or provide evidence that what you believed was being learned is, after, being learned
6. Influential: helps institute a culture of accountability, learning, and improvement at the institution

Principle of Assessment (Steen, 1999)

1. Assessment is not a single event, but a continuous cycle.
2. Assessment must be an open process.
3. Assessment must promote valid inferences.
4. Assessment that matters should always employ multiple measures of performance.
5. Assessment should measure what is worth learning, not just what is easy to measure.
6. Assessment should support every student's opportunity to learn important [mathematics].

Good Assessment Practices (Suskie, 2004)

Good assessments:

1. Give use *useful* information.
2. Give us *reasonably accurate, truthful* information
3. Are *fair* to all students.
4. Are *ethical* and protect the privacy and dignity of those involved.
5. Are *systematized.*
6. Are *cost-effective*, yielding value that justifies the time and expense we put into them.

Fair Assessment Practices (Suskie, 2000)

1. Have clearly stated learning outcomes and share them with your students.
2. Match your assessment to what you teach and vice versa.
3. Use many different measures and many different *kinds* of measures.
4. Help students learn how to do the assessment task.
5. Engage and encourage your students.
6. Interpret assessment results appropriately.
7. Evaluate the outcomes of your assessments.

Core Principles of Effective Assessment (Australian Universities Teaching Committee, 2002)

1. Assessment is treated by staff and students as an integral and prominent component of the entire teaching and learning process rather than a final adjunct to it.
2. The multiple roles of assessment are recognised. The powerful motivating effect of assessment requirements on students is understood and assessment tasks are designed to foster valued study habits.
3. There is a faculty/departmental policy that guides individuals' assessment practices. Subject assessment is integrated into an overall plan for [program] assessment.
4. There is a clear alignment between expected learning outcomes, what is taught and learnt, and the knowledge and skills assessed – there is a closed and coherent 'curriculum loop'.
5. Assessment tasks assess the capacity to analyze and synthesize new information and concepts rather than simply recall information previously presented.
6. A variety of assessment methods is employed so that the limitations of particular methods are minimized.
7. Assessment tasks are designed to assess relevant generic skills as well as subject-specific knowledge and skills.
8. There is a steady progression in the complexity and demands of assessment requirements in the later years of [programs].
9. There is provision for student choice in assessment tasks and weighting at certain times.
10. Student and staff workloads are considered in the scheduling and design of assessment tasks.
11. Excessive assessment is avoided. Assessment tasks are designed to sample student learning.
12. Assessment tasks are weighted to balance the developmental ('formative') and judgemental ('summative') roles of assessment. Early low-stakes, low-weight assessment is used to provide students with feedback.
13. Grades are calculated and reported on the basis of clearly articulated learning outcomes and criteria for achievement.

14. Students receive explanatory and diagnostic feedback as well as grades.
15. Assessment tasks are checked to ensure there are no inherent biases that may disadvantage particular student groups.
16. Plagiarism is minimized through careful task design, explicit education and appropriate monitoring of academic honesty.

Elements of Good Assessment Practice (Greater Expectations Project on Accreditation & Assessment, 2004)
Good assessment practice ought to include the following elements:

1. The use of both formative assessment, for the purpose of giving feedback and making improvement, and summative assessment, for the purpose of identifying levels of attainment
2. Multiple methods that include both qualitative and quantitative evidence
3. Authentic methods that arise from students' actual assignments and learning experiences, which might be both curricular and co-curricular
4. Assessments that are developmental, so that students and others can observe progress toward valued outcomes, perhaps through the use of portfolios
5. A focus on higher, more sophisticated knowledge and capacities rather than on more easily measured basic skills
6. Faculty ownership of not just the education but also, because it is inherent to the learning process itself, the assessment of students; whether they teach major or general education courses, faculty need to create, implement, and sustain the program to educate and assess students
7. Assessment as continuous, systematic, and multi-dimensional
8. An ongoing, systematic process for using assessment results to improve teaching, learning, and the curriculum

General Characteristics of Good Assessment Evidence (Ewell, n.d.)

1. Comprehensive: Covers knowledge and skills taught throughout course or program
2. Multiple sources: Involves more than one source or multiple judgments of student performance
3. Multiple dimensions: Provides information on multiple dimensions of student performance, i.e., more than a single summative grade
4. Direct: Includes at least one type of evidence based on direct observation or demonstration of student capacities, i.e., more than simply a self-report
5. Relevant
6. Verifiable
7. Representative
8. Cumulative
9. Actionable

Six Principles that Lead to Reflective, Scholarly Practice of Assessment (Eder, 1999)

1. Clear goals: State the basic principles of assessment work clearly; define objectives that are realistic and achievable; identify important questions in the field.
2. Adequate preparation: Show an understanding of existing scholarship in the field; bring the necessary skills to assessment work; bring together the resources necessary to move the project forward.
3. Appropriate methods: Use methods appropriate to the goals; apply effectively the methods selected; modify procedures in response to changing circumstances.
4. Significant results: Achieve the goals of the assessment project; add consequentially to the field; open additional areas for further exploration.
5. Effective presentation: Use a suitable style and effective organization to present assessment work; use appropriate forums for communicating work to intended audiences; present the message with clarity and integrity.
6. Reflective critique: Critically evaluate one's assessment work; bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to the critique; use evaluate to improve the quality of future work.

Key Findings Regarding Measuring Institutional Performance Outcomes (American Productivity & Quality Center, 1999)

1. The best [assessments] communicate the institution's core values.

2. Good [assessments] are chosen carefully, are reviewed frequently, and point to action to be taken on results.
3. External requirements and pressures can be extremely useful as starting points for developing [assessment] systems.
4. [Assessments] are best used as "problem detectors" to identify areas for attention and further exploration.
5. Clear linkages between [assessments] and resource allocation are critical, but the best linkages are indirect.
6. [Assessments] must be publicly available, visible, and consistent across the organization.
7. [Assessments] are best considered in the context of a wider transformation of organizational culture.
8. Organizational culture supportive of [assessments] take time to develop, require considerable "socialization" of the organization's members, and are enhanced by stable leadership.
9. [Assessments] change the role of managers and the ways in which they manage.

Ten Recommendations for a New Accountability Framework (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2004)

1. Make liberal education the new standard of excellence for all students.
2. Articulate locally owned goals for student learning outcomes.
3. Set standards in each goal area for basic, proficient, and advanced performance.
4. Develop clear and complementary responsibilities between general education and departmental programs for liberal education outcomes.
5. Charge departments with responsibility for the level and quality of students' most advanced work.
6. Create milestone assessments across the curriculum.
7. Set clear expectations for culminating work performed at a high level of accomplishment.
8. Provide periodic external review and validation of assessment practices and standards.
9. Make assessment findings part of a campus-wide commitment to faculty inquiry and educational improvement.
10. Provide public accountability and transparency.

Criteria for Recognizing "Good Practice" in Assessing Liberal Education (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2002)

1. Institutional mission is the ultimate source of the goals and objectives for assessment of student learning.
2. The implementation of the institution's strategic plan accords high priority to assessment practice that determines the effectiveness with which the institution is achieving its goals and objectives.
3. The institutions constituencies (especially the faculty and administration, but also students, board members, employers of graduates, and the general public) are active advocates (by discussion and promotion) of the assessment plan and the goals and objectives on which it is based.
4. Assessment is continuous, systematic, multi-dimensional, and based on well-defined outcomes for student learning (e.g., Bloom's taxonomy).
5. There is an ongoing, systematic process for using assessment results to improve teaching/learning and to identify areas needing improvement (and ways to do so).
6. Assessments are designed to demonstrate successful integration of the major and the general education components of the degree program.
7. There is both formative and summative assessment of student learning.
8. Learning outcomes addressed in assessment are consistent and cumulative, building throughout the educational program in tune with a longitudinal view of student development.
9. Assessment activities arise from and connect to actual student learning experiences, both curricular and co-curricular.
10. Assessments are created, implemented, sustained and rated collaboratively by faculty responsible for general education and the majors.
11. There are integrative courses and assignments embedded in the curriculum in which (a) students not only master knowledge and skills but practice integration; (b) faculty coach students to make connections between the major and general education; and (c) students are engaged in some culminating activity or product that demonstrates their ability to integrate their undergraduate experiences.

Responsibilities of Those Who Interpret, Use, and Communicate Assessment Results (National Council on Measurement in Education, 1995)

1. Interpret, use, and communicate assessment results in an informed, objective, and fair manner within the context of the assessment's limitations and with an understanding of the potential consequences of use.
2. Provide to those who receive assessment results information about the assessment, its purposes, its limitations, and its uses necessary for the proper interpretation of the results.
3. Provide to those who receive score reports an understandable written description of all reported scores, including proper interpretations and likely misinterpretations.
4. Communicate to appropriate audiences the results of the assessment in an understandable and timely manner, including proper interpretations and likely misinterpretations.
5. Evaluate and communicate the adequacy and appropriateness of any norms or standards used in the interpretation of assessment results.
6. Inform parties involved in the assessment process how assessment results may affect them.
7. Use multiple sources and types of relevant information about persons or programs whenever possible in making educational decisions.
8. Avoid making, and actively discourage others from making, inaccurate reports, unsubstantiated claims, inappropriate interpretations, or otherwise false and misleading statements about assessment results.
9. Disclose to examinees and others whether and how long the results of the assessment will be kept on file, procedures for appeal and rescoring, rights examinees and others have to the assessment information, and how those rights may be exercised.
10. Report any apparent misuses of assessment information to those responsible for the assessment process.
11. Protect the rights to privacy of individuals and institutions involved in the assessment process.

Responsibilities of Those Who Evaluate Educational Programs and Conduct Research on Assessments (National Council on Measurement in Education, 1995)

1. Conduct evaluation and research activities in an informed, objective, and fair manner.
2. Disclose any associations that they have with authors, test publishers, or others involved with the assessment and refrain from participation if such associations might affect the objectivity of the research or evaluation.
3. Preserve the security of all assessments throughout the research process as appropriate.
4. Take appropriate steps to minimize potential sources of invalidity in the research and disclose known factors that may bias the results of the study.
5. Present the results of research, both intended and unintended, in a fair, complete, and objective manner.
6. Attribute completely and appropriately the work and ideas of others.
7. Qualify the conclusions of the research within the limitations of the study.
8. Use multiple sources of relevant information in conducting evaluation and research activities whenever possible.
9. Comply with applicable standards for protecting the rights of participants in an evaluation or research study, including the rights to privacy and informed consent.

Compiled by Linda Suskie, Middle States Commission on Higher Education
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What is "Good" Assessment?
A Synthesis of Principles of Good Practice

1. Good assessments are used to inform important decisions, especially those to improve curriculum and pedagogy but also regarding planning, budgeting, and accountability.

- Successful assessment leads to improvement. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- The institution uses evidence of goal attainment to effect improvements in its programs. (C-RAC, 2004)
- Good [assessments] point to action to be taken on results. (APQC, 1999)
- Assessment evidence should be actionable. (Ewell, n.d.)
- Good assessments give us *useful* information. (Suskie, 2004)
- Assessment must be meaningful: useful to faculty and co-curricular specialists (Bresciani, 2003)
- Assessment must be influential: helps institute a culture of accountability, learning, and improvement at the institution (Bresciani, 2003)
- Effective outcomes assessment ensures that assessment data are used continuously to improve programs and services. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Effective outcomes assessment produces data that guide *improvement* on a continuing basis. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- A good assessment program leads to reflection and action by faculty, staff, and students (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- The implementation of the institution's strategic plan accords high priority to assessment practice that determines the effectiveness with which the institution is achieving its goals and objectives. (AAC&U, 2001)
- There is an ongoing, systematic process for using assessment results to improve teaching/learning and to identify areas needing improvement (and ways to do so). (AAC&U, 2001)
- A good assessment program is linked to decision making about the curriculum (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Good assessment practice includes an ongoing, systematic process for using assessment results to improve teaching, learning, and the curriculum (Greater Expectations Project, 2004)
- Successful assessment provides feedback to students and the institution. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- [Assessments] are best used as "problem detectors" to identify areas for attention and further exploration. (APQC, 1999)
- Clear linkages between [assessments] and resource allocation are critical, but the best linkages are indirect. (APQC, 1999)
- A good assessment program is linked to processes such as planning and budgeting (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. (AAHE, 1991)
- Effective outcomes assessment provides a vehicle for demonstrating accountability to stakeholders within and outside the institution. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Assessment must be accountable: informs decisions for continuous improvement or provide evidence that what you believed was being learned is, after, being learned (Bresciani, 2003)

A. Assessments that are used are planned and purposeful; they start with a clear understanding of why you are assessing.

- Connect assessment processes to questions or concerns that program decision makers or internal stakeholders really care about. (Driscoll & Cordero De Noriega, 2006)
- Effective outcomes assessment has a written plan with clear purposes that is related to goals people value—to a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment is a vehicle for improvement, not an end in itself. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about. (AAHE, 1991)
- A good assessment program asks important questions (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Identify important questions in the field. (Eder, 1999)
- The assessment of student learning begins with educational values (AAHE, 1991)
- Successful assessment flows from the institution's mission. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- Institutional mission is the ultimate source of the goals and objectives for assessment of student learning. (AAC&U, 2001)
- The best [assessments] communicate the institution's core values. (APQC, 1999)
- A good assessment program reflects institutional mission (Palomba & Banta, 1999)

- The multiple roles of assessment are recognised. The powerful motivating effect of assessment requirements on students is understood and assessment tasks are designed to foster valued study habits. (AUTC, 2002)

B. Assessments that are used focus on clear and important goals. (See separate section below.)

C. Assessments that are used involve the active participation of those with a stake in decisions stemming from the results.

