Learning Outcomes Assessment, Transparency, and the Internet

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Overview of NILOA

- Why NILOA?
- Who are we?
- Who is funding the Project?
Why Webscan

- Survey Report
- Occasional Papers
- Case Studies
- Accreditation Study
- Web Scan Study
Concept of Transparency

- Accountability
- Communication
- Audience
Research Questions and Methods
Research Questions

- What does the institution display on its website regarding student learning outcomes assessment?

- On which web pages is information about assessment of student learning outcomes located?
Terminology

- Direct evidence of learning. (e.g., capstone)
- Indirect evidence of learning. (e.g., survey)
- Capacity building efforts. (e.g., faculty/staff development)
- Assessment purposes. (e.g., general education)
Methods

- Stratified random sample
- Part 1: Specific web page scan
- Part 2: Search engine
- Part 3: Reviewer information and mission
- Part 4: Reflection
Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics
- T-tests
- Anova
- Chi-square
Limitations

- Confounding variables
- Website changes
- Website access
- Website finances and structure
- Researcher bias
Findings
Findings

- Who has Institutional Research websites?
- Say vs. Show
  (Differences between NILOA survey and web scan findings)
- Evidence types found
- Location and audience
- Password protection
Which Institutions Had IR Pages?

- 52% of institutions in our sample
- Institutions with IR pages tended to have higher student enrollment numbers
  - With IR website, average enrollment = 7,666 students
  - No IR website, average enrollment = 3,255 students
  - Statistically significant difference at $\alpha = .000$
Which Institutions Had IR Pages?

- Almost two-thirds of public institutions
- Just under half of private institutions
Which Institutions Had IR Pages?

- Doctoral and Master’s institutions were most likely
- Followed by Baccalaureate and Associate’s institutions
Say vs. Show

- More assessment activity was reported by chief academic officers than was available on institution websites.
Few in Number, But Great in Variety

- An average of only 2.2 student learning outcomes assessment activities were found.
- Many different types of assessment activities were represented on institution websites.
  - The most frequently posted—by at least 30% of all institutions—included information on national student surveys, alumni surveys, local student surveys, and capstone experiences.
Few in Number, But Great in Variety

Percentage of Institutions

Indirect Evidence
- National Student Surveys: 30%
- Alumni Surveys: 30%
- Local Student Surveys: 30%
- Graduating Student Surveys: 30%
- Other Surveys: 20%
- Capstone Experiences: 20%

Direct Evidence
- Portfolios: 40%
- Standardized Tests: 30%
- E-Portfolios: 20%
- Local Tests: 10%
Few in Number, But Great in Variety

For the 372 institutions that had IR pages

- An average of 3.3 student learning outcomes assessment activities were found across the institutional websites
  - With an average of 2.4 activities on IR pages
Few in Number, But Great in Variety

For the 372 institutions that had IR pages

- National Student Surveys
- Alumni Surveys
- Local Student Surveys
- Graduating Student Surveys
- Other Surveys
- Capstone Experiences
- Portfolios
- Standardized Tests
- Local Tests
- E-Portfolios

Percentage of Institutions that Have IR Pages

- Institutional Research Pages
- Other Location
Location and Audience

- Student learning outcomes assessment information was most often available on web pages primarily targeting internal audiences.
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment
Making Learning Outcomes Usable & Transparent

Location and Audience

Indirect Evidence
- National Student Surveys
- Alumni Surveys
- Local Student Surveys
- Graduating Student Surveys
- Other Surveys
- Capstone Experiences

Direct Evidence
- Portfolios
- Standardized Tests
- E-Portfolios
- Local Tests

Percentage of Web Pages

[Bar chart showing the distribution of web page locations and audiences]
For 7% of the institutions, password protection limited access to information regarding learning outcomes assessment activities.

