Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: All Signs Point to Accreditation

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APRIL, 2012
Advanced Organizers

- What is the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment?

- Why the interest in assessment?

- What is the national picture of student learning outcomes assessment for colleges and universities?

- How can universities and colleges capitalize on accreditation to move assessment forward?
Overview of NILOA

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

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
Welcome to NILOA

New to the website? For a general overview, click here.

Featured pages
National Survey Results 2011
National Survey Results 2009
Occasional Papers
College & University Associations
College & University Programs

Featured Website
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

Oregon State University
Oregon State University's Office of Academic Programs, Assessment, and Accreditation (APAA) website is NILOA's featured website for its communication.

In the News | Archive | RSS

Assessing Online Learning: Strategies, Challenges, and Opportunities
Fri, Mar 16, 2012 - 08:00 am
Faculty Focus
A special report in Faculty Focus on assessing online learning.

Doubling Down on Degrees
Fri, Mar 16, 2012 - 08:00 am
Mitch Smith in Inside Higher Ed
As part of Indiana’s performance based funding plan through the Indiana Higher Education Commission, Indiana’s public colleges and universities are tasked with finding and using assessments to appropriately track their students learning.

Learning Centers Had Little Impact
Fri, Mar 16, 2012 - 08:00 am
Jack Grove for Times Higher Education
This brief article discusses the successes and failures of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) initiative which ran from 2005 to 2010 and was financed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Join Our Email List
• Policies and Reports

• Accreditation

• Growing Interest
“Colleges . . . Do so little to measure what students learn between freshman and senior years. So doubt lurks: how much does a college education— the actual teaching and learning that happens on campus – really matter?”

--David Leonhardt, NYTimes, Sept 27, 2009
Definition

Assess: (v.): to examine carefully

Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 4)
“Assessment per se guarantees nothing by way of improvement, no more than a thermometer cures a fever.”

T. J. Marchese
Assessment Answers These Questions

- What is my institution/program accomplishing?
- How well is my institution/program influencing student learning?
- How do we know that students are learning?
- How do we improve student learning?
- On what information can we base celebrating our students’ accomplishments?
- Have the improvements been effective?
Assessments of what students learn during college are typically used for either improvement or accountability, and occasionally both. Yet, since the early days of the “assessment movement” in the US, these two purposes of outcomes assessment have not rested comfortably together.
## Two Paradigms of Assessment

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<td>Over time, comparative, established goal</td>
<td>Comparative or fixed standard</td>
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<td>Communication of results</td>
<td>Multiple internal channels</td>
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<td>Multiple feedback loops</td>
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Web-based inventory of assessment resources. Key words can be used to search the four categories:

- instruments (exams, surveys, questionnaires, etc.);
- software tools and platforms;
- benchmarking systems and data resources;
- projects, initiatives and services.

http://applications.airweb.org/surveys/Default.aspx
What are colleges and universities doing to assess student learning and how are they portraying their assessment information?

- Survey Reports
- Web Scan Studies
- Case Studies
- Accreditation Study
- Focus Groups
Survey asked chief academic officers at all accredited 2 & 4 year colleges and universities about their assessment practices.

Survey report “More Than You Think, Less Than We Need” released October, 2009
According to Provosts, what is the driving force for assessment?

a. Institutional Commitment to Improvement
b. Accreditation
c. Faculty & Staff Interest
d. Governing Board Mandate

“high importance”
85% Regional
80% Specialized
Assessment driven more by accreditation and commitment to improve than external pressures from government or employers.
Accreditation tops the list for uses of assessment data.
Institution-Level Assessments of Learning Outcomes for All Institutions

- National Surveys
- Alumni Surveys
- Local Surveys
- General Knowledge
- Rubrics
- Employer Surveys
- Additional Assessments
- Student Interviews
- Alumni Interviews
- External Judges
- Portfolios
- Specialized Knowledge
- Employer Interviews
What is Required to Improve Learning Outcomes Assessment for All Schools?