- Effective outcomes assessment involves stakeholders (faculty members, administrators, students, student affairs professionals, employers, community representatives) from the outset to incorporate their needs and interests and to solicit later support (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved. (AAHE, 1991)
- The collection, interpretation, and use of student learning evidence is a collective endeavor, and is not viewed as the sole responsibility of a single office or position. Those in the institution with a stake in decisions of educational quality participate in the process. (C-RAC, 2004)
- The institution applies collective judgment as to the meaning and utility of the evidence. (C-RAC, 2004)
- The institution uses broad participation in reflecting about student learning outcomes as a means of building a commitment to educational improvement. (C-RAC, 2004)
- Make assessment-for-improvement a team effort. (Driscoll & Cordero De Noriega, 2006)
- Good assessment practice includes faculty ownership of not just the education but also, because it is inherent to the learning process itself, the assessment of students; whether they teach major or general education courses, faculty need to create, implement, and sustain the program to educate and assess students (Greater Expectations Project, 2004)
- The institution's constituencies (especially the faculty and administration, but also students, board members, employers of graduates, and the general public) are active advocates (by discussion and promotion) of the assessment plan and the goals and objectives on which it is based. (AAC&U, 2001)
- Effective outcomes assessment devolves responsibility for assessment to the unit level. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- A good assessment program encourages involvement of individuals from on and off campus (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Successful assessment has faculty ownership/responsibility. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- Assessments are created, implemented, sustained and rated collaboratively by faculty responsible for general education and the majors. (AAC&U, 2001)
- Assessment must be an open process. (Steen, 1999)

D. Assessments that are used are communicated widely and transparently (clearly and understandably).

- [Assessments] must be publicly available, visible, and consistent across the organization. (APQC, 1999)
- Present the results of research, both intended and unintended, in a fair, complete, and objective manner. (NCME, 1995)
- A good assessment program shares information with multiple audiences (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Effective outcomes assessment incorporates continuous communication with constituents concerning activities and findings. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Provide public accountability and transparency. (AAC&U, 2004)
- The institution is clear and public about the learning outcomes to which it aspires for its students. (C-RAC, 2004)
- Make assessment protocols and results meaningful and available to internal and external stakeholders for feedback and ultimately improvement. (Driscoll & Cordero De Noriega, 2006)
- Use a suitable style and effective organization to present assessment work; use appropriate forums for communicating work to intended audiences; present the message with clarity and integrity. (Eder, 1999)
- Provide to those who receive assessment results information about the assessment, its purposes, its limitations, and its uses necessary for the proper interpretation of the results. (NCME, 1995)
- Provide to those who receive score reports an understandable written description of all reported scores, including proper interpretations and likely misinterpretations. (NCME, 1995)

- Communicate to appropriate audiences the results of the assessment in an understandable and timely manner, including proper interpretations and likely misinterpretations. (NCME, 1995)
- Students receive explanatory and diagnostic feedback as well as grades. (AUTC, 2002)
- Attribute completely and appropriately the work and ideas of others. (NCME, 1995)
- Qualify the conclusions of the research within the limitations of the study. (NCME, 1995)
- Inform parties involved in the assessment process how assessment results may affect them. (NCME, 1995)

E. Assessments that are used are used fairly, ethically, and responsibly.

- Conduct evaluation and research activities in an informed, objective, and fair manner. (NCME, 1995)
- Good assessments are fair to all students. (Suskie, 2004)
- Good assessments are ethical and protect the privacy and dignity of those involved. (Suskie, 2004)
- Interpret assessment results appropriately. (Suskie, 2000)
- Interpret, use, and communicate assessment results in an informed, objective, and fair manner within the context of the assessment's limitations and with an understanding of the potential consequences of use. (NCME, 1995)
- Successful assessment does not restrict or inhibit goals of access, equity, and diversity established by the institution. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- Assessment tasks are checked to ensure there are no inherent biases that may disadvantage particular student groups. (AUTC, 2002)
- Avoid making, and actively discourage others from making, inaccurate reports, unsubstantiated claims, inappropriate interpretations, or otherwise false and misleading statements about assessment results. (NCME, 1995)
- Disclose any associations that [those who evaluate educational programs] have with authors, test publishers, or others involved with the assessment and refrain from participation if such associations might affect the objectivity of the research or evaluation. (NCME, 1995)
- Preserve the security of all assessments throughout the research process as appropriate. (NCME, 1995)
- Disclose to examinees and others whether and how long the results of the assessment will be kept on file, procedures for appeal and rescoring, rights examinees and others have to the assessment information, and how those rights may be exercised. (NCME, 1995)
- Report any apparent misuses of assessment information to those responsible for the assessment process. (NCME, 1995)
- Comply with applicable standards for protecting the rights of participants in an evaluation or research study, including the rights to privacy and informed consent. (NCME, 1995)
- Protect the rights to privacy of individuals and institutions involved in the assessment process. (NCME, 1995)

Good assessments are cost-effective, yielding value that justifies the time and expense we put into them (Suskie, 2004)**.**

- Successful assessment is cost-effective. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- Design an assessment model that aligns with the institutional capacity to support it. (Driscoll & Cordero De Noriega, 2006)
- Assessment must be manageable: considering the varying resources of the institution or program engaged in the process, including financial resources committed to the process, the institution's assessment expertise, and faculty and co-curricular specialists' time (Bresciani, 2003)

A. Cost-effective assessments focus on clear and important goals. (See separate section below.)

B. Cost-effective assessments start with what you have.

C. Cost-effective assessments are simple and have minimal paperwork.

- Excessive assessment is avoided. Assessment tasks are designed to sample student learning. (AUTC, 2002)

D. Cost-effective assessments have realistic expectations: they are flexible; they don't aim for perfection; they recognize that some important learning outcomes, especially those related to attitudes, values, and dispositions, may be difficult if not impossible to assess accurately; and that not everyone will engage in assessment.

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- Student and staff workloads are considered in the scheduling and design of assessment tasks. (AUTC, 2002)
- Assessment must be flexible: accounting for institutional culture and the learning curves of people involved with implementation (Bresciani, 2003)

Good assessments yield reasonably accurate and truthful results, of sufficient quality that they can be used with confidence to make decisions about curricula and pedagogy (Suskie, 2004).

- Effective outcomes assessment produces credible evidence of learning and organizational effectiveness. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Assessment must be trustworthy: characterized as truth-seeking/objective/ethical (Bresciani, 2003)
- Assessment must promote valid inferences. (Steen, 1999)

A. Assessments yielding reasonably accurate and truthful results flow from clear and important goals. (See separate section below.)

B. Assessments yielding reasonably accurate and truthful results represent a balanced sample of key goals, including multidimensional, integrative thinking skills.

- Assessment evidence should be representative and cumulative. (Ewell, n.d.)
- Assessment evidence should cover knowledge and skills taught throughout course or program (Ewell, n.d.)
- Assessment should measure what is worth learning, not just what is easy to measure. (Steen, 1999)
- Assessment is multi-dimensional. (AAC&U, 2001)
- Assessment evidence should provide information on multiple dimensions of student performance, i.e., more than a single summative grade (Ewell, n.d.)
- Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. (AAHE, 1991)
- Assessment tasks assess the capacity to analyze and synthesize new information and concepts rather than simply recall information previously presented. (AUTC, 2002)
- Assessment tasks are designed to assess relevant generic skills as well as subject-specific knowledge and skills. (AUTC, 2002)
- Good assessment practice includes authentic methods that arise from students' actual assignments and learning experiences, which might be both curricular and co-curricular (Greater Expectations Project, 2004)
- Good assessment practice includes a focus on higher, more sophisticated knowledge and capacities rather than on more easily measured basic skills (Greater Expectations Project, 2004)
- Assessment activities arise from and connect to actual student learning experiences, both curricular and co-curricular. (AAC&U, 2001)

C. Assessments yielding reasonably accurate and truthful results use a variety of approaches, including direct evidence of student learning.

- Successful assessment uses multiple measures. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- Use multiple sources and types of relevant information about persons or programs whenever possible in making educational decisions. (NCME, 1995)
- A variety of assessment methods is employed so that the limitations of particular methods are minimized. (AUTC, 2002)
- Use multiple sources of relevant information in conducting evaluation and research activities whenever possible. (NCME, 1995)
- Use many different measures and many different *kinds* of measures. (Suskie, 2000)
- Assessment that matters should always employ multiple measures of performance. (Steen, 1999)

- Good assessment practice includes multiple methods that include both qualitative and quantitative evidence (Greater Expectations Project, 2004)
- Assessment evidence should involve more than one source or multiple judgments of student performance (Ewell, n.d.)
- Effective outcomes assessment recognizes that learning is multidimensional and developmental and thus uses multiple measures, therefore maximizing reliability and validity. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- The institution derives evidence of student learning from multiple sources, such as courses, curricula, and co-curricular programming, and includes effects of both intentional and unintentional learning experiences. Evidence collected from these sources is complementary and demonstrates the impact of the institution as a whole on the student. (C-RAC, 2004)
- A good assessment program includes direct evidence of student learning (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Assessment evidence should include at least one type of evidence based on direct observation or demonstration of student capacities, i.e., more than simply a self-report (Ewell, n.d.)
- Assessment evidence should be verifiable. (Ewell, n.d.)

D. Assessments yielding reasonably accurate and truthful results recognize diverse approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment.

- A good assessment program reflects what is known about how students learn (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- The institution uses learning goals as well as knowledge about learning as drivers for organizing instruction. (C-RAC, 2004)
- Use assessment to support diverse learning abilities and to understand conditions under which students learn best. (Driscoll & Cordero De Noriega, 2006)
- There is provision for student choice in assessment tasks and weighting at certain times. (AUTC, 2002)
- Help students learn how to do the assessment task. (Suskie, 2000)
- Engage and encourage your students. (Suskie, 2000)

E. Assessments yielding reasonably accurate and truthful results assess teaching-learning processes as well as outcomes.

- Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. (AAHE, 1991)
- Effective outcomes assessment assesses processes as well as outcomes. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- There is both formative and summative assessment of student learning. (AAC&U, 2001)
- Good assessment practice includes the use of both formative assessment, for the purpose of giving feedback and making improvement, and summative assessment, for the purpose of identifying levels of attainment (Greater Expectations Project, 2004)
- Assessment tasks are weighted to balance the developmental ('formative') and judgemental ('summative') roles of assessment. Early low-stakes, low-weight assessment is used to provide students with feedback. (AUTC, 2002)
- Good assessment practice includes assessments that are developmental, so that students and others can observe progress toward valued outcomes, perhaps through the use of portfolios (Greater Expectations Project, 2004)
- Learning outcomes addressed in assessment are consistent and cumulative, building throughout the educational program in tune with a longitudinal view of student development. (AAC&U, 2001)
- There is a steady progression in the complexity and demands of assessment requirements in the later years of [programs]. (AUTC, 2002)
- There are integrative courses and assignments embedded in the curriculum in which (a) students not only master knowledge and skills but practice integration; (b) faculty coach students to make connections between the major and general education; and (c) students are engaged in some culminating activity or product that demonstrates their ability to integrate their undergraduate experiences. (AAC&U, 2001)
- Create milestone assessments across the curriculum. (AAC&U, 2004)

F. Assessments yielding reasonably accurate and truthful results are developed thoughtfully.

- Good [assessments] are chosen carefully. (APQC, 1999)

- Take appropriate steps to minimize potential sources of invalidity in the research and disclose known factors that may bias the results of the study. (NCME, 1995)
- A good assessment program contains a thoughtful approach to assessment planning (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Effective outcomes assessment begins when the need is recognized; allows sufficient time for development. Timing is crucial. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Apply effectively the methods selected. (Eder, 1999)

G. Assessments yielding reasonably accurate and truthful results are perpetual works in progress.

- A good assessment program allows for continuity, flexibility, and improvement in assessment (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic. (AAHE, 1991)
- Assessment is continuous. (AAC&U, 2001)
- Assessment is not a single event, but a continuous cycle. (Steen, 1999)
- Effective outcomes assessment encompasses the expectation that outcomes assessment will be ongoing, not episodic. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Good assessment practice includes assessment as continuous, systematic, and multi-dimensional (Greater Expectations Project, 2004)
- Assessment is systematic. (AAC&U, 2001)
- Good assessments are *systematized.* (Suskie, 2004)
- Evaluate the outcomes of your assessments. (Suskie, 2000)
- Successful assessment includes a process for evaluating the assessment program. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- Good [assessments] are reviewed frequently. (APQC, 1999)
- Effective outcomes assessment incorporates ongoing evaluation and improvement of the assessment process itself. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Provide periodic external review and validation of assessment practices and standards. (AAC&U, 2004)
- Critically evaluate one's assessment work; bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to the critique; use evaluation to improve the quality of future work. (Eder, 1999)
- Modify procedures in response to changing circumstances. (Eder, 1999)

Good assessments are valued.

