

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



**Talking About Assessment:  
An Analysis of the *Measuring Stick* Blog &  
the Comments It Elicited**

GLORIA JEA SHENOY

NOVEMBER 03, 2011



## **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](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)**

# National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

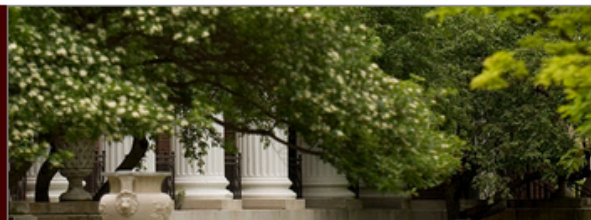
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## Welcome to NILOA

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



August 2011: Two assessment briefs are now available - one for Faculty written by Pat Hutchings and another one for Student Affairs Professionals written by Marilee J. Bresciani.

- ◀◀ [Occasional Paper 11](#)
- ◀◀ [Briefs](#)
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- ◀◀ [Occasional Paper 10](#)
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[Occasional Papers](#)  
[College & University Associations](#)  
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### Walden University

Walden University's "Demonstrating Accountability, Transparency, and Assessment" (DATA) is NILOA's Featured Website for its communication and creativity.

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### [NILOA September Newsletter Available](#)

Wed, Sep 21, 2011 - 08:00 am  
NILOA

Find out about what's new with NILOA in addition to recent news items about learning outcomes assessment in this month's newsletter.

### [The Spellings Report, 5 Years Later](#)

Tue, Sep 20, 2011 - 08:00 am  
Various authors in The Chronicle of Higher Education

Three authors talk about the Spellings Report near its 5th anniversary in The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Kelly Field's article, "[Spellings Panel Spurred Progress in Some Key Areas but Failed to Remake American Higher Education](#)" examines progress made in 3 areas: access, accountability, and affordability.

Margaret Spellings' Q&A titled, "[Former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings Discusses the Impact of Her Commission](#)" gauges progress made since the Report.

Robert Zemsky's "[The Unwitting Damage Done by the Spellings Commission](#)" gives us an insider's view of the Spellings Commission and how



- What is student learning outcomes assessment?
- Why the interest in this type of assessment?
- What does the conversation in the Measuring Stick series in *The Chronicle* tell us about the current state of assessment?

# 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)**



## Setting the Context

- Growing Interest in Student Learning
- Policies and Reports
- Media

*We need a system that ensures quality by fostering genuine learning, not mere program completion...*