Reasons for password protection included:
- Temporary password protection of draft documents
- Internal-only information, not for public consumption
- Student-level data

In half of the cases, we could not determine what resided behind the password protection.
Password Protected

Percentage of Institutions with Password Protection

Location of Password Protection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions Office</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Research</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provost Office</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Plan</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across Many Pages</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations
Recommendation #1

- Make assessment information more accessible (Volkwein, 2010)
  - Provide information on multiple web pages
  - Collaborate with other campus stakeholders
  - Update web pages regularly
Recommendation #2

- Explicitly state assessment goals, activities, and initiatives on web pages
  - Ensure statements are understandable and transparent
University Learning Outcomes

Serving individuals who live and work in the state capital region and beyond, Sacramento State is committed to providing an academic environment in which community leadership grounded in scholarship is fostered. Our institutional learning outcomes reflect this commitment, and our programs are designed to provide opportunities for learners to build a strong knowledge base within and across disciplines, to grow as critical and analytical thinkers, to develop information competencies including expertise with a variety of modes of communication, and to engage in public discourse and community work as ethical and just human beings.

The following link leads to the document which explains our General Education Learning Outcomes:

[General Education Learning Outcomes](#)

The Chancellor's Office recently issued Executive Order 1033 governing General Education and directed all campuses to align GE learning outcomes with the LEAP outcome framework. Here is a summary of the LEAP Framework:

[LEAP’s Essential Learning Outcomes](#)

The following link leads to the statement of our baccalaureate learning goals:

[Baccalaureate Learning Goals](#)
Recommendation #3

- Help audiences understand assessment activities through simple examples and descriptions
  - Explain data in layperson’s language (Middaugh, 2010; Volkwein, 2010)
  - Use an outside reviewer
Learner Satisfaction
See how learners rate their Capella experiences.

On-line learners may have different needs, expectations, and priorities than more traditional students. At Capella, we strive to understand and meet those needs, priorities, and expectations. One way we do that is to measure learner satisfaction using standardized surveys. These surveys allow us to evaluate Capella’s performance and to compare it to other similar institutions.

National Survey of Student Engagement
Each year Capella participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). In 2008, all Capella undergraduate students that were the equivalent of first-year or senior level students were invited to participate.

Results reported here are from students at the senior-year level. Capella’s results are compared to the survey’s the National Benchmark’s results, which represent learners from 769 different institutions. The response rates were 42% for Capella and 35% for the National Benchmark. Sampling error is +/- 4.0% for Capella and 0.2% for the National Benchmark.

Survey details
NSSE obtains information from hundreds of colleges and universities nationwide about undergraduate student participation in programs and activities and their interactions with faculty and other students. The results provide a picture of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.

The numbers reported here reflect the percentage of respondents who chose the top 2 positive answers on a 4-point scale or the top 3 positive answers on a 7-point scale.

What Universities Enable Students To Do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Capella</th>
<th>National Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing clearly and effectively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking critically and analytically</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using computing and information technology</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working effectively with others</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving complex real-world problems</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation #4

- Clarify the use of password protected web pages
  - What content is being posted
    - Who needs to see it and why?
  - Appropriateness
    - What’s your rationale?
Student Learning Assessment Implementation Team

POLICY ON SHARING DATA ON INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT

The purpose of generating, gathering, and analyzing data on Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning is to improve the institution's performance of its key functions: enrolling, supporting, and educating its students. Data for these purposes falls into two categories:

a. reports that are mandated by the state, by the community college system, and/or by accrediting agencies; this data may be part of the public record and therefore accessible to anyone.

b. data that is generated by a particular office, department, committee, or team for a particular purpose; such data may include customer satisfaction surveys, service utilization figures, Banner reports, and/or data on student performance in course-level, program specific, or college-wide assessment activities.

For the purpose of this policy, public data is public once it is reported, posted, or published it is available to anyone who takes the time to look for it, cite it, and make use of it. However, the second type of data, which is generated in-house for a particular purpose, is not public information, and the college must establish guidelines to cover the reporting, posting, publishing, and manipulation of this data for purposes for which it was not originally intended.