A. Valued assessment efforts yield results that inform important decisions on important goals. (See separate section below.)

B. Valued assessment efforts are recognized and honored through meaningful incentives and rewards.

C. Valued assessments are part of an institutional climate in which innovation, risk-taking, and efforts to improve teaching and learning are recognized and honored through meaningful incentives and rewards.

- The institution provides an environment which signals support for student learning at all levels. (C-RAC, 2004)
- The institution promotes an atmosphere of critical reflection about teaching and learning. (C-RAC, 2004)
- Assessment is treated by staff and students as an integral and prominent component of the entire teaching and learning process rather than a final adjunct to it. (AUTC, 2002)
- Embed assessment into campus conversations about learning. (Driscoll & Cordero De Noriega, 2006)
- Make assessment findings part of a campus-wide commitment to faculty inquiry and educational improvement. (AAC&U, 2004)
- Effective outcomes assessment involves recognition that assessment is essential to learning, and therefore is everyone's responsibility. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change. (AAHE, 1991)

- [Assessments] are best considered in the context of a wider transformation of organizational culture. (APQC, 1999)
- Organizational culture supportive of [assessments] take time to develop, require considerable "socialization" of the organization's members, and are enhanced by stable leadership. (APQC, 1999)

D. Valued assessments are supported with appropriate resources, including time, guidance, support, and feedback.

- Successful assessment has institution-wide support. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- Effective outcomes assessment is undertaken in an environment that is receptive, supportive, and enabling—on a continuing basis. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Effective outcomes assessment has knowledgeable, effective leadership. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Successful assessment has a conceptual framework. (Huba & Freed, 2000)
- There is a faculty/departmental policy that guides individuals' assessment practices. Subject assessment is integrated into an overall plan for [program] assessment. (AUTC, 2002)
- State the basic principles of assessment work clearly. (Eder, 1999)
- Effective outcomes assessment includes faculty and staff development to prepare individuals to implement assessment and use the findings. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Show an understanding of existing scholarship in the field; bring the necessary skills to assessment work; bring together the resources necessary to move the project forward. (Eder, 1999)

Good assessments focus on and flow from clear and important goals.

- Assessment is based on well-defined outcomes for student learning. (AAC&U, 2001)
- The institution sets clear learning goals, which speak to both content and level of attainment. (C-RAC, 2004)
- There is a clear alignment between expected learning outcomes, what is taught and learnt, and the knowledge and skills assessed – there is a closed and coherent 'curriculum loop'. (AUTC, 2002)
- Effective outcomes assessment bases assessment approaches on clear, explicitly stated program objectives. (Banta & Associates, 2002)
- Define and clarify program goals and outcomes for long-term improvement. (Driscoll & Cordero De Noriega, 2006)
- Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. (AAHE, 1991)
- Articulate locally owned goals for student learning outcomes. (AAC&U, 2004)
- Have clearly stated learning outcomes and share them with your students. (Suskie, 2000)
- A good assessment program reflects programmatic goals and objectives for learning (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Define objectives that are realistic and achievable (Eder, 1999)
- Use methods appropriate to the goals. (Eder, 1999)
- The institution collects evidence of goal attainment using appropriate assessment tools. (C-RAC, 2004)
- A good assessment program contains relevant assessment techniques (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
- Assessment evidence should be relevant. (Ewell, n.d.)
- Match your assessment to what you teach and vice versa. (Suskie, 2000)
- Grades are calculated and reported on the basis of clearly articulated learning outcomes and criteria for achievement. (AUTC, 2002)

A. Assessments with clear goals have clear, appropriate standards for acceptable and exemplary student performance.

- The institution sets clear learning goals, which speak to both content and level of attainment. (C-RAC, 2004)
- Set standards in each goal area for basic, proficient, and advanced performance. (AAC&U, 2004)
- Set clear expectations for culminating work performed at a high level of accomplishment. (AAC&U, 2004)
- Evaluate and communicate the adequacy and appropriateness of any norms or standards used in the interpretation of assessment results. (NCME, 1995)

A Five-Dimensional Model of "Good" Assessment

Characteristics of good-quality assessment results	Characteristics of good assessment processes that engage faculty	Good assessments…
✓	✓	**1. Are used.**
✓	✓	Are planned and purposeful; start with a clear understanding of why you are assessing.
✓	✓	Focus on clear and important goals.
	✓	Involve the active participation of those with a stake in decisions stemming from the results.
	✓	Are communicated widely and transparently.
✓	✓	Are used fairly, ethically, and responsibly.
	✓	**2. Are cost-effective.**
	✓	Focus on clear and important goals.
	✓	Start with what you have.
	✓	Are simple.
	✓	Have realistic expectations.
✓		**3. Yield reasonably accurate and truthful results.**
✓		Flow from clear and important goals.
✓	✓	Represent a balanced sample of key goals, including multidimensional, integrative thinking skills.
✓		Use a variety of approaches, including direct evidence of student learning.
✓	✓	Recognize diverse approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment.
✓	✓	Assess teaching-learning processes as well as outcomes.
✓		Are developed thoughtfully.
✓		Are perpetual works in progress.
	✓	**4. Are valued.**
	✓	Yield results that inform important decisions on important goals.
	✓	Are recognized and honored through meaningful incentives and rewards.
	✓	Are part of an institutional climate in which innovation, risk-taking, and efforts to improve teaching and learning are recognized and honored through meaningful incentives and rewards.
	✓	Are supported with appropriate resources, including time, guidance, support, and feedback.
✓	✓	**5. Focus on and flow from clear and important goals.**
✓	✓	Have clear, appropriate standards for acceptable and exemplary student performance.

Linda Suskie, Middle States Commission on Higher Education
November 1, 2006

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Compiled by Linda Suskie, Middle States Commission on Higher Education
11/1/2006

The UNIVERSITY *of* OKLAHOMA

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT

NEEDS SURVEY FOR FACULTY

Part 1: YOUR VIEWS ABOUT ASSESSMENT

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.
*(*Scale: *Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, I don't know)*

My Department/School…

- Coordinates its student assessment activities annually in conjunction with campus administrators.
- Is recognized by faculty in other colleges/departments for its approach to program assessment.
- Has an effective plan for monitoring student outcomes.
- Demonstrates a great deal of consensus on its approach to student learning
- Collects information about employer needs for specific skills and knowledge among our graduates
- Is perceived as a campus leader on issues of student assessment.
- Has influence on assessment techniques I use in my course(s)

Overall, I believe that…

- Results of student evaluations of my teaching influence my approach to assessing their work.
- State or federally mandated assessment requirements improve the quality of undergraduate education.
- Student assessment reduces the quality of education.
- Student assessment limits the amount of time I have to devote to other academic activities such as research.
- Student assessment is more effective when determined by the faculty member rather than by the institution.
- Student assessment has improved the quality of education at this institution.
- From an educational standpoint, it is necessary for us to monitor what students learn.
- The effectiveness of teaching is enhanced when faculty regularly assess students.
- What I learn by assessing student learning has immediate relevance to what takes place in the classroom.
- Regular assessment of students accurately captures what they are learning in my classroom.
- Monitoring student assessment is a distraction and competes with essential academic work.
- Faculty have a professional obligation to regularly assess what students are learning in courses.

Part 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOMENT THEMES/TOPICS

a) The following section reflects important aspects of assessment at both course and program levels. Please rate each statement based on the following:

(i) Your perception of the <u>importance</u> of this aspect
(Scale: *Very important, Moderately important, Of little importance, N/A)*

(ii) Would you be interested in <u>attending a workshop</u> designed to address this aspect?
*(*Scale: *Definitely yes, Probably yes, Probably not, Unsure)*

- Defining course level student learning outcomes
- Defining program level student learning outcomes
- Aligning course level student learning outcomes with program level student learning outcomes
- Determining appropriate assessment strategies for face-to-face courses
- Determining appropriate assessment strategies for blended or fully on-line courses (including Open Courses).
- Developing strategies for assessing students' dispositions, virtues and attitudes
- Providing feedback to learners and using feedback to enhance instruction

- Organizing content in the best sequence for learning
- Using digital media to support learning *(wikis, blogs, social media)*
- Designing and assessing team-based learning sessions
- Making lectures engaging and interactive
- Using *clickers* and other technology to elicit student participation and promote engagement
- Developing service-learning initiatives to achieve learning goals
- Designing competency-based teaching/learning strategy
- Designing problem-based learning strategies
- Promoting case-based instruction
- Assessing large classes
- Integrating and assessing academic service learning into your course
- Developing rubrics for assessing assignments and projects
- Writing effective multiple-choice tests (that target higher order thinking skills)
- Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)/Informal, formative assessments
- Use and evaluation of portfolios
- Maintaining equity in assessment

b) **What other topics/areas would you like to see presented?**

_____

_____

_____

a) **Would you be willing to join the staff of the Office of Academic Assessment as a guest speaker or a facilitator for any of the topics/areas mentioned above? Is yes, please write your name and e-mail address in the space below as well as and the topic(s) you'd be interested in facilitating**

_____

_____

_____

b) **Can you suggest possible guest speakers or facilitators (on/off campus) for our workshops? Please provide names, institutions and their areas of expertise.**

_____

_____

_____

Part 3: PREFERENCES FOR WORKSHOP DELIVERY METHODS AND FORMATS

Preferences for workshop formats often depend on the topic. However, it would be helpful if you could provide us with your general preferences for workshop formats, time, and length.

a) **Preferred formats (please check all that apply)**

- Formal face-to-face presentations followed by discussion
- Combination of presentation, group/interactive work, and discussion
- Self-paced/self-directed materials (e.g., Web-based resources, video tapes, handouts, etc.)
- Informal face-to-face events (e.g., presentations, brown bag meetings, etc.)
- Informal on-line sessions (e.g., web-based presentations, chat sessions, etc.)
- Other (please specify): _____

b) **Preferred day/time (please check 3 preferred starting times for each day of your choice)**

Day	Time							
	9am	10am	11am	12:00 Noon	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm

c) **Preferred length (please check all that apply)**

- 45 min
- 60 min
- 90 min

d) ***Preferred way to receive information about upcoming workshops/sessions, programs, and program materials (please check all that apply)***

- Office of Academic Assessment website
- E-mail
- Phone
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Other, please specify:

Part 4: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

a) **Your primary appointment** *(department, College)*
b) **Tenure Status** *(Tenured, On tenure track, Not on tenure track)*
c) **Position** *(Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Instructor, Ranked Renewable Term, Adjunct Professor/Visiting Professor)*
d) **Please indicate the type and format of courses you primarily teach:**

(i) Undergraduate credit (*Face-to-face, blended or 100% online*)
(ii) Graduate courses *(Face-to-face, blended or 100% online)*
(iii) Non-credit courses *(Face-to-face, blended or 100% online)*

e) **Gender** (male, female, do not wish to respond)
f) **Time at OU** (less than two years, 2-5 years, 6-9 years, more than 10 years)
g) **What is your ethnicity?**

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino/Latina
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Mixed Race
- Other (please specify) _____

BASIC Curriculum Mapping Template

Part A Program student learning outcomes (SLOs).	**Part B** Required Courses						**Part C** Indirect Measures
	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4	Course 5	Course 6	
SLO #1							
SLO #2							
SLO #3							
SLO #4							
SLO #5							

Instructions for BASIC Curriculum Mapping Template		
Part A	**Part B**	**Part C**
Insert program student learning outcomes (SLOs).	**Insert "X" under each course to align with the SLO it addresses.**	**Map indirect measures.**
1. Insert **program outcomes** in the **rows** labeled *"Program level student learning outcomes"*. Insert additional rows if needed. 2. Insert an **abbreviated course name, number, and units/sections** (if applicable) in labeled **columns.** Insert additional columns if needed. It is helpful to insert course information in the **sequence** in which they are typically taught.	1. Request that faculty teaching each course listed in the columns to determine which, if any, of the **program student learning outcomes (SLOs)** are **addressed** and/or **assessed** in their **course.** 2. Ask those same faculty members to identify alignment of each course with one or more SLOs. Select a course in which the SLO is addressed. It's perefectly ok to have **more than one course addressing a single SLO** and/or **more than one SLO addressed by a single course.**	Indirect measures ask students to reflect upon and report their **perceptions** of their gains in knowledge, skills, etc. Examples of indirect measures include *graduating surveys, exit surveys, alumni surveys,* and *focus groups.* If the program conducts surveys or focus groups with students, alumni, etc., place an "**x**" in the cell(s) in which a part or all of the survey's (or focus group's) findings may align with a program-level SLOs.

