

2002 AAHE Research Forum

**Supporting a Shared
Commitment to Assessment
A Research Agenda**

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The Research Forum has been a steadfast part of AAHE's national conference since 1984. This year at the Assessment Conference, the goal was to create a research agenda focused entirely on the research and scholarship of assessment. Educational practitioners have created this 2002 agenda through structured, intellectually challenging small-group discussions around critical themes emerging in the assessment community. As assessment is coming of age, the Research Forum asks:

- How do we best demonstrate that our students are learning?
- How do institutions and programs overcome barriers to collectively identifying core assessable outcomes and fostering the ineffable?
- What are reliable, valid, and valuable alternative assessment methods?
- How can we ensure that assessment used for accountability is adequately balanced by use for improvement?
- How can assessment promote the curricular integration of General Education and the major?
- How does assessment contribute to transformation of institutional cultures that achieve our shared and diverse purposes?

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What is the Purpose of the Research Forum? Involvement and critique from educators in dialogue with researchers is a critical element for achieving clarity about what research will benefit educational policy and practice. The AAHE Research Forum is convened annually at the Assessment Conference to involve individuals committed to research and scholarship in higher education. The Forum stimulates educators' involvement in creating a research agenda that speaks to current educational concerns. Each year's agenda is developed around the conference theme. Thus, educators and researchers can continually rely on the Forum agenda as an up-to-date source of common research questions that flow from the year's most central educational issues. The Forum enables educators to provide leadership and support for those researchers who share educators' interests, who speak clearly to educators about their findings, and who actively respond to educators' most pressing questions.

Since 1985, the AAHE Research Forum has provided leadership from educators for bridging the gap between research and practice, and has enabled educators and researchers to define the kinds of contexts that need to be reshaped within colleges and universities for research findings to benefit students.

Why AAHE? AAHE has traditionally brought together a wide range of interested educators, and has been successful in defining current issues that stimulate a broad spectrum of higher education constituencies. A recent survey shows the AAHE annual conference to be the most stimulating meeting of its kind. There are other forums at which research results are presented and discussed, but many of them are not regularly attended by or directed toward higher education administrators and faculty. AAHE membership has the desire and potential to stimulate research among its members, and to engage the research community in continual dialogue about research questions and findings that directly relate to educational practices for governance, for teaching and learning, and for student development.

What is the Forum Process and Product?

1. **The Invitational Pre-Conference Session.** Educators (selected from conference experts) generate research questions on topics that emerge as central to the conference theme through a specially designed group process. Experts on each topic serve as group leaders and synthesizers. Each topic group reviews the current issues around their topic and discusses with those who currently, or are likely to, research the year's agenda. Questions are synthesized in each group, and session leaders edit and prepare them for distribution at the all-conference session.
2. **The All-Conference Forum and Panel.** Forum leaders bring the questions generated in the pre-conference session to the attention of the conference membership and involve the larger audience in discussion of issues and research questions in their own settings. Forum leaders also elicit discussion of research questions by a panelist who is an expert on the year's conference theme. Our panelist was *Peter Gray*, Associate Director, Center for Support of Teaching and Learning, Syracuse University. Group discussions on each topic followed the panelist and allowed for more focused critique and discussion of the pre-conference questions. Experts on the topics serve as leaders and synthesizers in each group.

3. **The Research Agenda and Its Dissemination.** Following the session, Forum leaders edit and integrate questions from topic group syntheses and individual work sheets for a final agenda. The agenda is disseminated to all contributors; participants are credited. The history and rationale for the American Association for Higher Education Research Forum are described in M. Mentkowski and A. W. Chickering, Linking Educators and Researchers in Setting a Research Agenda for Undergraduate Education, *The Review of Higher Education*, 1987, 11(2), 137–160.