*--Jamie Merisotis, Lumina Foundation, January 13, 2011*



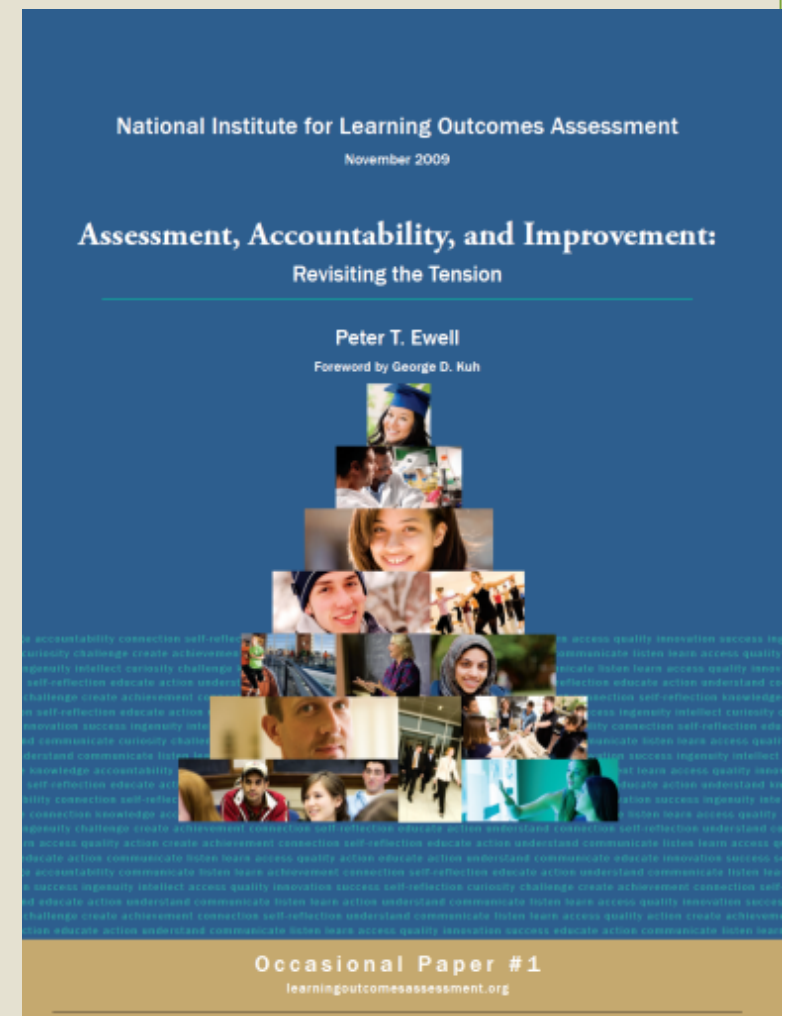
## Assessment Purposes

### Occasional Paper #1

# Assessment, Accountability, and Improvement

Peter T. Ewell

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

	<i>Continuous Improvement</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
<b>Strategic dimensions</b>		
Purpose	Formative (improvement)	Summative (judgment)
Orientation	Internal	External
Motivation	Engagement	Compliance
<b>Implementation</b>		
Instrumentation	Multiple/triangulation	Standardized
Nature of evidence	Quantitative and qualitative	Quantitative
Reference points	Over time, comparative, established goal	Comparative or fixed standard
Communication of results	Multiple internal channels	Public communication, media
Use of results	Multiple feedback loops	Reporting

*Ewell, Peter T. (2007). Assessment and Accountability in America Today: Background and Context. In Assessing and Accounting for Student Learning: Beyond the Spellings Commission. Victor M. H. Borden and Gary R. Pike, Eds. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.*



## Measuring Stick

- Background on *Chronicle* and the series
- Major themes from analysis
- NILOA's work/response

# THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

Friday, October 7, 2011

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## Measuring Stick

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Previous

A Dual System of Quality → **Next**

### Faculty Norms Inhibit Excellence

August 27, 2010, 6:28 pm

By Patrick Allitt

In the 20th century, American professors built an incredibly powerful edifice for themselves and shored it up with sturdy walls of tenure.

In one way that's good. It means they are free to research and publish in the most controversial areas, able to go where the evidence leads them, and be confident that their colleagues will support them if attacked from outside.

In another way it's not so good. Tenure, which frees them to think anything, also enables the less energetic and scrupulous among them to think almost nothing. Every university lugs along its share of unproductive faculty members whose last publication immediately preceded the grant of tenure, 10, 20, or 30 years earlier. This is a case where the norms of professionalism may inhibit, rather than enhance, the achievement of excellence.

## Which colleges are great places to work?

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MEASURING  
STICK

Experts explore the quality and assessment of higher education.



## Definition of Quality

- The real problem: No one agrees on definition of quality

## Responsibility

- “Any college or university could improve quality if they cut their bloated administration.” *shirley77*
- Governing boards- *Peter Ewell*
- Accreditation –*Judith Eaton*

## Improving & Measuring

- Grades and college rankings

*Continuous  
 Improvement*

*Accountability*

**Strategic dimensions**

Purpose

Orientation

Motivation

**Implementation**

Instrumentation

Nature of evidence

Reference points

Communication of results

Use of results

I am not a big fan of the word quality and use it as little as possible. But I do believe in getting better at what I'm suppose to be doing. In other words, I believe in and strive for continuous

In response to our administration's demand that course specific SLOs be put in the syllabus (and not just a copy of the department's SLOs), the syllabus (which has my narrative of objectives for the course), and any special focus requirements (writing intensive for example). Then they work in groups to develop SLOs for our class, which I then collate into a single set and post. This process has the added benefit of getting them to read and actively engage with the syllabus. At the end of the semester, the student evaluation form asks them to evaluate the course on each of the SLOs they devised.

11293800, September 7, 2010

media

Multiple feedback loops

Reporting

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- Tools
- NILOA Resources
- Assessment Resources
- Event Calendar
- Accreditation
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## About Us

Our Mission & Vision  
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NILOA Presentations  
 Monthly Newsletters  
 Viewpoints

## NILOA Guest Viewpoints

We have invited learning outcomes assessment leaders throughout the nation to submit short perspective pieces for this feature, Viewpoints. We hope that these pieces will spark further conversations to help us intentionally dialogue about change in this field. **Join the conversations here** and **sign up here** to receive monthly newsletters that headline these pieces along with NILOA updates, current news items, and upcoming conferences.

**Putting Myself to the Test - Ama Nyamekye, *Education Week***

As first appeared in *Education Week*, August 31, 2011. Reprinted with permission from the author.

In college, I pumped my fist at a rally against standardized testing. I'd never seen the exam I was protesting, but stood in solidarity with educators and labor organizers who felt the testing movement was an attack on teachers, particularly those working in poor public schools. My opposition grew when I became a teacher in the South Bronx, one of America's poorest communities. I wanted to uplift my students and resented the weight of a looming high-stakes test



Check out other Viewpoints:

**From Uniformity to Personalization: How to Get the Most Out of Assessment**

Peter Stokes

**Transparency Drives Learning at Rio Salado College**

Vernon Smith

**Navigating a Perfect Storm**



## **Blogs as Assessment**

- Continuous conversation
- Desired responses
- Type of voices

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**Gloria Jea Shenoy**  
gjea2@illinois.edu

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