ENHANCED Curriculum Mapping Template

Program student learning outcomes (SLOs).	A. Insert course names & #'s in columns and program (SLOs) in rows	Required Courses						D. Indirect Measures
		Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4	Course 5	Course 6	
	A. Insert units/sections (if applicable)							
SLO #1	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**"							
	C. Insert instructional activities							
	D. Insert potential assessments							
SLO #2	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**"							
	C. Insert instructional activities							
	D. Insert potential assessments							
SLO #3	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**"							
	C. Insert instructional activities							
	D. Insert potential assessments							
SLO #4	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**"							
	C. Insert instructional activities							
	D. Insert potential assessments							
SLO #5	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**"							
	C. Insert instructional activities							
	D. Insert potential assessments							

MAPPING KEY

I=***Introduced***, A=***Advanced***, M=***Mastery***

Instructions for ENHANCED Curriculum Mapping Template

A	B	C	D	E
Insert course and program student learning outcomes (SLOs).	**Insert expected knowledge or skill level of each course.**	**Insert instructional activities used in courses**	**Insert how the outcome is assessed in the course.**	**Map indirect measures.**
1. Insert **program outcomes** in the **rows** labeled "*Program level student learning outcomes*". Insert additional rows if needed. 2. Insert an **abbreviated course name, number, and units/sections** (if applicable) in labeled **columns.** Insert additional columns if needed. It is helpful to insert course information in the **sequence** in which they are typically taught.	1. Request that faculty teaching each course listed in the columns to determine which, if any, of the **program student learning outcomes (SLOs)** are **addressed** and/or **assessed** in their **course.** 2. Ask those same faculty members to identify whether students--after taking the course--are expected to demonstrate: - ***introductory*** *knowledge or skill (e.g., recall or explain facts, concepts),* - ***advanced*** *knowledge or skill (e.g., apply a procedure or analyze how parts relate to or contrast from one another), or* - ***mastery*** *(e.g., evaluate or make judgments based on criteria; create a novel approach, product, or artifact).* In order to represent each faculty member's determination, use the following key: "**I**" for ***Introductory*** , "**A**" for ***Advanced*** , "**M**" for **Mastery.**	1. **Instructional activities** occurring in and out of class **reinforce** learning objectives and **prepare** students for assessments. Request that faculty teaching each course **list** the **instructional activities** for each course. Frequently used instructional activities are listed below. (This list is not all-inclusive; faculty should insert any activities not found in this list.) --case study --client project --debate --discussions (online and face-to-face) --exhibition of work --group work --lab reports --lecture (e.g., by faculty, guests) --oral presentation --performance --public review --recitation --service learning --studio --video clips --Book review and discussions	1. Request that faculty teaching each course state **how student knowledge** or **skill** is **assessed** in their course, as aligned with the program-level SLOs. 2. **Insert** potential **assessment** methods into the appropriate cells. Frequently used assessments are listed below. (This list is not all-inclusive; faculty should insert any activities not found in this list.) --case study --client project --debate --exhibition of work --exam* --group work/project --lab reports --oral presentation --performance --problem sets --service learning --studio --written work --internship/practicum --reflection papers --journal article critiques *Besides multiple-choice tests/exams, the quality of student work in the rest of the assessments require use of ***rubrics*** .	**Indirect measures** ask **students** to reflect upon and report their **perceptions** of their gains in knowledge, skills, etc. **Examples** of indirect measures include graduating surveys, exit surveys, alumni surveys, and focus groups. If the program conducts surveys or focus groups with students, alumni, etc., place an "**x**" in the cell(s) in which a part or all of the survey's (or focus group's) findings may align with a program-level SLOs.

Example of BASIC Undergraduate Curriculum Map

BFA in Art

Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) *Graduates of the AA in Art should be able to:*	Required Courses							Indirect Measures
	Perspectives in Western Art	Perspectives in Ancient & World Art	Critical Theories in Art	Foundation Studio I	Advanced Studio I	Future Media and Advanced Techniques	Senior Studio, Exhibition, & Portfolio	
	2	3	5	4	4	5	8	
SLO 1: Appropriately conduct and incorporate research findings into their work	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
SLO 2: Evaluate art movements from various cultures and time periods	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
SLO 3: Articulate a philosophical and aesthetic approach to their art and its place in the larger cultural and historical context				X	X	X	X	
SLO 4: Design and execute projects effectively				X	X	X	X	
SLO 5: Use new tools and methods with facility				X	X	X	X	
SLO 6: Create a distinctive body of work that embodies their personal approach and their creative and technical mastery				X	X	X	X	

MAPPING KEY:

I=***Introduced***, A=***Advanced***, M=***Mastery***

Example of BASIC Undergraduate Curriculum Map *(with Levels)*

BFA in Art

Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) *Graduates of the AA in Art should be able to:*	Required Courses							Indirect Measures
	Perspectives in Western Art	Perspectives in Ancient & World Art	Critical Theories in Art	Foundation Studio I	Advanced Studio I	Future Media and Advanced Techniques	Senior Studio, Exhibition, & Portfolio	
	2	3	5	4	4	5	8	
SLO 1: Appropriately conduct and incorporate research findings into their work	I	I	I	I	A	A	M	
SLO 2: Evaluate art movements from various cultures and time periods	I	I	I	I	A	A	M	
SLO 3: Articulate a philosophical and aesthetic approach to their art and its place in the larger cultural and historical context				I	A	A	M	
SLO 4: Design and execute projects effectively				I	I	A	M	
SLO 5: Use new tools and methods with facility				I	I	I	A	
SLO 6: Create a distinctive body of work that embodies their personal approach and their creative and technical mastery				I	I	A	A	

MAPPING KEY:

I=***Introduced***, A=***Advanced***, M=***Mastery***

Example of ENHANCED Undergraduate Curriculum Map

BFA in Art

Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	A. Insert course names & #'s in columns and program SLOs in rows	Required Courses							D. Indirect Measures
		Perspectives in Western Art	Perspectives in Ancient & World Art	Critical Theories in Art	Foundation Studio I	Advanced Studio I	Future Media and Advanced	Senior Studio, Exhibition, & Portfolio	
Graduates of the BFA in Art should be able to:	A. Course units/sections	2	3	5	4	4	5	8	
Appropriately conduct and incorporate research findings into their work.	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**,"	I	I	I	I	A	A	M	Focus Groups and Alumni and Graduating Surveys
	C. Insert instructional activities	Virtual and in-person resource orientations, lectures, group discussions, debates	Virtual and in-person resource orientations, lectures, group discussions, debates	Lectures, group discussions, artist seminars	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Exhibition & portfolio process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	
	D. Insert potential assessments	Written critiques	Written critiques	Mid-term and final papers	Artistic work product, oral presentation	Artistic work product, oral presentation	Artistic work product, oral presentation	Exhibition & portfolio presentation	
Evaluate art movements from various culturesand time periods.	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**,"	I	I	I	I	A	A	M	Focus Groups and Alumni and Graduating Surveys
	C. Insert instructional activities	Lectures, group discussions, debates virtual and in-person museum tours, PowerPoint reviews	Lectures, group discussions, debates virtual and in-person museum tours, PowerPoint reviews	Lectures, group discussions, artists seminars	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Exhibition & portfolio process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	
	D. Insert potential assessments	Written critiques	Written critiques	Mid-term and final papers	Artistic work product, oral presentation, written critiques of peer work	Artistic work product, oral presentation, written critiques of peer work	Artistic work product, oral presentation, written critiques of peer work	Exhibition & portfolio presentation, written critiques of peer work	
Articulate a philosophical and aesthetic approach to their art and its place in the larger cultural and historical context	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**,"				I	A	A	M	Focus Groups and Alumni and Graduating Surveys
	C. Insert instructional activities				Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Exhibition & portfolio process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	
	D. Insert potential assessments				Oral presentation of artistic work product	Oral presentation of artistic work product	Oral presentation of artistic work product	Exhibition & portfolio presentation	
Design and execute projects effectively	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**,"				I	I	A	M	Focus Groups and Alumni and Graduating Surveys
	C. Insert instructional activities				Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Exhibition & portfolio process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	
	D. Insert potential assessments				Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Exhibition & portfolio process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	

Example of ENHANCED Undergraduate Curriculum Map *(cont.)*

BFA in Art

Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	A. Insert course names & #'s in columns and program SLOs in rows	Required Courses							D. Indirect Measures
		Perspectives in Western Art	Perspectives in Ancient & World Art	Critical Theories in Art	Foundation Studio I	Advanced Studio I	Future Media and Advanced	Senior Studio, Exhibition, & Portfolio	
Graduates of the BFA in Art should be able to:	**A. Course units/sections**	**2**	**3**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**5**	**8**	
Use new tools and methods with facility	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**,"				I	I	I	A	Focus Groups and Alumni and Graduating Surveys
	C. Insert instructional activities				Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Exhibition and portfolio process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	
	D. Insert potential assessments				Artistic work product	Artistic work product	Artistic work product	Exhibition, portfolio presentation	
Create a distinctive body of work that embodies their personal approach and their creative and technical mastery	B. Insert "**I**," "**A**," or "**M**,"				I	I	A	A	Focus Groups and Alumni and Graduating Surveys
	C. Insert instructional activities				Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Artistic work process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	Exhibition & portfolio process, iterative critique and dialogue w/peers & faculty	
	D. Insert potential assessments				Artistic work product, oral presentation	Artistic work product, oral presentation	Artistic work product, oral presentation	Exhibition & portfolio presentation	

MAPPING KEY:
I=***Introduced***, A=***Advanced***, M=***Mastery***

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

October 2010

Regional Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: Mapping the Territory

Staci Provezis

Foreword by Stanley O. Ikenberry

Occasional Paper #6

learningoutcomesassessment.org

About the Author

Staci Provezis

Staci Provezis is Project Manager and Research Analyst for the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). She oversees NILOA's daily operations and participates in various research projects undertaken by the institute. Her own research examines the role of accreditation in institutional assessment and maps institutional responses to the nationwide call for transparency in student learning outcomes assessment. Before joining NILOA, Staci worked in various collegiate academic and student affairs positions, including coordinating a Study Abroad Program at Eastern Illinois University, directing a first-year experience program at the University of Pittsburgh, and teaching English courses at Dallas County Community College and Collin County Community College. She holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education from the University of Illinois, and an M.A. and B.A. in English from Marshall University.

"The findings in this study should be of interest to all those concerned with the future of higher education in the United States and the integrity of the systems of quality control that sustain it."

Stanley O. Ikenberry

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Contents

Abstract

Regional Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes

While institutions engage in assessment for various reasons, one principle reason is to meet the expectations of accreditors. Accreditation in the United States serves as both a quality assurance and accountability mechanism, and it has been the focus of much discussion since the Spellings Report and the Reauthorization of Higher Education Act, the common contention being that regional accreditation organizations should be assuring high levels of quality education from the institutions they accredit.

