ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE

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

• NILOA – who we are and what we do
• Overview of assessment
  • What it is and why we do it
• National picture of assessment activities
• Operationalize assessment through the DQP
  • What it is and what institutions are doing with it
• Implications for assessment
• Structure and alignment of learning
• Resources and institutional examples
Established in 2008, the mission of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) 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.

Jointly located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
Welcome to NILOA

Our October newsletter featuring NILOA updates, news, and upcoming conferences and programs is now available.

In the News | Archive

New Issue of Assessment Update is Available Now
Fri, Oct 25, 2013 - 08:00 am
The latest issue of Assessment Update: Progress, Trends and Practice in Higher Education for September/October 2013 is now available. Articles in this issue include Eloise Knowlton’s "Through the Rearview Looking Glass: Collaborative Writing and the Accreditation Self-Study," Tiffany Hamlett and Mary Bold’s "Faculty Development for Online Institutions," and Sarah Keeling, Kara Woodlee, and Michelle Maher’s "Assessment Is Not a Spectator Sport: Experiencing Authentic Assessment in the Classroom."

Online Open Forums on Revised Information Literacy Competency Standards
Thu, Oct 24, 2013 - 08:00 am
The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) invites attendees to one of their free online open forums to learn more about the work of their task force appointed to oversee substantial revisions to the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Learn more here.

An Early Report Card on Massive Open Online Courses
Wed, Oct 23, 2013 - 08:00 am

Queensborough Community College
QCC’s assessment website is NILOA's Featured Website for its Centralized Assessment Repository.

Join Our Email List
What is assessment?

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

• Assessment occurs at a variety of levels –
  • Within a single course
  • Within a program
  • Within a degree
  • In general education
  • Across an institution

• Assessment is complex and that’s ok because learning is too!!
Why do we do it?

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

- But these are mostly external...what are some internal reasons we would engage with assessment? (and not just because someone said you have to do it)
What is happening nationally?

- 2013 National Provost Survey
- Sample: All regionally accredited, undergraduate degree-granting institutions (n=2,732)
- Announced via institutional membership organizations, website, newsletter, mailing
- Online and paper
- 44% response rate (n=1,202)
- 725 schools participated in both 2009 and 2013
Findings

Look for our survey report which will be released mid-January in our newsletter...but for now enjoy a sneak peak of the results...
Assessment Approaches by Institutional Type
Most Valuable Assessment Approaches

• The top three...

1. Classroom-based assessment
2. National Student Surveys
3. Rubrics
Drivers of assessment

- Regional accreditation
- Program accreditation
- Institutional commitment to improve
- Faculty or staff interest in improving student learning
- Concerns about the effectiveness and value of postsecondary education
- President and/or governing board direction or mandate
- National calls for accountability and/or transparency
- Statewide governing or coordinating board mandate
- External funding (federal, state, or foundation grants)
- Institutional membership initiatives (e.g., VSA, U-CAN, Transparency by Design, AAUDE, VFA)
- State mandate
- Participation in a consortium or multi-institution collaboration
- Other

Other | Associates | Baccalaureate | Masters | Doctoral
Then and Now

• Institutions are doing more assessments (3 in 2009 now 5 in 2013)
• More institutions have student learning outcomes statements
• National initiatives with implications for assessment continue to build steam
• Degree qualifications profile (DQP)
  • Piloted in over 400 institutions
• Competency-based education
  • University of Wisconsin system
  • Southern New Hampshire University
  • Western Governor’s University
  • Alverno College
• MOOCs
• Prior-learning assessment (PLA)
NILOA’s role with the DQP

• NILOA is “harvesting” (collecting, analyzing, summarizing, synthesizing) what can be learned from all of the funded and unfunded work currently going on with the DQP.
• Providing resources and information to institutions engaged in working with the DQP
• Document what is being done, by whom, and any lessons learned
• Gather information to help guide the upcoming revision of the DQP
• Identify synergies and cross-cutting issues
• Provide support to campuses
DQP Corner Resource

- New to the DQP
- Resource Kit
- Occasional papers
- Webinar Series
- DQP In Practice
- Assignment Library...coming soon!

http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/DQPCorner.html
What is the DQP?