- Faculty Engagement
- More Expertise
- More Finances
- Better Tests
- More Tool Info
- More Policy Info
- Presidential Support

What is Required to Improve Learning Outcomes Assessment for All Schools?
Occasional Paper #4
*Opening Doors for Faculty Involvement in Assessment*

Pat Hutchings

The key to effectively using assessment data to improve student learning is to engage faculty in meaningful ways in this critical activity. This paper discusses the challenges inherent in and opportunities for doing so.
Understanding the purposes and uses of student learning outcomes assessment continues to be a challenge for many college and university stakeholders. The NILOA Assessment Briefs aim to provide a brief, informative guide on the nature and practical use of assessment evidence that is targeted to a particular audience, such as faculty, senior leadership, student affairs, governing boards, SHEEOs, and so on.
Report Summary

1. Perhaps more assessment underway than some acknowledge or wish to believe

2. More attention needed to using and reporting assessment results

3. Involving faculty is a major challenge

4. More investment likely needed to move from data to improvement
2010 Program-Level Survey Characteristics

✓ Two-staged administration
✓ Usable responses from 982 programs (30% of programs surveyed)

http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/NILOAsurveyresults11.htm
Program Learning Outcomes

What proportion of programs have established learning outcomes?

a) 80%  b) 60%  c) 45%  d) 30%

- More than 8 of 10 programs have established an agreed-upon set of intended student learning outcomes

- Overwhelming majority of programs have established learning outcomes goals
Assessment Methods Used

- Capstone: Most Students (70%) and All Students (60%)
- Rubrics: Most Students (60%) and All Students (50%)
- Final Project: Most Students (50%) and All Students (40%)
- Local Tests: Most Students (40%) and All Students (30%)
- Local Surveys: Most Students (30%) and All Students (20%)
- Alumni Surveys: Most Students (20%) and All Students (10%)
- External Exam: Most Students (10%) and All Students (5%)
- Portfolios: Most Students (5%) and All Students (2.5%)
- Comprehensive Exam: Most Students (2.5%) and All Students (1.5%)
- Special Tests: Most Students (1.5%) and All Students (1%)
- National Surveys: Most Students (1%) and All Students (0.5%)
- General Tests: Most Students (0.5%) and All Students (0.25%)
- Employer Surveys: Most Students (0.25%) and All Students (0.125%)
- Interviews/Focus Groups: Most Students (0.125%) and All Students (0.0625%)
Accredited Program Effect

Specialized Accreditation Matters A Lot

- Accredited programs were significantly more likely to report that specialized accreditation is of high or moderate importance
- “Halo Effect” of programmatic accreditation
Uses of Assessment Results by Program Accreditation Status

- Program Review
- Revise Goals
- Improve Instruction
- Improve Curriculum
- Inform Planning
- Evaluate Program
- Support Budget
- Evaluate Faculty

Accredited | Not Accredited
What Would Help?

- Release Time: 65%
- Stipends: 55%
- Faculty Expertise: 55%
- Better Measures: 50%
- Information from Others: 45%
- More Faculty Involvement: 45%
- Staffing: 20%
- Consultants: 15%
Accredited programs report higher levels of faculty involvement in assessment than non-accredited programs.

**TRUE**

Accredited programs: 41% report that “all” of their faculty are involved, 35% report that “most” of their faculty are involved.