In this paper, I examine the policies and procedures of the seven regional accreditors as they relate to student learning outcomes assessment. My findings indicate that accreditors (1) subscribe to the Council for Regional Accreditating Commissions' (C-RAC) Principles of Good Practice; (2) do not prescribe strategies for assessment although some offer structured guidance; (3) predominantly consider transparency an issue of institutional integrity; (4) agree that faculty are a crucial stakeholder in student learning outcomes assessment; (5) cite institutions for deficient work in assessment at higher levels than in the past; and (6) offer various resources to assist institutions in meeting their expectations. In many ways, these organizations exhibit a degree of consistency across regions with regard to student learning outcomes assessment. However, more could be done to define useful approaches to assessment, to disseminate these approaches, and to address the issue of assessment as a cost liability for institutions. Regional accreditors and their institutional members particularly need to work together to address two concerns: faculty involvement and transparency. My findings and recommendations provide, in miniature, a map of the current territories of regional accreditation, with an emphasis on organizations' efforts to foster both consistency and creativity as they assist institutions in their assessment activities. At their foundation, accreditors' expectations are similar, but there are different approaches being tested across the nation. More cross-pollination among the regions would allow each to learn and grow from the others.

Foreword

Accreditation and Assessment: Inevitable Partners

Accreditation in American higher education is at once ubiquitous and shrouded in ambiguity. Taking root a century ago, the concept of accreditation was created by institutions themselves as a means to assess academic quality. Over the years the uses of accreditation have grown to include, for example, qualitative distinctions among programs in professional fields such as medicine, law and countless others; a litmus test for use by state and federal policy makers in the prudent distribution of public funds; and, of course, help for students and their families as well as the general public in making informed choices.

The question of how – precisely on what basis – accrediting groups make these difficult and consequential decisions about which institutions and programs should be granted accreditation and which should not has never been fully addressed, remaining a work in progress. As a result, accreditation processes and decisions are often contested, either informally within the academy or legally through the courts. To complicate matters, the range of institutions seeking accreditation has expanded to include not just traditional public and not-for-profit independent campuses but for-profit corporations. The variety of approaches to teaching and learning has expanded to embrace on-line learning, challenging process-based judgments of an earlier era. Given these changes, the evidentiary base on which regional and specialized accrediting groups make the consequential decision to grant or deny accreditation becomes a hugely important question.

In this manuscript, Staci Provezis from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment carefully examines how regional accrediting groups go about the job of making judgments about institutional quality. Specifically, she focused on the standards and expectations held by the seven regional accrediting groups for institutional assessment of student learning outcomes, pointing out the similarities and difference among regions. What is the standard for assessment of learning outcomes against which institutions will be held? And even more important, what expectation do regional accrediting groups hold for how the evidence of assessment is used? The relevance of these questions becomes clearer when we learn from Dr. Provezis that the most common focus of letters to institutions following accreditation visits is the adequacy of institutional assessment of learning outcomes.

In an earlier study, George Kuh and I shared the findings from a national survey of chief academic officers. We worked to understand the current state of learning outcome assessment on campus. Our report, *More Than You Think; Less Than We Need,* revealed a number of things, including the fact that more attention was being given to the assessment of learning outcomes on college campuses than many had assumed. At the same time, the survey evidence made plain that the challenge of assessing what students know and are able to do is being only partially and unevenly addressed and that the slim evidence of assessment too often has no consequence, left unused.

Foreword (cont.)

The other major finding of our work that stood out was that chief academic officers pointed out that regional and specialized accreditation standards and expectations were the main drivers of outcome assessment initiatives on their campuses. In some respects, learning that accreditation was the main driver of assessment on most campuses is disappointing. Instead, we would have been elated if institutions themselves, faculty members and academic and administrative leaders and governing boards, driven by the desire to be the best and continuously improve, would have been in the driver's seat.

Still, if accreditation *is* driving learning outcome assessment in American higher education, where is it taking us? What are the standards? What is the variation among regions? And how are regional accrediting groups guiding and helping institutions meet these rising expectations for outcome evidence? These and other key questions are probed in this NILOA Occasional Paper #6, *Regional Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: Mapping the Territory.* It comes as a result of a year-long effort by Dr. Provezis and the generous cooperation of the seven regional accrediting commissions, all made possible by support from Lumina Foundation for Education, Carnegie Corporation, and The Teagle Foundation. The findings should be of interest to all those concerned with the future of higher education in the United States and the integrity of the systems of quality control that sustain it.

Stanley O. Ikenberry
President Emeritus & Regent Professor
University of Illinois

Regional Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: Mapping the Territory

Staci Provezis

What is driving the assessment movement in American higher education? In probing that question the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) has found that while several forces have converged, prompting more institutions to assess student learning outcomes, regional accreditation is among the most important of those forces. Chief academic officers at regionally accredited institutions across the U.S. cite accreditation as the *primary reason* their institutions assess student learning (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009). Underscoring this finding, the comments of college and university presidents during a focus group at the 2009 annual meeting of the American Council on Education testified to the power of accreditation as a driving force in student learning outcomes assessment:

- "[New England Association for Schools and Colleges] is pushing for outcomes." (President, Liberal Arts College)
- "Accreditation visit coming up. This drives what we need to do for assessment." (President, Urban University)
- "[Southern Association of Colleges and Schools] Quality Enhancement Plan was important to our assessment efforts." (President, State Regional Public University)
- "[Higher Learning Commission] came down on us hard over assessment." (President, Small Liberal Arts College)

This paper focuses on policies and procedures as they relate to student learning outcomes assessment at each of the seven regional accreditation organizations in the U.S. and explores a set of major findings from this study, including recommendations for advancing student learning outcomes assessment. For this study, interviews were conducted with accreditation organization representatives, and site visits were made to the organizations in all but one of these regions.[1] In the second phase of the study, NILOA and the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), composed of the heads of the seven regional organizations, jointly sponsored an invitational "Symposium on Student Learning Outcomes Assessment."[2]

Several forces have converged, prompting more institutions to assess student learning outcomes. Regional accreditation is among the most important of those forces.

[1] During July 2009, the author visited six of the regional accreditation organizations, interviewing one individual or more who could speak of the accreditation organization's practices regarding student learning outcomes assessment. (The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities [Northwest] did not agree to be interviewed for this study.) Prior to the interviews, each region's accreditation standards and websites were reviewed for information on student learning outcomes assessment. During the interviews, which lasted between two and five hours, interviewees provided various documents for the study, including proceedings of meetings and workshops, memos, and redacted accreditation letters. The interview data were transcribed and all materials were analyzed for emerging themes based on a set of research questions focusing on the expectations of the accreditation organizations.

[2] Key findings from the interviews were presented in October 2009 at the "Symposium on Student Learning Outcomes Assessment," sponsored by NILOA and C-RAC. Two representatives from each of the regional accreditation organizations attended this symposium (except for Northwest, which did not attend), reviewed information collected and presented for their region, and had the opportunity to respond.

One overriding impression emerged from the study: Although there are seven quasi-independent regional organizations in the accreditation system, their policies and approaches to student learning outcomes assessment tend to be more alike than different. The seven regional accreditation organizations appear to share similar expectations for student learning outcomes assessment.

Findings

While supporting the claim that the regional accreditation organizations have similar expectations with regard to assessing student learning, the findings from this study also shed light on the various ways these organizations are shaping institutional assessment activity. Specifically, the study found the following:

- Each of the seven regional accreditors appears to be following the guidelines set forth in the C-RAC's Principles for Good Practices (2003).
- All regional accreditors expect learning outcomes to be defined, articulated, assessed, and used to guide institutional improvement.
- None of the regional accreditors prescribe specific assessment practices or tools, but several provide structured guidance with regard to ways to assess student learning.
- All regional accreditors appear to agree that public disclosure of learning outcomes assessment information is an issue of institutional integrity.
- With one exception, regional accreditation standards urge that faculty be involved with learning outcomes assessment, particularly with respect to the creation of learning goals and of plans linking assessment to improvement.
- Perhaps most relevant, each of the regional accreditors reported that deficiencies in student learning outcomes assessment were the most common shortcoming in institutional evaluations.
- And finally, through multiple avenues, all but one of the regional accreditors provide institutions with direct assistance (in the form of materials, programs, and other means) to improve their capacity to assess student learning outcomes.[3]

C-RAC Guidelines

The heads of each of the regional accrediting groups belong to the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), the purpose of which is to promote collaboration between the regional accrediting commissions so as to build on best practices strategies, to work with the U.S. Congress and the Department of Education, and to communicate with all stakeholders.[4] During the interviews, representatives from every participating accreditation region discussed the value and importance of the C-RAC's Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: Principles for Good Practices (2003).

The C-RAC principles are designed to "help guide the work of all regional commissions" by showing "the commissions' shared commitment to student learning" and by providing "a basis for assessing accreditation practice across the regions" (pp. 1–2). The interviews, regional accreditation standards, and materials from the regional accreditors all suggest that the basic C-RAC principles have, to varying degrees, been adopted by each of the regional commissions. Essentially, the C-RAC principles offer a common statement of expectations for learning outcomes assessment. Each region, for instance, expects institutions 1) to articulate learning outcomes that are directly related

Although there are seven quasi-independent regional organizations in the accreditation system, their policies and approaches to student learning outcomes assessment tend to be more alike than different.

[3] It appears from its website that Northwest does not offer workshops or resources on student learning outcomes assessment; not agreeing to be interviewed or to respond to questions, Northwest did not provide information to the contrary.

[4] See C-RAC by-laws for more about the organization, at http://www.ncahlc.org/download/C-RAC_BYLAWS.pdf

to institutional missions; 2) to look for clear, suitable evidence of the presence of those outcomes; and 3) to build assessment capacity through training (p. 3). The C-RAC principles speak both to what accreditors should do and to what regional accreditors should expect institutions to do.

A review of the various policies and practices of the regional accrediting organizations suggests they are, for the most part, adhering to the basic C-RAC principles as set forth in this national "agreement." Even though they are commonly criticized for having different policies and procedures,[5] these organizations generally adhere to loosely defined but similarly expressed expectations on student learning outcomes assessment. Most have changed their accreditation standards since the 2003 C-RAC principles were adopted and/or have strengthened standards and expectations for outcomes assessment. Moreover, they regularly share and discuss assessment strategies with institutions and with each other. As a result, rather than there being seven unique or distinct assessment processes and programs, the seven regional organizations are more similar than not in their approaches to outcomes assessment.

Still, within these common threads, each regional organization has its own distinctive practices and strategies influenced by its engagement with campuses and by the distinctive economic and cultural properties of its region (Brittingham, 2009). A case in point is New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), where the New England region tends to reflect a culture of institutional independence evidenced by state mottos, such as Connecticut's "Land of Steady Habits" and New Hampshire's "Live Free or Die." The New England region also has a larger proportion of private or independent colleges and universities. NEASC tries to accommodate the "rhythm of the institutions, rather than impose one" (personal communication, July 29, 2009), helping institutions find assessment practices that work for them, rather than dictating a single approach.

That the culture of a region influences both academic institutions and the organizations that accredit them should not be surprising. A national accreditation system would, according to Brittingham (2009), fail to allow for these regional differences, or to enable regions to adapt and experiment with approaches to learning outcomes assessment. Practices described later in this paper show that regional accreditors are experimenting with different strategies to assist with learning outcomes assessment. In the interviews, it was not uncommon for an accreditor's representative to refer to the successes or failures of accreditors in other regions as motivation for revising a current strategy or creating a new one. For instance, if one regional accreditation organization has a successful program, it is likely to be emulated by another accreditor—but with a difference that takes into account the culture of the region. While a national system would have certain benefits of continuity across the country, this uniformity would occur at the expense of being able to respond to regional differences or being able to experiment with different ways to approach the process. Still, although regional differences may result in minor differences in approach and philosophy, these distinctions do not preclude the emergence of an overall, more-or-less common national strategy towards learning outcomes assessment.

While a national system would have certain benefits of continuity across the country, this uniformity would occur at the expense of being able to respond to regional differences or being able to experiment with different ways to approach the process.

Definition and Articulation of Learning Outcomes

Consistent with other observations (Bardo, 2009; Ewell, 2009), all seven regional accreditors expect institutions to articulate student learning outcomes and to assess those outcomes. While ten years ago it may have been acceptable for an institution to have an assessment plan, regional accreditors today

[5] For instance, see the American Council of Trustees and Alumni's *Why Accreditation Doesn't Work and What Policymakers Can do About It*, at https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/Accreditation2007Final.pdf, and *Can College Accreditation Live up to its Promise?*, at http://www.chea.org/pdf/CanAccreditationFulfillPromise.pdf. Also, see the discussions of the Spellings Commission, like those highlighted in *InsideHigherEd*'s "Dropping the Bomb on Accreditation," at http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/03/31/accredit.

expect that evidence of student learning outcomes will be assembled and used to improve teaching, learning, and overall institutional performance. This increased emphasis on assessment and on using assessment results for improvement is underscored by the fact that each of the regional accreditors has updated and strengthened standards for assessment at some point over the last eight years. Updates, for example, include broader expectations for student learning outcomes assessment. For example, the new accreditation standards issued in January 2010 by the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) place less emphasis on planning than previously but require "an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement" (p. 15). Because many institutions are on a ten-year reaccreditation cycle, they are likely to confront a higher bar and raised expectations for learning outcomes assessment over the next several years. In other words, institutions reaccredited during the last decade may be vulnerable to a false sense of comfort as they prepare for the next accreditation review.