Proposed Guidelines for Non-Public Data

1. The office, department, committee, or team that produces the data has control of the data's use. For example, the Executive Committee sub-committee on planning and institutional effectiveness controls the use of data it generates on how the college is performing in relation to its strategic goals; academic departments and programs control the use of data on student performance in those programs, including performance on licensure exams, etc.; departments that conduct customer satisfaction surveys control the use of those results; and results compiled by the college-wide Assessment Implementation Team may be reported as aggregate data to appropriate offices, departments, and governance committees but may not be disseminated beyond the college without the consent of the Assessment Coordinator and Assessment Advisory Council. Those who control the use of particular data must coordinate that information at levels of generality appropriate for reporting in all College meetings, through the Institutional Assessment Portfolio, or through other means, but may not be compelled to do so.

2. The Office of Institutional Research, which has access to sensitive data related to every academic program, department, and college-wide assessment activity, must obtain the permission of those who control the use of non-public data before reporting, posting, or publishing any non-public or using that data for any purpose beyond the original intention of those who produced the data.

APPLICATION OF POLICY TO STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT DATA

1. Limited use of student learning assessment findings
   Data collected for the assessment of student learning is governed by four questions: What do students know? When do they know it? Who needs this information for decision making? How will we use this information to enhance student learning? All student learning assessment projects must focus on and be limited to answering these questions. Therefore, the findings of assessment implementations are not appropriate for uses beyond those directed toward improving student learning. The Assessment Implementation Team controls the use of information it collects, sharing it with relevant college departments in accordance with standards of confidentiality and clarity of purpose. The team or departments may report summaries, conclusions, or actions based on the assessment data, tailoring these reports for public purposes in accordance with Guideline #1 above. All assessment results will be prepared with the following disclaimer:
   This information is one indicator of student performance in relation to a specific goal. It is the result of an assessment project expressly designed to guide decisions concerning the improvement of student learning.

2. Anonymous aggregate reporting
   To maintain student and faculty involvement in the assessment process, the college must assure that no grades, awards, evaluations, or judgments about any individual can be adversely affected by participation in an assessment study. For this, the college must be able to promise that no student, teacher, or small group can be identified through the assessment reports. Since the college is a public institution and open to pressure for information from many quarters, to keep that promise it must take measures to disconnect assessment findings and reports from the Banner identification numbers through which a large amount of information can be connected with individuals. The Assessment Implementation Team has revised its research design to assure that reports are confined to aggregates of anonymous participants.

3. Maintaining focus on practical teaching and learning applications
   The student learning assessment movement began among teachers who wanted to gather information on which to make decisions to better support student learning. More recently, the language of assessment has been adopted by external evaluators and funders who are concerned about institutional accountability, and the methods of gathering and using data for external accountability often run counter to the methods best suited to assessment projects in quest of interventions to improve learning. Although data from some assessment projects can serve both internal and external purposes, other assessment data may serve internal purposes only. To keep assessment focused on the practical internal uses of information, teaching faculty must lead in generating questions, implementations, and interpretations.
Recommendation #5

• Facilitate successful website navigation (Shneiderman & Plaisant, 2004)
  ○ Varying web browsers, accessibility of software, etc
  ○ File sizes (Pdf, Excel, SPSS outputs, etc) and download times
Discussion

• What do these implications mean for IR offices?
  ○ Culture shift—IR offices as “Knowledge Brokers”
  ○ IR Officers and partnerships with other campus units

• What systems are currently in place?
  ○ Do you have an IR website? Who manages it?
    ▪ If no, how do you communicate assessment activities?
    ▪ If yes, who is responsible for uploading and updating content?

• Who is your target audience(s)?
  ○ Make the internal...external
• What are some additional strategies for increasing transparency?
  ○ What are the next steps for IR offices? For campuses at-large?
• What are some innovative communication examples from your campus or strategies you have heard of?
  ○ For web pages and off the web
Next Steps for NILOA

- Examination of posted results
- Greater emphasis on program/departmental activities


Thank you!

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

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