Prior Agendas:

- *The Classroom Researcher's Research Agenda*, 1987
- *A Research Agenda in Support of Our Highest Calling*, 1988
- *Improving the Odds for Student Achievement: A Research Agenda*, 1989
- *The Future of the Professoriate: A Look in the Mirror*, 1990
- *Achieving the Promise in Diversity: A Research Agenda to Inform the Issues*, 1991
- *Reclaiming the Public Trust: A Research Agenda to Explore the Validity of the Criticisms*, 1992
- *Reinventing Community: A Research Agenda to Create Common Purposes, Build Commitment, and Sustain Improvement*, 1993
- *A Research Agenda for Envisioning the 21st Century Academic Workplace Through Responsive Academic Citizenship*, 1994
- *The Engaged Campus: A Research Agenda to Serve Society's Needs*, 1995
- *Crossing Boundaries: A Research Agenda Toward Productive Learning and Community Renewal*, 1996
- *Learning, Teaching, and Technology: A Research Agenda for the Way We Work*, 1997
- *Taking Learning Seriously: A Research Agenda for Learning*, 1998
- *Organizing for Learning: A Research Agenda*, 1999
- *Diversity and Learning: A Research Agenda*, 2000
- *Private Gain and Public Good: A Research Agenda for Achieving Balance*, March, 2001
- *Enacting a Scholarship of Assessment: A Research Agenda*; June, 2001
- *Learning in Context: Who are our Students? How do they Learn? A Research Agenda*; March, 2002

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2002 RESEARCH FORUM ORGANIZERS

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DEMONSTRATING STUDENT LEARNING

Over the last two decades, higher education has increasingly focused on demonstrating student learning. Regional accreditation agencies began to include student learning in their standards, and various discipline and professional accreditation groups have shown a similar concern for the learning outcomes of graduates in addition to content coverage. While student learning has always been inherent in higher education's mission, the concern for demonstration has frequently changed the character of higher education debates and sometimes put an emphasis on accountability that minimizes educational aspirations. At the same time, the questions of student learning are entangled with evolving definitions of the baccalaureate degree, and cognitive research is creating new understandings of adult intelligence. Inevitably, institutions need to address these issues individually, but the common concerns create a basis for shared discussions. How do deep learning outcomes that encompass domains such as reasoning and civic responsibility emerge alongside the command of disciplinary content, and how will this create new forms for demonstration? How can we assess the contribution of service learning? What measurements or processes become important? How do these fit within the needs and parameters of courses and programs? And how does an advanced understanding of student learning fit within emerging concerns of legislators, employers, and the public, as well as the kind of assessment that is most needed?

On Student Learning Skills, Competence, and Deep Learning

How do students identify the coherence of their curriculum? How does experiential learning promote depth of learning?

How do we ensure that curricular goals for "deep learning" are grounded in research? How do we tie "deep learning" to insure the term is based upon the solid research of Perry, King and Kitchener, etc.? (It is important not to sever the research from a terminology.)

How can we assess service-learning? (We cannot assume assessment is automatically built into service-learning.) What student outcomes are desirable for assessing the effectiveness of service?

What are effective means of identifying what is important for students to learn (including co-curriculum) according to various constituencies (including students, parents, public, governing boards, legislators, administrators, faculty, and staff)?

Are assessment methods employed on a campus broad enough to encompass learning by the breadth of students on that campus? That is, do assessment techniques allow for capturing "truth" from a diverse student body? How do we demonstrate student learning for "cross cultural" education?

How can higher education incorporate assessment of prior learning into assessment of learning on a given campus?

What are the frameworks, structures, and strategies that promote and assess appropriate levels of learning?

How do we identify and use valid authentic assessments to demonstrate student learning outcomes?

On Campus Culture

What is the role of “culture” in designing and demonstrating student learning outcomes?

What is the value of—and how might we achieve—a systemic framework and vocabulary to organize and talk about student learning? How can we ensure that students, faculty, and researchers are using appropriate and consistent terminology?

What are the relationships among mission statements, goal statements, conceptual frameworks for assessment, institution-wide development of learning outcomes, and criteria for assessing these outcomes? How is this information evaluated and used to continuously improve student learning?

On Faculty Learning

What kind of faculty development processes are required to support faculty in implementing practices that improve student learning? What are good ways to communicate to faculty to get buy-in to practices? When is avoidance of “assessment” terms a good way?

How can sound methods of instruction and assessment be communicated to faculty and staff within the reward structures of an institution? How can faculty and staff then communicate evidence of student success, along with discussion of changes they are making following reviews of assessment results?

What kind of faculty development is required to support faculty in implementing practices that improve student learning? What kind of (best) development practices support assessment?

On Student Learning

What is the role of students in achieving higher learning and building an improved learning community?