The standards of almost all of the regional accreditors include the expectation that institutions *clearly state* learning outcomes. Each regional accreditor, moreover, expects institutions to assess stated learning outcomes at all levels with *multiple measures* and to *use* the assessment information primarily for institutional improvement. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) standards state, for example, "Evaluation enables the institution to demonstrate through verifiable means its attainment of purposes and objectives both inside and outside the classroom" (2005, p. 4). Another NEASC standard adds that institutions should implement a "systematic and broad-based approach to the assessment of student learning" that promotes understanding of both what and how students learn (p. 12).

While ten years ago it may have been acceptable for an institution to have an assessment plan, regional accreditors today expect that evidence of student learning outcomes will be assembled and used to improve teaching, learning, and overall institutional performance.

All regional accreditors call for institutions to use multiple measures, both direct and indirect, to assess learning. This requirement is typically listed in the organization's standards. A Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commmission on Colleges (called, SACS) representative stated that institutions should use "multiple measures," but noted that this requirement was understood in the region and therefore was not listed in the standards. SACS facilitator notes used for training peer evaluators explain that an institution should have multiple outcome measures (SACSCOC, 2009, p. 15). In the interviews, accreditor representatives all pointed out the importance of institutions using appropriate measures, for instance, avoiding using a student engagement survey as direct evidence of student acquisition of critical thinking skills.

All regional accreditors also want institutions to use the information gained from the assessment process for improvement. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), for example, requires that the results of assessment be used to "improve teaching and learning" (2006, p. 63). All regional accreditors share the hope that the results of assessment will prove "useful" and that assessment data will actually be used to improve the attainment of institutional goals. They also tend to stress that the assessment process should be "ongoing." Yet as noted earlier, while all the accreditors to some degree expect institutions to state learning outcomes, to assess them, and to use the results for improvement, the typical ten-year accreditation cycle may mean that many institutions have not yet undergone these requirements.

Practices and Tools

Every regional accreditation organization is careful not to prescribe specific methods or tools for assessing outcomes. In fact each stressed the diversity of institutions in its region and the need for the assessment process to reflect the concerns of the institution. All of the accreditors echoed the sentiment that institutions should select the process that works best for them while at the same time institutions should draw on multiple indirect and direct measures

for evidence of student learning. All regional accreditors agreed that institutions should embed the assessment process in activities already taking place on campus.

While not prescribing a model, regional accreditors expect that a campus's assessment activities will be supported by an institutional commitment to the assessment by the institution's president and other leaders and through funding and other support for assessment activities. According to a North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission (commonly referred to as simply HLC) staff member, for instance, institutions in that region may approach assessment in different ways, but one element of consistency is essential: "persistent engagement and leadership for assessment" (personal communication, July 10, 2009).

All regional accreditors agreed that institutions should embed the assessment process in activities already taking place on campus.

Overall, while the regional accreditors have similar expectations, they are experimenting with different assessment strategies and with the accreditation process itself. In so doing, they are creating expectations for assessment but are also providing structured ways for institutions to organize their assessment strategies by providing guidance on possible ways institutions can engage the process and provide data for accreditors. While MSCHE and the Northwest expect institutions to include assessment information as part of a larger self-study, NEASC, HLC, SACS, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (called Western Senior) look for evidence of learning outcomes through more focused initiatives, as illustrated below.

NEASC's policy initiative on assessment for improving student achievement and success is in two parts—Part 1: Making Assessment More Explicit (The E-series); and Part 2: Documenting Student Success (The S-series). Commonly called "the E and S forms," these forms were developed in August 2008 and became a requirement in spring 2009. The E-series requests institutions "to select and declare their basic approach to assessment and to summarize their findings" (NEASC, 2008, p. 1). While institutions may seek NEASC approval to use alternative approaches, NEASC suggests institutions select from the following approaches to assessment:

1. An inventory of program assessment and specialized accreditation
2. The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) plus program review
3. A statement of claims for student achievement with supporting evidence
4. A comparison to peers on measures of student achievement and success (p. 1)

For the S-series, institutions provide data on retention and graduation rates as well as other measures that fit with the institutions' missions. Institutions are given forms for documenting information and these are filed as part of the fifth-year report and the ten-year comprehensive review. This initiative is meant to be "mission-sensitive"—that is, the types of information collected would allow a diverse set of institutions to demonstrate success. NEASC hopes the initiative will promote creativity as well as institutional improvement (2009, p. 10) and in this sense is trying to provide some flexibility while also offering a clear structure.

HLC has two programs that guide the approach to student learning outcomes assessment. The first, Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), serves as an alternative to the self-study process and aims to improve institutional quality through the initiation of a continuous improvement cycle. AQIP institutions are "part of an intensive, collaborative effort to reshape their cultures and to make a commitment to continuous quality improvement their constant focus" (NCA-HLC, 2008, p. 244). Assessment is a key function of the AQIP process. Institutions participating in AQIP must "measure student learning—

and use the results to improve teaching and learning processes as well as all other institutional processes that contribute to student learning" (p. 244). In AQIP's "helping students learn" category, an institution must "address specific questions about its teaching-learning processes, about the performance of these processes, and the way the institution uses results data to improve" (p. 244). AQIP institutions create at least three "action projects"—reviewed annually—focusing on institutional improvement, one of which addresses student learning assessment.

A second HLC approach to outcomes assessment is its Academy for Assessment of Student Learning, launched in 2006, which includes a "four-year sequence of events and interactions focused on student learning, targeted at accelerating and advancing efforts to assess and improve student learning, and designed to build institution-wide commitment to assessment of student learning" (NCA-HLC, 2008a, p. 251). Institutions in the HLC can participate in this academy to fulfill accreditation requirements related to student learning, to address mandates related to insufficient student learning outcomes assessment information, or to implement one of the AQIP action projects (p. 251). Institutions send teams to create an "action portfolio," to attend workshops, and to receive feedback on their portfolios. In the end, institutional teams write a "results report," and the academy compiles the publications as a "showcase of accomplishments and inventory of good practices" (p. 251).

The SACS Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), in contrast, is mandatory for all institutions in that accreditation organization's region. A QEP must be submitted that (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement (SACSCOC, 2007, pp. 6 & 19). The SACS QEP plans are followed by a peer visit that may include an assessment expert who consults with the institution concerning its QEP (personal communication, July 10, 2009). Even though this QEP process does not prescribe an assessment method, it does have clear expectations with respect to student learning outcomes assessment.

Very similar is the process for Western Senior, which divides the visits into three phases: the proposal, a capacity visit, and an educational effectiveness visit. Student learning outcomes assessment threads throughout these three phases and all parts of the visits. Institutions are asked questions from Western Senior's rubric: Educational Effectiveness Framework: Capacity and Effectiveness as They Relate to Student and Institutional Learning. This rubric outlines Western Senior's standards and gives the peer reviewers a framework from which to judge the institution. For example, an element and definition reads: "Student learning outcomes established; communicated in syllabi and publications; cited and used by faculty, student affairs, advisors, others" (WASC-ACSCU, n.d., p.1). If classified in the initial stage for this item, an institution may have only a few programs listing their student learning outcomes and minimal knowledge or use of them across the campus; in the emerging stage, many programs would list this information in basic documents beginning to be used; in the developed stage, all programs would have established outcomes known and used by most programs; and in the highly developed stage, all programs would share such information that faculty and others would use widely and routinely. Western Senior provides further guidance with similarly structured rubrics, which are available for program learning outcomes, portfolios, capstone activities, program reviews, and general education assessment.

Overall, while the regional accreditors have similar expectations, they are experimenting with different assessment strategies and with the accreditation process itself.

Every regional accreditation organization is careful not to prescribe a single method or tool for assessing learning outcomes. Rather, they tend to value and respect the diversity of academic missions and institutions in their region and the need for the assessment process to reflect these variations. In most instances, regional accreditors encourage evidence drawn from multiple measures embedded in existing activity, processes, and issues on campus.

Transparency and Integrity

Several commission representatives mentioned that transparency and learning outcomes assessment rose to the fore in the wake of the Spellings' Commission report and the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. In this current climate, grade-point averages, graduation rates, alumni surveys, and such are all important but not sufficient in the eyes of critics. Additional information is being requested and several national organizations are addressing transparency. While the regional accreditation organizations support those initiatives, representatives from the HLC and NEASC mentioned that templates such as that of College Portrait of Undergraduate Education (http://www.collegeportraits.org/) do not provide enough information on student learning outcomes. Even so, at this point, the majority of commissions ask institutions to be more transparent through their integrity standards and not through student learning outcomes standards. Each regional accreditor is addressing transparency with slight variations. Most assert that transparency is a part of institutional integrity and that campuses should be able to show what students will learn. Others—for example, Western Senior—appear to take a stronger approach and call for institution-wide assessment information, not merely course/program expectations, to be made public.

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Western Senior expects public disclosure of information, stipulating that the institution "demonstrate" the achievement of its graduates (WASC-ACSCU, 2008, p. 15) and "[make] public data on student achievement at the institutional and degree level, in a manner determined by the institution" (p. 11). A Western Senior task force on transparency and accountability issued a report in October 2009 providing additional guidance on the transparency standard and expanding on the importance that institutions deliver "current and easily accessible data about student achievement" to various higher education stakeholders (2009, p. 5). To that end, the task force provided recommendations on what kinds of information institutions might publish and where it might appear. A commission representative pointed out that "WASC Senior is requiring some degree of disclosure, but what or how the institutions disclose is not mandated" (personal communication, July 17, 2009).

The issue of transparency actually appears to present itself at two levels in accreditation. While this study focuses on transparency as a requirement for institutions to post their assessment information publicly, an animated discussion occurred at C-RAC-NILOA's "Symposium on Student Learning Outcomes Assessment" about whether institutional self-studies should also be available to the public. During that discussion, Douglas Bennett, president of Earlham College, said, "If we are going to stand behind accreditation as our quality assurance mechanism, we cannot hide that information; we have to make it available." Bennett reiterated this sentiment in his Inside Higher Ed editorial (Bennett, 2010). While some accrediting organizations said they encourage institutions to publish such information, others said it "deteriorates the self-study process if [accreditors] make it public" because institutions may feel compelled to highlight only areas where they are doing well. In contrast, if assessment results are not accessible to interested parties on and off the campus, then institutions can be more honest about what is happening on campus and describe their shortcomings—as well as their successes.

Faculty Involvement

To address the role of faculty in learning outcomes assessment, most of the regional accreditors articulate expectations for faculty involvement in assessment in their standards. SACS expects faculty involvement but does not directly state this expectation in its standards, but the standards of all of the other accreditors stipulate faculty involvement. While representatives from MSCHE, NEASC, HLC, and Western Junior (WASC Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges) said they do not perceive institutions struggle to meet this requirement, common accreditor expectations for faculty involvement include that faculty (a) define the learning outcomes or goals, (b) decide on ways to evaluate those stated goals, and (c) create plans for using assessment results for improvement. NEASC and Western Senior both illustrate strong expectations for faculty involvement.

In NEASC's standards faculty have a key role in the understanding of how students learn and assessment is a key measure of teaching and learning effectiveness. Expectations for faculty with regard to learning outcomes assessment can be found in three areas of these standards. First, faculty must have a "substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise" (NEASC, 2005, p. 6). Next, faculty are directly involved with "understanding what and how students are learning and using the results for improvement has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty" (p. 13). Finally, faculty have a responsibility for the "instruction and the systematic understanding of effective teaching/learning processes and outcomes in courses and programs for which they share responsibility" (p. 14).

In the case of Western Senior, the role of faculty is considered in the commission's capacity and preparatory review, in which representatives ask, "Do faculty have resources and support to assess and improve student learning and success?", as well as in the educational effectiveness review, in which representatives ask, "How do the faculty demonstrate responsibility for assessment and improvement of learning?" (personal communication, July 17, 2010). Additionally, a nonmandatory guideline in the Western Senior standards states, "Where appropriate, the institution includes in its policies for faculty promotion and tenure the recognition of scholarship related to teaching, learning, assessment, and co-curricular learning" (2008, p. 15).