Non-Accredited: both 23%
Key Findings

- Action at the program level
- Perceptions of CAOs and programs differ
- Specialized accreditation matters a lot
- Disciplinary differences matter even more
Objective of Institutional Web Scans

To understand what student learning outcomes assessment information institutions post on their websites and where they post it.
Comparison of Survey with Web Studies

- National Student Survey
- Local Student Survey
- Alumni Survey
- Other Survey
- Standardized Tests

- 2010 Web Scan
- 2009 National Survey
- 2009 Web Scan
Location and Audience

• Student learning outcomes assessment information was most often available on web pages primarily targeting internal audiences.
  ○ Such as institutional research and provost pages

Interesting Fact: over 50% of institutions have an Assessment page
Influences

Institutions that have recently undergone accreditation show more assessment information, results, and use.
Major Findings

- More assessment takes place than is shown.
- Assessment information is typically found on pages geared to internal audiences.
- Accreditation, institutional control, and participation in national initiatives appear to influence website communication on assessment.
- Institutions show results more often than you would think they do, but you have to search for it.
NILOA Sessions at Institutional Meetings

- “NEASC is pushing for outcomes.” President, Liberal Arts College
- “Accreditation visit coming up. This drives what we need to do for assessment.” President, Urban University
- “WASC has influenced our assessment work.” President, Regional Public University
- “SACs QEP was important to our assessment efforts.” President, State Regional Public University
- “HLC came down on us hard over assessment.” President, Small Liberal Arts
Regional Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: Mapping the Territory

Staci Provezis

This paper examines the policies and procedures at each of the seven regional accreditation organizations, as they relate to student learning outcomes assessment.
Accreditation Study

- Philosophical shift from creating an assessment plan to implementing outcomes assessment.

- Increased follow up visits and reports for accreditation based on lack of sufficient student learning outcomes assessment activity.

- Language used in accreditation letters across all regional accrediting agencies include “creating a culture of evidence” and “using results for improvement.”
Example of Philosophical Shift - Northwest

- Their past standards indicated the need for assessment:
  - “Educational Program Planning and Assessment 2.B.1  The institution’s processes for assessing its educational programs are **clearly defined, encompass all of its offerings, are conducted on a regular basis, and are integrated into the overall planning and evaluation plan.**”

- Their new standards talk specifically about having learning outcomes, collecting data on them, and making judgments on what to do with the findings:
  - “Standard Four: Effectiveness and Improvement: The institution **collects data related to clearly defined indicators of achievement, analyzes those data, and forms evidence-based judgments of achievements of core objectives.**”
Regional accreditors cite deficiencies in student learning outcomes assessment with greater frequency

**Middle States** - 2/3 of institutions have follow-up; number one reason being assessment

**NEASC** - 80% of institutions asked for follow-up on student learning outcomes assessment

**HLC** - 7 out of 10 institutions are being monitored; the vast majority for student learning outcomes assessment.
Accreditation Letters

For all institutions, 90% of regional accrediting agency letters posted asked for additional follow-up information on student learning outcomes activity.
Themes

• More than you think
• Less than we need
• Accreditation as a driver
• Improvement as a desired goal
What strategies can institutions employ to improve assessment practices and institutional quality?
Examples of Good Assessment Practice Overview

To develop a better understanding of what “good work” looks like related to assessment, data-informed improvement, and transparency at the institutional level, we are compiling some short, instructive case studies or Examples of Good Assessment Practice. The institutions selected were identified using information from the national survey of student learning outcomes assessment, self-nominations by institutions, and suggestions from the NILOA advisory panel. The Examples feature colleges and universities that appear to be using assessment data to effect changes in teaching and learning or reporting their activities and findings in an accessible manner. We welcome additional recommendations for where to look to find exemplary assessment work from which others can benefit. To see the Examples, click here.
Characteristics of campuses with successful assessment programs

- Institutional leaders support assessment efforts
- Openly share assessment information
- Build capacity for assessment
- Strive to routinize assessment
- Realize the importance of small gains and time
Challenges to Assessment

• **Changing department culture** - ongoing assessment and continuous improvement not part of department culture

• **Prioritizing** assessment

• **Overcoming perceived lack of expertise** in gathering and interpreting assessment evidence

• **Conflating assessment** with evaluation of teaching effectiveness
Improving Quality with Assessment

• Less about Compliance, more about Quality

• Sincere Institutional and Program Engagement with Accreditors in Assessment