How can an institution/program effectively blend assessment of general education with that in the major to show a unified picture of student learning? Do capstones accomplish this?

How do students know what’s expected of them? How do we effectively engage students in understanding varied levels of learning expectations and desired learning outcomes? What is the relationship between student maturity/cognitive development (and how do we determine this) and their ability to reflect to get to a greater depth of learning?

On Connecting Institutional and Program Assessment

Is there coherence in the curriculum? How does the institution identify and communicate coherence of the curriculum?

How can we ensure coherence across the general education, undergraduate and graduate levels as well as within?

How can we better gather data about the role of faculty in assessment? In institutionalizing assessment?

How do we describe student learning not only in relation to individual students but also in relation to cohorts of students? To what extent is the institution accountable for ensuring, assessing, and demonstrating cohort-level student learning?

How can an administration show that the demonstration of student learning really affects teaching?

How can administrators effectively translate and deliver to their constituencies evidence of student success and changes made and being considered that result from analysis of assessment results?

How do we identify which assessment practices are really producing the value, based on time and cost of the practices, for improvements in student learning?

How do we translate student learning outcomes into what happens in the classroom? How do we deal with innovation in demonstrating student learning outcomes?

On Negotiating Standards for Institutional Effectiveness

How can higher education get accrediting-agency-type assessment requirements adopted by legislatures and governing boards?

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

At least since the time of the publication of *Student Involvement in Learning* in 1984, educational reform has envisioned alternative assessments as a linchpin to transforming the culture of higher education practice and student learning. Portfolios and performance-based assessments have embraced a range of modalities (video, discussion, projects, simulations, etc.). Concepts of validity and reliability are being adjusted to meet the use of the open-ended nature of constructive responses, in which context and performance qualitatively vary across individuals. There is a greater recognition of how assessment purposes (such as student learning, measuring classroom achievement, meeting program or institutional accountability, transforming educational practice) affect interpretations of validity and reliability. As assessment practitioners, how do we represent differing purposes of assessment in our validity inquiries? At the same time, educational reform is animated by the vision of integrating various assessment purposes. For example, when students expect to learn and get feedback from assessments they are more motivated to perform, and inferences about their performance are more likely to be valid. As we bridge classroom assessment, program assessment, and large-scale assessment, how do we represent validity at different levels of practice (course/program/institution/system)?

New conceptions of validity also include the need to establish and take into account the consequences of assessment. This has increased our responsibility for assuring valid interpretations of student performance and to use multiple sources of information. How do we demonstrate the validity of alternative methods to stakeholders who want standardized tests? In what ways do we take into account opportunity to learn and the consequences of assessment as part of our validity inquiries?

On Differences in Alternative Assessments

How do the validity and reliability of alternative assessments compare to the validity and reliability of traditional assessments?

For specific means of alternative assessment (e.g., portfolios, projects), what are some specific examples of ensuring reliability and validity?

How are validity and reliability defined with respect to alternative assessment?

What does validity and reliability of alternative assessment look like? (examples, vignettes, case studies)

On Uses

How do we best bridge the use of alternative assessments in the classroom to support alternative assessments of curricula, programs, academic units, and institutions?

How are alternative assessment results used for resource allocation decisions?

How do we conceptualize assessments for student services and academic support programs?

Can a formative assessment process, properly implemented, be used to extract summative information to satisfy accountability requirements?

Can a good, well-designed formative assessment process be later used to satisfy summative questions?

How does the validity and reliability of assessment instruments impact/support program review processes?

On Validating Assessment Consequences (including student learning)

Does the use of alternative forms of assessment drive curricular and institutional development as intended?

What evidence is there that alternative assessments drive student learning in ways that differ from traditional means of assessment?

Does the use of alternative forms of assessment improve student learning and curricular and institutional outcomes?

What specific aspects of alternative assessment enhance students' motivation to learn in specific ways? What specific constructive strategies can we use prior to evaluating students so that we can best maximize the phenomenon that our assessments will drive the way students learn?

On Construct Fidelity

What alternative assessment methods most validly match what forms/means of fostering learning?

How do we best ensure and measure the validity of alternative assessments to improve student learning?

What constructs are measured by capstone experiences and what types of assessments measure those constructs? How do those constructs differ from what is measured in classroom assessments?