Despite calling for faculty involvement, all regional accreditation standards are weak in respect to means of assuring such involvement. During the interviews several of the regional accreditation representatives suggested that faculty involvement is not an issue. However, the 2010 NILOA survey, in contrast, found faculty involvement listed most often by provosts as the biggest challenge to overcome to effectively assess student learning outcomes. Even though faculty are seen as playing a part in the assessment process, C-RAC-NILOA symposium participants said more needs to be done to encourage the involvement of faculty in assessment because they are central to the teaching and learning process. One regional accreditation leader said it would be good to know more about what would make assessment worthwhile to the faculty—for a better understanding of the source of their resistance.[6] Currently, it appears that the requirements for regional accreditation serve as an incentive, or driver, for campus administration seeking ways to gain faculty involvement and support.

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Institutional Shortcomings

While the assessment of the quality of academic programs is a central function of higher education institutions as well as of accrediting organizations,

[6] Pat Hutchings (2010) provides some insight into the issue of faculty involvement with learning outcomes assessment.

learning outcomes assessment is only one of many areas in which colleges and universities are reviewed for accreditation. Accreditors tend to review the institutions in their regions for reaccreditation on a ten-year cycle, with Western Junior being the exception.[7] These reviews typically include a self-study report from the institution and a visit by a team of peers from other campuses. Following the peer team visit, institutions receive a preliminary report, a final report is developed, and the commission makes its ultimate accreditation decision. Institutions often receive recommendations or requirements for follow-up actions and reports, and accreditor representatives noted that follow-up requirements often focus on issues of student learning outcomes assessment and that many institutions have not met the enhanced expectations. In some cases, institutions respond by writing additional reports focusing on assessment or they receive additional campus visits. Notably, increasing numbers of institutions may not receive the ten-year reaccreditation "seal of approval" but a shortened approval instead. While to date no institution appears to have lost its accreditation solely because of student learning outcomes assessment deficiencies, increasing numbers of institutions are being required to address such issues as institutions are being placed on probation or are receiving follow-up requirements—with learning outcomes assessment as one of the main reasons, if not the sole reason.

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About two thirds of MSCHE institutions, for example, were asked for follow-up actions because of assessment (personal communication, July 30, 2009). While some institutions have follow-up reports, others receive additional team visits. NEASC reported that 80% of its institutions had been asked for follow-up actions related to assessment—either in the fifth year or during the comprehensive visit—and that the number of such actions is increasing (personal communication, July 29, 2009). If an institution understands assessment expectations and is progressing with its assessment activity, a commission may simply ask for a progress report—say, in five years. An HLC representative explained that, currently, "Very few institutions get by without strong language on assessment" (personal communication, July 7, 2009). In fact, in a study completed in 2005, seven out of ten of its institutions received some sort of monitoring, with the vast majority of the follow-up focused on assessment of student learning (personal communication, July 9, 2009). In July 2009, HLC reported that 60% of focus visits, 30% of progress reports, and 40% of monitoring reports involved assessment of student learning; and among follow-ups, assessment was among one of the three most common points of attention.

Most of the recommendations for follow-up issued by SACS relate to its "Standard of Institutional Effectiveness." In December 2008, more than half of all requests received by institutions for follow-up were focused on assessment of learning outcomes. In the last few years, 63% to 78% of the SACS institutions up for review have received follow-up recommendations with regard to the QEP standard (personal communication, July 10, 2009).

At Western Senior, almost every action letter to institutions over the last five years has required additional attention to assessment, with reasons ranging from insufficient faculty involvement to too little evidence of a plan to sustain assessment. While institutions have not received "warnings," Western Senior has issued formal notices of concern, granted shorter terms of reaccreditation, and issued prescriptive action letters. A commission representative stated during an interview, "No institution with weak assessment in the last couple of years has gotten any more than seven or eight years even if everything else is perfect" (personal communication, July 17, 2009).

[7] The institutions in the WASC Junior region are all two-year associate degree granting institutions, so the policy for this commission is to review the institutions on a six-year cycle because the time for students moving through the program is shorter (personal communication, July 17, 2009).

Western Junior, in contrast, will not sanction institutions for student learning outcomes assessment deficiencies until 2012, under the assumption that institutions will need time to "come into full compliance with the new standards" created in 2002 (Barbara Beno, memorandum, June 25, 2009). Even so, institutions are expected to be increasing their efforts in assessment to be in compliance in 2012 and beyond. Communications issued by Western Junior now often state that the "institution has made progress but needs to accelerate to get to speed by the 2012 deadline" (personal communication, March 16, 2010).

The six accreditation organizations that participated in the interviews provided access to accreditation letters relating to student learning outcomes assessment. These letters cited various factors explaining why institutions were receiving follow-up action with accreditors. For instance, an institution might need to establish clear learning goals, to continue to develop and implement the assessment process, to use evidence for improvement, and/or to gain more faculty support. While all regional accreditors are increasing the rigors of assessment and requiring greater compliance, the letters also point to successful examples of learning outcomes assessment at program level and even at institutional level. Successful campuses, according to the accreditors, are ones that have clearly stated outcomes and that provide evidence of robust and sustainable program evaluation systems, using multiple assessment measures aligned with learning goals, with high levels of faculty involvement, and using results to improve the academic program.

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Each of the regional accreditors interviewed appeared to have raised expectations for the institutional assessment of student learning outcomes. At the same time, each of them appears to view outcomes assessment as a work-in-progress, treating assessment more as a means to improvement than as a narrowly defined approach to quality control and accountability.

Assessment Resources

Regional accreditation organizations offer several different types of resources to member institutions to assist in meeting the student learning outcomes assessment challenge. For example, assessment information and resources are made available on commission websites, workshops and special sessions are offered for members at annual meetings, and experts on assessment are often placed on peer review teams. Although the standards often provide a statement of threshold expectations for assessment, the supplementary materials and resources provide support and information to guide and enhance member institutional assessment efforts. Most accreditation organizations provide information on learning outcomes assessment online. Particularly robust is MSCHE's website, which links C-RAC documents, bibliographies, its own documents about student learning outcomes assessment (e.g., Fundamental Elements of Assessment of Student Learning and Optional Analysis and Evidence), and information on assessment workshops. While websites present one venue for disseminating resources on assessment, workshops and annual meetings offer another significant resource. Annual meetings often model good assessment practice and provide networking opportunities for institutions to share assessment practices.

Two commission programs deserve particular comment in respect to providing assessment resources for institutions: The HLC's Academy for Assessment of Student Learning and Western's Assessment Leadership Academy. The HLC's academy seeks to create an "institution-wide commitment to assessment of student learning" (NCA-HLC, 2008a) by giving institutional teams a chance to work on assessment projects they are trying to implement on their campuses and by connecting the teams with mentors who have led successful efforts on their own campuses. Academy participants are required to make a four-year

commitment to an assessment project, checking in with the academy at least annually and ultimately reporting results. Western's Assessment Leadership Academy is geared more toward increasing the assessment capacity of individuals, with a goal of creating assessment leaders in the region. This nine-month program, which began in March 2010, offers roughly 30 participants an intensive course of study in the field of assessment involving multiple convenings in the course of a year (including one of a week's duration) in the hope that they, in turn, will train others, act as consultants, and/or contribute to the scholarship on assessment.

Several of the regional commissions—for example, MSCHE, HLC, NEASC, and Western Senior—employ individuals with national reputations in the field of assessment. Most of these individuals were hired in the last ten years with the purpose of augmenting and improving resources for student learning outcomes assessment. In addition, some commissions—such as MSCHE, SACS and Western Senior—send a peer evaluator with an assessment background on campus visits. These experts are typically those who have led successful assessment initiatives at their own campuses.

The nature of the assessment support accreditors provide appears to have evolved over the years as the questions and challenges related to assessment have evolved. Representatives of MSCHE, HLC, and Western Senior mentioned during interviews that when their organizations first started offering workshops they dealt with very basic questions from institutions, such as "What is assessment?" Now, institutions are asking, "How do we use the data?" These current questions are not likely to have formulaic answers and often need to be considered in relation to the concerns of specific campuses. Representatives from more than one accreditation agency indicated their organization shies away from directly presenting information at workshops so that institutions do not just do "what the accreditor wants" but instead seek out what is relevant for the institution.

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Recommendations

What insights can be drawn from this overview of approaches to learning outcomes assessment in the seven higher education accreditation regions? I offer five possibilities to advance student learning outcomes assessment.

Communicating Institutional Initiatives on Student Learning

One possibility is for the higher education community to take more initiative in addressing issues of quality assurance, allotting particular attention to learning outcomes assessment. Federal policy actions have often prodded and shaped expectations for learning outcomes assessment. Molly Broad, the current president of the American Council on Education, speaking at the HLC's 2010 annual meeting, addressed the need for institutions to self-assess student learning:

> To the extent that federal policy makers are now willing to bail out banks and other financial institutions, and to take major equity positions in our auto makers, because those companies are too big to fail, then I believe it's wise for us to assume they will have little reservation about regulating higher education now that they know it is too important to fail. (Lederman, 2010, ¶5)

In response to her assertion, Lederman asked, "But where will such large-scale change come from? The regional accreditors acting together to align their standards?" (¶18). Regional accreditors have certainly become the focus of a national debate on assessment, intensified by the Spellings' Commission and the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Still, disciplinary and professional societies and the higher education community in general can shape the learning outcomes assessment movement in constructive ways.

Although accreditation groups are loosely linked through their membership in C-RAC, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and other groups, the national trajectory for learning outcomes assessment is not well enough defined or articulated, nor does it engage the intellectual energy of campuses and academic leaders. More must be done to engage the broader higher education community in the search for more useful approaches to learning outcomes assessment and to communicate those efforts.

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Gaining Faculty Involvement

To engage faculty members in learning outcomes assessment, institutions should search for ways to collaborate with disciplinary and professional organizations. Most faculty members want to improve their courses and the curriculum for students; many are already deeply involved in such work. At the same time, faculty members too often tend to perceive assessment as an additional administrative chore. Faculty involvement in learning outcomes assessment will require a shift in the direction of viewing assessment as a form of "scholarly, intellectual work" (Hutchings, 2010). While Western Senior does provide a "guideline" suggesting that institutions reward faculty for investing time in assessment, the standards in that region and others should consider addressing the question of faculty involvement more fully—so that assessment is valued by faculty members.

Seeking Meaningful Transparency

Increased transparency is important for a number of reasons. Most often thought of in terms of "accountability," transparency is also useful as a way of sharing new and innovative approaches to learning outcomes assessment and best practices within an institution, with the public, and with policy makers. How to share assessment information publicly—to make it transparent without compromising the assessment process—is the challenge (Kuh, 2007). Both accreditors and institutions need to consider fully what to share with the public. Accreditation organizations must carefully weigh the benefits of making the accreditation process more public against the need for institutions to make honest, objective, and useful self-assessments of performance. Understanding how to move forward with this transparency issue requires more attention from all stakeholders.

Achieving Purposeful Investment in Assessment

Too often, assessment is reactive, sporadic, unfocused, and unproductive. Assessment should be proactive, focused on meaningful issues and questions, used to improve teaching and learning, and sustained over time. While it is true that institutions are receiving more follow-up requests from accrediting groups than previously related to student learning outcomes assessment, the reporting process and the follow-up processes and visits are expensive in terms of money and faculty/staff time. Given the scarcity of institutions' resources, institutions need to regain the initiative and become proactive in defining an approach to learning outcomes assessment that is sustainable as well as useful in decision making.

Using Institutional Resources Productively

Although much has been done over the last decade, higher education institutions need more support in building assessment capacity. Accrediting groups are working to build capacity on campuses and shaping the dialogue around assessment nationally. Still, there are too few venues where faculty members and academic leaders can get assistance in scaling up assessment capacity and too few resources are available for institutions to learn about assessment. Some national organizations—like the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)—provide training workshops and conferences, and some conferences centering on student learning outcomes assessment have been developed (Assessment Insti-

tute). In April 2010, the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE) was formed as a professional association for those interested in assessment. Some regional and specialized accreditors have developed training processes to fill the void and others have offered opportunities for institutions to learn from each other through networking. Yet the question remains: Is enough help being provided? A national initiative building on the resources of all of the regional and specialized accreditors to provide more assessment resources and training would be a very constructive step forward.

Conclusion

Accreditors have moved away from a rear-view-mirror, retrospective glance at what is happening on campuses toward an effort to gain a deeper understanding of what students know and can do as a result of their academic experience. Part of this shift is toward understanding how assessment is embedded in the institutional culture. The findings from this study show that there is a degree of consistency across the seven accreditation regions in terms of accreditor requirements for student learning outcomes assessment, while at the same time expectations concerning student learning outcomes assessment continue to evolve. The sources of the consistency across the regions need to be more clearly articulated, and ongoing discussions between the regions are necessary for such an advance.