Three degree levels:
• Associate
• Bachelor
• Master

Five competency areas:
• Specialized Knowledge
• Broad, Integrative Knowledge
• Intellectual Skills
• Applied Learning
• Civic Learning

Regional Accreditors
• ACCJC
• HLC
• SACS
• WASC

States
• Oregon

Organizations
• AASCU
• AAC&U
• CIC
• Unfunded
Who is working with it? What are they doing?
Community Colleges

- 100 institutions are focusing on the associate degree level
- Most focus on specific programs and pathways to transfer
- Working in partnership with four-year institutions
- Sharing assignments and data

- Kansas City Kansas Community College
- New Mexico Junior College
- IUPUI and Ivy Tech
- North Dakota State College of Science
Assessment and the DQP

- Ongoing, embedded in courses and curriculum
- Driven by and owned by faculty
- Not about standardization
- For every student
- To raise student awareness of the purpose of courses and their progress towards competencies
- Not an “exo-skeletal” approach
Implications of the DQP

• Alignment and Structure
• Curriculum mapping (moving from “my course” to “our curriculum”)
• Data audit and Course taking patterns

• How are we going to know what every student who attends is leaving with the desired knowledge and skills? But how do we keep it meaningful, manageable, and not a reporting burden?

What is the value of alignment and mapping?

Causal Statements

• The ability to make causal claims about our impact on students and their learning

• Institutional structures and support + student = enhanced learning
Difficulty of Causal Statements

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

• Why do we think the changes we make will lead to better outcomes?
• What is assumed in the changes we select as it relates to how students understand and navigate higher education?
Theory of Change (TOC)

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

• Coverage and content
• Opportunities and support
• Intentional, coherent, aligned pathways

• Within each of these is the belief about a root cause – why students were not learning or not meeting the outcome and the mechanism by which the institution can help them succeed
Root Cause

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

Toulmin (2003)

Evidence → Claim

Warrant

- Warrants
- Arguments
What does it look like in practice?

- Case Studies and Cross-case report
A faculty chair in business examined the results of program outcomes for learners who completed the program capstone course and found that on one of the outcomes, learners were performing below what he regarded as the minimum threshold. Through the curriculum maps and alignments linking learning activities in individual courses to program outcomes in the capstone, he was able to identify across the entire program which courses had the strongest alignment to the outcome in question. From there, he was able to delve deeper into individual learning activities, to combine that information with additional data including course evaluations, and from the combined data to make detailed changes in specific courses and specific learning activities or assignments within courses. By the time participants in the revised courses and learning activities completed the capstone course, there was a measurable improvement in the particular outcome in question. The faculty chair involved in the process stated, “The concept of having an outcomes-based approach and having a strong theory of alignment all the way down to individual learning activities helps facilitate the use of assessment data.”
Veterinary technology students did not score as well as needed in quantitative reasoning, for example, so veterinary technology faculty redesigned several key assignments to build and document that competency in students. Whereas previously students only read an article to learn about monitoring glucose levels in felines, the new assignment asked them to read the article, to take a reading of a cat’s glucose level, and then to use both sources to write an analytical report. This curriculum redesign created a more robust and discipline-specific quantitative reasoning experience for students and a richer set of documents to be collected and examined through ePortfolio. Addressing general education requirements throughout the program, according to the veterinary technology program director, means that “programs need to decide where they are addressing general education within the curriculum,” and using student artifacts collected through the ePortfolio “brings assessment to the forefront of the classroom.”
The religion department wanted to know if their students were writing at a desired level, and so the faculty developed a writing rubric, gathered a random collection of student essays, and had a faculty panel rate them. A report was generated from the rating that outlined where students demonstrated or fell short on the outcomes in question. Areas where students fell short were used to refocus teaching and also to rethink the sequence of courses and assignments within courses so as to better reinforce the desired outcomes and help students improve. A faculty member involved in this effort remarked, “It seems so modest to state it now – we identified an intended learning outcome, made rubrics, looked at essays, and altered teaching – but that fairly modest process generated a holistic view of what students were doing well and what they were not doing so well, which allowed for minor adjustments. In a year or two these adjustments showed that students are doing better on a given outcome.”
Evidence-based Storytelling

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

(Jankowski, 2012)
Discussion and Reflection

• Making sense of results – **Meaning Making**
• Multiple individuals across the institution critically engaging with assessment data
• Make sense of data to determine what, if anything, to do
  • 70%
• Examine multiple data points
• Group data by theme not method
Resources

- NILOA occasional papers and reports
- NILOA case studies
- Measuring Quality Inventory
- ACCJC project website: [www.dqpp.org](http://www.dqpp.org) (resources including worksheets and templates)
Thank You

• National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA): www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

• Questions and comments: njankow2@illinois.edu