How can we develop reliable and valid assessments of prior learning? How well do these assessments measure specific skills and constructs? How do learning styles affect performance on alternative assessments?

Are portfolios a true assessment of student learning?

On Validation Strategies

Can there be a standardized process for developing and validating alternative assessments? How do we engage faculty in a standardized process to validate the alternative assessments they develop?

How is the role of experts best incorporated in validating alternative assessment methods and instruments?

How can we best measure students' perceptions of the validity of alternative means of assessment?

How can student evaluations of courses and extra- and co-curricular experiences be best designed to measure validly and reliably the effectiveness of alternative assessments?

Would the assessment of technology versus other programs require different or similar strategies?

How is assessment different from evaluation? How is it understood differently?

On Fostering Implementation

How can we best ensure that students buy into the validity of alternative methods and instruments, and buy-in to the validity of assessment results?

What expertise do faculty have for developing and implementing alternative means of assessment? What kinds of learning experiences do they need?

What learning theories underlie course assessments, and how are these reflected in the assessment methodology?

What challenges do different underlying theories of student learning present for assessment?

How integrated is the assessment process with learning theory?

TECHNOLOGY AND ASSESSMENT

As new technological horizons emerge for higher education, we need to continually revisit our current understandings of learning and the structures of educational practice and assessment. Web-based instruction, Internet connections, email capacities, portable laptops, and other technologies are described as creating new kinds of cultures of interaction and inquiry. How do we identify these changes and evaluate them? The integration of technology and assessment also promises to break the mold of how we assess. But how? For example, how can technology ease the process of assessment, increase its frequency, and improve its quality? How might various types of technology help us improve feedback to students? How might electronic portfolios assist students to engage in assessment of their own performance?

Distance learning has become not only a new way to deliver education, but also a platform for new providers that bring particular perspectives on education, such as just-in-time learning and an emphasis on the delivery of content rather than the deeper wells of liberal learning. How can assessment informed by the purposes of institutional missions contribute to evaluating the quality of distance learning?

And so, keeping up with technology has become a new and costly imperative for higher education institutions. What kinds of initiatives are most needed, and how can we evaluate their costs and benefits?

On Faculty Learning

Are we communicating effectively about what technology is working well with students, faculty?

How do we as faculty buy-in to the vision when there is often reluctance to share data online?

How do we use technology for teaching and assessment? What are appropriate uses in different disciplines?

How might institutional electronic portfolios assist faculty to engage in assessment of their performance?

What technology promotes faculty “buy-in”?

Can technology be more effectively used across disciplines?

Which method of dissemination will faculty use (email vs. paper; word vs. access electronically)/prefer?

How do we increase intelligent and effective faculty buy-in to use of technology in classrooms and assessment?

How do we benefit from different levels of faculty comfort with technology?

On Availability and Learning

Does having the technology available (e.g., portfolios, electronic portfolios, laptops) improve learning?

How can technology be more effectively used to support student learning, academic decisions, and faculty teaching?

What kinds of infrastructures help educators make applications in technology assisted learning and teaching?

On Kinds of Teaching and Learning

How do we distinguish just-in-time learning re development of deeper abilities (problem-solving, deep learning) from on-the-spot learning of specific skills? How can technology support both kinds of learning?

Can technology support deeper, higher-level learning?

Does technology use/improve classroom face-to-face learning?

What do effective examples of technology-supported learning tell us about our practices? What evidence is there for effective use?

How do we resolve tensions between the use of electronic portfolios for documenting and reflecting on individual growth and the organization's need for uniformity of assessment data for aggregating across cohorts?

On Leveraging the Cost-Benefit of Technology-Supported Learning

What research findings are available on the benefits of portfolios? Electronic portfolios?

Using technology for online course evaluation surveys can increase writing from students even though this generation of faculty often did not experience the use of technology in their undergraduate education and are not as comfortable as their students. Do particular tools (i.e., PPT) force students into a too specific and narrow mindset and writing/communication process?

Do graduates of online programs have the same level of intellectual discourse as those in traditional face to face classrooms? Many courses are becoming "hybrid"? What is the impact of learning at a distance? What is the impact of online web-based interaction?

What do we do with online course information? What do we do with the data that results? What is the effect of the use of technologies in face to face courses?