Accreditation has undeniably had a demonstrable influence on moving campuses' assessment initiatives forward. The accreditor representatives who attended the C-RAC-NILOA symposium on student learning outcomes assessment took seriously the challenge of assessing student learning outcomes. They also agreed, however, that while the accreditors may be major drivers for assessment, it would be far better for institutions themselves, as part of their cultures, to drive student learning outcomes assessment—to create a space for quality improvement independent of the pressures for accountability.

Accreditors have moved away from a rear-view-mirror, retrospective glance at what is happening on campuses toward an effort to gain a deeper understanding of what students know and can do as a result of their academic experience.

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NILOA National Advisory Panel

Ex-Officio Members

NILOA Mission

NILOA's primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

NILOA Occasional Paper Series

NILOA Occasional Papers are commissioned to examine contemporary issues that will inform the academic community of the current state-of-the art of assessing learning outcomes in American higher education. The authors are asked to write for a general audience in order to provide comprehensive, accurate information about how institutions and other organizations can become more proficient at assessing and reporting student learning outcomes for the purposes of improving student learning and responsibly fulfilling expectations for transparency and accountability to policy makers and other external audiences.

Comments and questions about this paper should be sent to niloa@education.illinois.edu.

About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA web site went live on February 11, 2009. www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.
- One of the co-principal NILOA investigators, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and 2009 to 2010. He also served as president of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001.
- Peter Ewell joined NILOA as a senior scholar in November 2009.

NILOA Staff

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

Stanley Ikenberry, *Co-Principal Investigator*

George Kuh, *Co-Principal Investigator and Director*

Peter Ewell, *Senior Scholar*

Staci Provezis, *Project Manager and Research Analyst*

Jillian Kinzie, *Associate Research Scientist*

Natasha Jankowski, *Research Analyst*

Gloria Jea, *Research Analyst*

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National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

For more information, please contact:

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
340 Education Building
Champaign, IL 61820

learningoutcomesassessment.org
niloa@education.illinois.edu
Fax: 217.244.3378
Phone: 217.244.2155

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT
PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REVIEW RUBRIC

This rubric was developed by the Office of Academic Assessment to provide feedback regarding the annual **Program Assessment Reports**. The rubric reflects brief descriptions of the **4-step OU Program Assessment Process** and **Color Codes** indicating the outcome of the reviews of contents for each step. For instance, if a **Student Learning Outcome (SLO)** is not stated in "**Measurable**" terms, then item "**a**" under "**NEEDS REVISION**" will be highlighted in **Yellow** to signify that the SLO **needs to be revised**. In short, **only the highlighted text/area (in Green, Yellow or Red) applies to your report.**

COLLEGE: _____ **DEGREE PROGRAM & LEVEL:** _____

STEPS OF PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PROCESS	REVIEW COLOR CODES FOR EACH STEP OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS				RECOMMENDATIONS
	MISSING INFORMATION	NEEDS REVISION	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS	
	Information for ONE OR MORE steps is missing OR the report was NOT submitted.	***Assessment Report reflects ONE OR MORE of the following IN EACH STEP of the assessment process:***	***Assessment Report reflects ONE OR MORE of the following IN EACH STEP of the assessment process:***	***All of the "Meets Expectations" indicators are met and AT LEAST ONE of the following additional indicators is met (IN EACH STEP).***	
1 STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOs) *Articulate **3-5 statements** reflecting specific **knowledge, skills or abilities** graduates of your degree program should be able to demonstrate.*	SLOs are missing.	a) One or more SLOs is unclear, not stated in measurable and/or observable terms, too broad and/or stated in terms of department/program effectiveness goals, not student learning outcomes.	a) ALL SLOs are clearly stated in **measurable and/or observable** terms. SLOs reflect specific **knowledge, abilities or skills** graduates of the degree program are expected to demonstrate.	SLOs are further defined by **Performance Indicators** -- that is, specific elements of student performance that contribute to the achievement of the SLO.	
2 ASSESSMENT METHODS *Describe how each SLO is assessed using at least one **direct measure** (e.g., exams, Capstone projects, etc.) and, where possible, an indirect measure (e.g., exit surveys).*	Assessment methods are missing.	a) At least one of the methods does not reflect description of data collection process and use of appropriate direct measure(s). Performance targets are not reported and no explanation is provided. b) One or more methods reflect exclusive use of end-of-course grades and/or indirect methods (e.g., surveys).	a) ALL methods clearly describe the data collection process and include at least one appropriate **direct measure** for each SLO. Performance targets are reported. If none is reported, an explanation is provided. b) ALL methods reflect evaluation of the quality of students' work using a **rubric** (where appropriate). Indirect measures (e.g., student surveys and course evaluations), if mentioned, are used only to supplement outcome of direct measures.	Report includes attachment of sample rubric(s). Methods include information on psychometric properties of assessment instruments or tools (e.g., inter-rater reliability of rubrics).	
3 ASSESSMENT RESULTS *Briefly describe students' **actual performance** on each SLO. Report data in **aggregate**.*	Assessment results or findings are missing.	a) Results for one or more SLOs: (1) rely exclusively on end-of-course grades or indirect measures, (2) are not clearly described and not reported on aggregate, and (3) are not aligned with methods or performance targets in SLOs. b) Results for one or more SLOs does not indicate the number of students assessed.	a) Results for ALL SLOs: (1) are presented based on **direct measures**, (2) are clearly described and reported **on aggregate** and (3) are directly **aligned** with methods and performance targets in each SLO. b) Results for ALL SLOs indicate the number of students assessed.	Trends or patterns over time are discussed to indicate progress of student performance. Assessment results indicate areas where students excelled, met standards, and fell short.	
4 USE OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS *Describe in detail how faculty **have used or plan to use** results of student achievement to make **curricular changes**. Include concrete recommendations and/or an action plan tied directly to student learning.*	Use of assessment results information is missing.	a) Descriptions for one or more SLOs: (1) lack specific examples of planned and/or implemented use of assessment results for program improvement, (2) consistently indicate that no changes are needed without further explanation. b) One or more of the descriptions does not address gaps in student performance and is not aligned with the SLOs, measures, performance targets and/or assessment results.	a) Descriptions of ALL SLOs reflect **specific examples of planned and/or implemented use of assessment results** for program improvement. Explanations are provided where descriptions indicate that no changes are needed. b) Descriptions for ALL SLOs **address gaps** in student learning and are directly aligned with the SLOs, measures, performance targets and/or assessment results.	Report includes information on dissemination of results to faculty and an action plan for continous improvement. Report shows critical evaluation of past and current assessment, including strengths and possible opportunities for continous improvement.	

SAMPLE PROGRAM OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT REPORT TEMPLATE

College: College of Arts and Sciences

Department/School/Division: Psychology

Degree Program: Psychology, M.A.

Report Submitted By: John Doe | **Date of Submission:** Jan. 1, 2020

Program Mission Statement:

Student Learning Outcome 1

Upon completion of the program, students will demonstrate understanding and application of basic and advanced research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation (APA Assessment Standard 2.b). Specifically, students will be able to:

a) Describe the basic characteristics of the science of psychology.
b) Explain different research methods used by psychologists.
c) Evaluate the appropriateness of conclusions derived from psychological research.
d) Generalize research conclusions appropriately based on the parameters of particular research methods.

Method(s) of Assessment

Direct Measure AND Number of Students Assessed **(Required)**

a) *Research Paper in PSYC 5008 (Advanced Seminar) –* ***this is a required course****:* All students [n=34] will be required to write a comprehensive research project (at least 20 pages long) on a topic of their choice. Research projects are intended to target their ability to understanding and application of basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation. All Research Papers in the Advanced Seminar will be evaluated by at least two faculty members using a generic department rubric reflecting the four elements of the above outcome as criteria and the following performance scale: *1=Does Not Meet Expectations, 2=Partially Meets Expectations, 3=Meets Expectations, and 4=Exceeds Expectation.*

b) *Comprehensive Examination:* All students (N=34) are required to take a comprehensive examination during the last semester of the graduate program. Comprehensive Exams will be evaluated by a team of three faculty members using a generic *Comprehensive Examination Rubric* reflecting criteria for each question as well as the following performance scale: *5=Exceeds Expectations, 3=Meets Expectations, 1=Does Not Meet Expectations.* Ratings of *"Exceeds Expectations"* and *"Meets Expectations"* will constitute a *"Pass"* while the rating of *"Does Not Meet Expectations"* will be equivalent to *"Fail".*

Performance Target

a) ALL research papers will be rated at "adequate" or above.
b) 90% of students will pass their comprehensive examinations (i.e., *"Exceed Expectations" or "Meet Expectations")*

Indirect Measure **AND** ***Number of Students Completing Surveys***

a) *Graduating Survey:* All students in the Advanced Seminar (Required course), will be asked to complete a short survey prior to graduation. One of the items in the survey will center on the degree to which they agree that the course or courses in the program have helped them to acquire the ability to

Commented [WFO1]: This is the main learning outcome statement. It's derived from the main description of a required course(s).

Commented [WFO2]: The mention of APA Assessment Standard 2.b here means the assessment report meets both the institutional assessment requirements as well as the specialized accrediting agency assessment-related standards/criteria.

Commented [WFO3]: These are the specific "performance indicators" under the main outcome. These could be the "criteria" used to evaluate the learning outcome in a required course or courses in any assessment or a "signature" assignment, project, examination, or a combination of these, etc. selected as the avenue or avenues for addressing the main outcome.

Commented [WFO4]: A description such as this would be great for the assessment method. You can have more than one method for a given outcome. Also, the same method can be used for multiple outcomes.

Pls note that for each outcome a direct measure (papers, exams, presentations – where individually or in groups) must be used to report student performance.

Commented [WFO5]: These are simply targets/benchmarks that can be determined once data has been reviewed and faculty have agreed on an appropriate measure.

Commented [WFO6]: This simply seeks student opinions regarding their learning. Results can be used to augment outcome of direct measure. However, student surveys should never be used as the sole measure of a learning outcome because they are self-reported.

	understanding and application of basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation. ***Expected Target*** All of students in PSYC 5008 (Advanced Seminar) will "agree" or "strongly agree" that the coursework in the program have helped them to acquire the ability to understanding and application of basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.
Assessment Results	***Direct Measure(s)*:** **a)** *Research Paper in PSYC 5008 (Advanced Seminar):* 90% of research papers were rated "adequate" and above with the remaining rated as "needs work" due to weaknesses in most of the criteria reflected in the rubric. More than half of the research papers reflected solid application of various theories of psychology to real life situations. **b)** *Comprehensive Examination:* The internally generated comprehensive exam consisted of two parts during the 2013-14 year. The first part covered courses taken by all students, either as part of their undergraduate program, or as graduate requirements. The second part covered the graduate electives taken be each student. The average score of Spring 2014 graduates on the common part of the exam was 75 percent (versus 68 percent in 2012-13). ***Indirect Measure(s)*:** *Graduating Survey:* 85% or students in the Advanced Seminar (Required course) reported that they "agree" or "strongly agree" with the degree to which the course or courses in the program have helped them to acquire the ability to understanding and application of basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.
Use of Results	Although 90% of students' research projects were rated "adequate" and above, faculty are discussing strategies for continuous improvement to ensure that all students' research projects in the coming year are rated as "adequate" or above. Part of this will involve comprehensive assignments targeting understanding and application of theories of personality to real life situations. Results of the comprehensive exams were better this year that they were last year. Faculty will introduce peer assessment activities among students to boost their overall performance in the comprehensive exams. Student perceptions are regarded as extremely important by the department. Faculty will begin to seek student opinions as part of self-assessment at the end of each course in addition to course evaluations. This is intended to gather adequate longitudinal data upon which faculty may begin discussing strategies for continuous improvement.

Commented [WFO7]: "**Assessment Results**" and "**Use of Assessment Results"** sections will be completed at the end of the semester or academic year once data has been gathered and analyzed.

Student Learning Outcome 2	
Method(s) of Assessment	***Direct Measure AND Number of Students Assessed*** **(Required)** ***Performance Target***
	Indirect Measure **AND** ***Number of Students Completing Surveys*** ***Expected Target***
Assessment Results	***Direct Measure(s)*****:** ***Indirect Measure(s)*****:**
Use of Results	

Student Learning Outcome 3	
Method(s) of Assessment	***Direct Measure AND Number of Students Assessed*** **(Required)** ***Performance Target***
	Indirect Measure **AND** ***Number of Students Completing Surveys*** ***Expected Target***
Assessment Results	***Direct Measure(s)*****:** ***Indirect Measure(s)*****:**
Use of Results	