How can technology ease the process of assessment, increase its frequency, and improve its quality?

How can technology help disseminate and filter key data and change it into useable information?

How can technology assist and promote quality assessment?

How can technology assist with student evaluations of teacher performance?

How do we deal with the technology industry's need for constant innovation and the consequent cost and need to constantly upgrade technology within an environment of shrinking budgets?

How do we work with industry to reduce costs of upgrades or to encourage them to avoid planned obsolescence of hardware and software?

What are the issues about the public nature of the web and e-mail that impact on the openness and willingness to use technology as an assessment tool? What are the issues about privacy, intellectual property, security, and ethics? What issues are raised by the digital divide?

On Learning as the Driver for Technology

Why is technology less important than the learning that is being targeted?

To what extent do technology-based assessments (TBA) serve faculty in their scholarship and in their learning about teaching? How best use TBA for faculty development and to improve student learning?

How can technology be used for assessment of learning goals pursued through co-curricular or non-curricular activities?

TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES

Educational reform in higher education has increasingly focused on the need to transform institutional cultures. Legislators emphasize accountability to particular societal needs, and educators emphasize improving particular forms of student learning. But there is also general agreement on the need to foster collaboration in achieving institutional missions and that this requires a culture of improvement. Assessment within institutions is generally seen as a key lever for creating an institutional culture of improvement, inquiry, responsibility, and (in the language of some circles) quality. For example, regional accreditation agencies in the U.S. have new emphases on demonstrating student learning outcomes and using assessment for improvement. What kind of assessment fosters a culture of collaborative inquiry into student learning outcomes? How will the roles, commitments, and identities of faculty and staff formed in one culture be appreciated or changed as part of the process of transforming culture? What role will accreditation play? What is most needed to achieve a transformation of institutional culture that achieves our shared and diverse purposes?

On Student Learning

To what extent are institutions able to conceptualize what assessment means to them in relation to student learning and what a focus on learning can contribute to their institutions?

How does assessment improve student learning and what are the concrete expressions of student progress?

What is the expected impact of integrating assessment practice in teaching and learning practice?

How best link student affairs and academic affairs to acknowledge student affairs role in student learning?

How tie learning theory to assessment work?

How do you get students to give real feedback as opposed to prompted and hurried?

On Strategic Decision-Making/Change and External Context

How is assessment activity connected with budget and planning? Is this key to faculty commitment?

How are institutional incentives, rewards, and resources used to manage institutional culture and change?

What is the impact of standards/mandates on the differential size/resources of educational institutions?

What is the impact of a State Higher Education Board on assessment? What is the role of the state boards re institutional change?

What is the impact of internally- and externally-driven change? Professional accreditation really moves institutions, but how do state or regional accrediting bodies effect change in other disciplines?

What are effective strategies for institutional change? How do faculties relate more to their discipline, to their institution, to their own institutional context, to management of assessment data? Where are the imbalances?

What are the roles of all institutional resources and support department toward assessment (e.g., library, student affairs)?

What are the strategies for institutional change? How do we develop the trust? Create the awareness of the need to refocus what we do?

How do we shift faculty attitudes about assessment—to see its value to institutionalize?

How does an institution use assessment results in bringing about transformational change?

What are the major points of collaboration across the institution to develop assessment and continuous improvement?

What change strategies emerge as effective for a meta-research study of the change literature?

How do you share assessment results with the community? On my campus this means shifting from a course-based, teacher-centered form of assessment, heavily focused on pretests and exit tests, departmental exams to creating an awareness of the need to be more reflective in our practices and more centered on student learning.

Can/how can assessment lead to more resources and energy for faculty and students regarding connections with each other, regarding career paths?

How have results been disseminated so that they have more meaning for everyone?

How do institutions best share decisions made based on assessment results?

How can we manage information and communicate to the community? How can we bring people together and satisfy the need for dialogue?

How does assessment relate to the more general power relationships and decision making structures both on campus and in society?

How does assessment relate to an institution's quality and how is this related to academic ranking? What is the nature of the tension here?

How do you develop an environment of trust, honesty, candor, and integrity in relation to assessment and releasing assessment data?

How do you reverse the current culture of muzzling assessment data?

How do you share assessment data with the community?

How does assessment and the wise use of its results help our individual institutions to better “tell their story” of success and effectiveness?

How can we use technology to disseminate assessment information?

On Campus Culture and Resources

What are the characteristics and processes of administrators where assessment works? What symbols build community? How do individuals articulate what is happening? How to trust the process? How do they communicate negative results?

How is the institution assessing its own cultural transformation? How do values of institutions relate to societal values in student learning and outcomes?

What is occurring in faculty and administrative commitment to assessment in resource allocation; in roles and rewards; in the establishment of rituals, symbols, and practices; and in sustainability of assessment?

Is there one institutional culture or many subcultures? How many are there and how do they differ? What are the values of those subcultures?

What are the characteristics of those institutions that are successfully integrating learning/assessment into the culture?

How can assessment decisions be shared with the educational community? Is this critical to a culture of shared governance and faculty buy-in?

What are the characteristics of institutions that are transforming themselves? (For example, performance evaluations based on learning activities or syllabi that support learning outcomes, changes in syllabi and learning activities)

What are the influences of assessment on faculty pedagogy?

What is the relationship between opportunities for professional development and faculty using outcomes-based education (learning outcomes)?

How can the culture of assessment survive during times of transitions and change (e.g., change of presidents, academic offices, influential faculty)? New administrators who do not value assessment often derail good assessment efforts that have taken years to build.

What selection criteria for hiring new faculty support transforming institutional culture?

Scholarship of assessment—What is its role in faculty portfolio, rewards, promotion? What should the involvement of adjunct faculty be in the overall context of institutional culture/assessment?

Are authority figures (presidents, deans, etc.) open to following the conclusions of assessment data wherever these conclusions may lead? Even if the conclusions challenge these campus leaders? Is there a different mentality toward assessment on religiously-based schools?

Are there differences between religiously-based colleges and state supported universities in their attitudes toward assessment?

How do assessors lower the threat of terminating or reducing programs that don't "look good" based on data gathered in assessment? How can you build a culture of assessment when the nature of assessment can be threatening?

What are the significant characteristics of leadership that foster the assessment culture and how is this maintained if a leader leaves?

How can individual educators responsible for teaching appreciate the importance of assessment to them personally in achieving their instructional goals?

How can we get people to understand and see the benefits of assessment and not see it as a threatening process?

How can we foster collaboration across the various groups of the university?

On Value Frameworks and Educational Assumptions

What are the value frameworks embodied in the institution? What is its mission and how is the general mission related to individual missions?

What are the assumptions that faculty, institutions, and students hold about the institutional culture? About education and learning?

How does an institution actualize its values and assumptions and then measure the outcomes? Are an institution's stated values different from those it actualizes and what role does assessment play?

How do we create a shared common vision of the future of the institution and what is the role of assessment in this vision?

How do values of institutions relate to societal values in student learning and outcomes?

What is the critical role of leadership for administrators and faculty? For students?

Why isn't service-learning embraced within institutions that pride themselves on being cutting-edge and progressive in techniques and methodology?

Some leadership models have a philosophy that states that anyone can be a leader and encourage circular, non-hierarchical models of leadership. How effective is such a model when it is coming from an institution with a very rigid hierarchy?

What do we do when the college's stated values differ significantly from what it actually does and how can our assessment/scholarship of assessment/teaching and learning project bring our assumptions and values back into alignment?

On Creating a Culture of Evidence

What are the overarching characteristics of success in institutions who have been successful in changing their cultures?

How does an institution facilitate a culture of learning and self-reflection?

How do you make assessment "worth it" to the faculty? How is it built into tenure and promotion? Is a focus on assessment presented in the appointment of new faculty? Does a focus on the 'scholarship of teaching' work toward tenure?

Are changes in faculty attitudes key to cultural transformations on campuses?

What works with faculty in developing a 'culture of evidence?' Is it possible to do this without losing time and resources needed for other important areas? How do faculty learn new things given that few faculty want to look like non-experts or take baby steps in a new world?

How do you get all constituents of an institution to see the benefits of assessment?

How do you ensure that student feedback and perspectives are taken into account? It is important to not treat them as "bottom of the pole," but rather as critical stakeholders in the process. Entrust them with complex decisions in communities when it relates to their educational experience.

What are some strategies and models used to ensure faculty commitment to holistic integration of assessment as a fundamental institutional practice?

How identify professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to encourage their input and contributions to the development of an institutional assessment practice.

How is assessment as a culture institutionalized?

How effective are case studies for transforming institutions as wheels of communications to campus constituencies about the potential benefits of assessment for student learning?

How to best encourage reporting assessment activities across all majors?

How change roles and rewards for department chairs/division chairs to support the development of faculty use of multiple assessment strategies?

How do we assist the change to a culture that universally addresses outcomes at the student level? This implies helping faculty recognize a shift in the teaching/learning paradigm.

How can the results of individual, departments, and institutional assessment be accessed freely among all educators on campus so that they may be used rather than simply stored?

How can those being assessed (directly or indirectly) trust that results will not be used against them?

How can departments across campus work together to support each other in assessment?

On Program Logistics and Conceptualizations

What are the factors for success in achieving a solid assessment program? What are factors that hinder?

To what extent are the similarities/differences between the disciplines with accreditation requirements and those disciplines which don't have accreditation requirements?

What role does undergraduate research play in enhancing student learning?

Who is to do the assessment/research and where are findings of research to be reported to be most effective?

How does assessment lead to change or support effective pedagogy?

FOSTERING AND ASSESSING THE INEFFABLE

Many of the outcomes that educators intend seem ineffable. Accreditation demands for accountability are often met with “you can’t measure what I teach for.” Although faculty traditionally have measured (graded) knowledge in the disciplines, other important outcomes call for developing new approaches or at least developing new kinds of arguments. What’s more, the range of seemingly “ineffable” outcomes that are intended by higher education is extraordinary: from effective citizenship and global awareness to integrity and spirituality to critical thinking to creativity to entrepreneurship and professionalism to self-awareness and identity. Some of these are more observable in performance (e.g., critical thinking) and are taught across the disciplines while others require higher levels of inference or self-report (e.g., spirituality). Some of the more observable learning outcomes have been successfully fostered and assessed in many educational settings (e.g., communication) while higher inference outcomes have been fostered but not specifically required for graduation (e.g., integrity). For high inference outcomes, developmental psychology has provided some external measures that work to some degree at the level of assessing aggregate growth across an institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) but many of these require intensive investment in research that most institutions have not been able to achieve. Of course, surveys and interviews play a role in institutional and program assessment. But, also, what is the relationship of curriculum embedded assessments to this range of “ineffable outcomes?” How do institutions and programs overcome barriers to collectively identifying core assessable outcomes and fostering the ineffable? How do we know what is collectively achievable in our institutions? And, if we don’t yet know how to accomplish our goals, what are reasonable expectations for progress? Must we give up our rhetoric or is there an assessment path that fosters the diversity of seemingly ineffable outcomes that constitute the ideals of higher education?

On Student Learning Skills and Competencies

What do we want students to learn? How do we measure the balance between liberal arts and professional skills?

How do we understand the ineffable enough to assess it?

How do we assess perspective transformation?

How do we effect change in ineffable thinking and action?

On Campus Culture

How do we create a social context for faculty, students, and staff to assess the ineffable? What helps an institution to come to a common understanding of what it’s trying to accomplish?

On Program Logistics and Conceptualizations

How do we measure the character of the institution?

On Tools and Strategies

How do institutions operationalize this type of assessment? How do we make such assessment authentic?

What sorts of evidence will convince us we are accomplishing the ineffable? How do various sources of evidence relate to each other—qualitative and quantitative, direct and indirect?

How do we measure empathy?

What methods of assessment are effective, yet do not bring the ineffable to the literal?

ASSESSING LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN GENERAL EDUCATION

General education is common to both community colleges and baccalaureate degree awarding institutions. It reflects the broad intended outcomes of an institution and readily serves as a cross-profession reference point to the meaning of the degree. As such, defining and assessing the outcomes of general education is often a key aspect of institutional accreditation. Many institutions are broadening or reestablishing the core curriculum and tightening rationales for distribution requirements to foster greater coherence in curricular outcomes. A broad range of models exist (e.g., writing across the curriculum, linking standing courses through learning communities, developing interdisciplinary courses, and creating capstone courses that encourage the integration of general education and the major). Such movements toward coherence have the potential to foster in students a broader and deeper understanding of their educational goals and outcomes and also to ground institutional and program assessment. How general education is defined will affect how it's assessed, but the converse may be true as well. To what degree are institutional assessment initiatives promoting students' integration of their learning, and how might they do so more? How can assessment promote the curricular integration of general education and the major? What are sources of effectiveness in general education, and how do we know? How do course embedded assessments contribute to the assessment of general education? What general education outcomes can we foster and how? How do we assess them? What can we credential?

On Common Student Learning Skills and Competencies

To what extent do (should) institutions across the country have a common set of skills (intended outcomes) for all students who attend an institution of higher education in America?

What are we trying to achieve through the General Education curriculum at our institutions? How can we define and operationalize the goals and objectives of the General Education curriculum?

“Definitions” of General Education: What was it, what is it, what should it be? To what extent do we (both at the institution and across higher education) agree on what General Education is and should accomplish? How can we operationalize our global learning objectives?

How can assessment strategies measure general education competencies in ways that are meaningful for different disciplines?

To what extent do skills taught and learned in the General Education curriculum translate/apply/integrate with the major?

What differences exist in valuing, articulating, and assessing the goals of General Education across departments and schools?

How are course-embedded assessments (program-wide) in general education working? How will it fit into state-mandated core transfer courses? What kind of information will it give us? What are its limitations?

On the Role of the Student

How are the traditional ways/models (writing, math, speech) being revised to encompass diverse student populations and skills (i.e., “oral and expressive communication”) to take into account physical disabilities and the performance arts, for example).

How are transfer students impacted, and how can we partner with “feeder schools” to move toward more consistency in the teaching, learning, and assessment of General Education skills?

What role does student self-assessment play in General Education assessment?

Is there a relationship between how the institution values General Education and how the students value General Education? How can we change the “language and culture (how we talk about General Education requirements, i.e., get “x” out of the way) so students see how General Education skills translate into skills needed for the major?

On Campus Culture

How do institutions demonstrate that General Education is valued and assessment of it is important, systematic, and *used*?

How do reward systems and structures (both formal and informal) reflect the commitment of an institution to faculty involvement in General Education?

What would it mean to have a reward structure that supports general education and assessment?

What is the balance between “carrots” and “sticks” to move departments in desirable directions with respect to General Education assessment and improvement?

How do institutions support the professional development of the faculty in the area of General Education assessment? What works? And how does it impact student learning?

How can an institution support a consistent set of learning objectives within and across the General Education curriculum and still honor academic freedom and disciplinary differences?

How can we assess to shape faculty and students’ thinking about general education in the major to make it a more integrated experience?

How can General Education results affect administrator decisions, how are they communicated, how do they become public—illustrating that assessment information *matters*?

Is General Education subversive and do we dare to show it is working through assessment?

What is the language and location of General Education, and what should it be?

Some departments are more vested in design and delivery of general education. How does this impact assessment?

Who is responsible for promoting and assessing general education requirements?

What types of substantive changes are brought about by assessing General Education?

On Program Logistics and Conceptualizations

How do models for General Education assessment vary by institutional type, and what elements “translate” regardless of type?

How do students *really* move through the General Education program? What does that do to learning?

How do you assess instructional *processes* as well as outcomes in General Education?

How can (should) an university’s general education goals, which have been newly articulated for undergraduate programs of study, be effectively integrated and assessed in its graduate and professional programs of study (masters, doctoral)?

How can we implement course-embedded assessments with transfer students, adult learners, and others who don’t complete the majority of general education requirements at a single institution?

What are the implications for graduate and professional (both graduate and undergraduate) programs that may not include general education courses but may articulate outcomes associated with general education?

On Tools and Strategies

What measures (methods) are useful and meaningful for what skills?

At what stages should we implement formal assessment strategies (e.g., baseline data, mid-point, end of General Education, end of major, alumni)?

How can assessment activities be embedded into courses to be used for both individual and program assessment?

When is it appropriate/most useful to assess General Education—and is pre/post wise and necessary?

What is the appropriate mix of course-based and other (campus-wide, external, national) assessment measures/tools is assessing General Education?

When, how, and where do we assess General Education requirements?

On Translating/Communicating Externally

What can be done to address the sometimes “reductionist” assessment questions of external presses while fostering/enhancing assessment that improves/informs General Education teaching, learning, curriculum?

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