



Assessing Student Learning Outcomes: A Brief “360” Review

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Defining Assessment of Learning Outcomes

- Systematic Information About What [Undergraduate] Students Know and Can Do as a Result of Attending College
- Generally Driven by Formal Statements of Intended “Outcomes” (e.g. Oral Communications, Quantitative Reasoning, or Problem-Solving) of Collegiate Study
- Usually Collected in the *Aggregate* (that is, to Inform Judgments About Programs, not People)





Where Did Assessment Come From?

- Accountability Concerns About “Return on Investment” from External Stakeholders and Funders
- Internal Needs for Better Information to Manage and Improve Academic Programs
- Inability of Faculty-Awarded Grades to Provide Adequate Information





What's Wrong With Grades?

- Can't Provide Information About the Overall Impact of Instruction for Important Abilities (e.g. Writing) Across Classes
- Not Benchmarked Against Common Standards of Achievement (e.g. "What Does a 'B' Really Mean?")
- Not Reliable Across Graders (e.g. "Is the 'B' John Gives Comparable to the one Mary Gives?")





How Is Assessment in Higher Education Different from Assessment in K-12?

- Academic Outcomes and Standards Legitimately Differ Across Institutions
- Outcomes of College are Hard to “Measure” in a Standardized Way
- Nevertheless, Interest in Some Quarters for a “Collegiate NAEP”
- Assessment Is Usually Done in the Aggregate— That is, Not for Every Student





The Accountability Dimension

- National Governors Association “Time for Results” (1986) → State Mandates
- USDOE Interest in “Consumer Protection” from 1989 (e.g. “Student Right to Know” Act) → Reporting and New Accreditation Requirements
- The “Quality Movement” in Corporate America → Performance Indicators and Evidence-Based Quality Improvement





The Improvement Dimension

- “Involvement in Learning” (1984) and “Integrity in the College Curriculum” (1986)
- Concerns About Curricular Coherence in an Age of Specialization and Student Choice
- Growing Technical Ability to Collect and Interpret Evidence of Student Learning





Some Details of the Tension

	<i>Continuous Improvement</i>	<i>Accountability</i>
Strategic dimensions		
Purpose	Formative (improvement)	Summative (judgment)
Orientation	Internal	External
Motivation	Engagement	Compliance
Implementation		
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



Choices About Assessment

- Direct vs. Indirect Assessment
- Forced-Choice vs. “Authentic” Assessments
- Standardized vs. Non-Standardized Results
- Specially-Constructed vs. Naturally-Occurring Assessments
- Absolute vs. “Value-Added” Designs





Assessment Actors

- Individual Faculty Members
- Academic Programs
- Colleges and Universities
- States and Systems
- Accreditation (Programmatic and Institutional)
- Nations in the Global Arena





Faculty Members: Motives and Methods

Motives:

- Improving Teaching
- External Certification of Student Learning

Methods:

- Classroom Research
- Content Examinations





Academic Programs: Motives and Methods

Motives:

- Curriculum Improvement
- Programmatic Accreditation

Methods:

- Standardized Examinations (e.g. MFAT)
- Portfolios and Capstones





Institutions: Motives and Methods

Motives:

- Improving Curricula and Pedagogy
- Demonstrating Graduate Quality
- Institutional Accreditation





Institutions: Motives and Methods

Methods:

- Standardized Examinations (e.g. ACT CAAP, ETS Profile, CLA, etc.)
- Portfolios and Capstones
- “Embedded” Assessment
- Surveys (e.g NSSE/CCSSE)





States: Motives and Methods

Motives:

- Institutional Accountability
- Regulating Student Progress (e.g. SD)

Methods:

- Standardized Examinations (e.g. CAAP, CLA)
- Institution-Centered Approaches (e.g. WA)





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Accreditation: Motives and Methods

Motives:

- “Gate-Keeping” Federal Dollars
- Institutional Accountability
- Institutional Improvement Through Use of Results

Methods:

- Not Prescribed—Institution Chooses Goals and Methods





Nations: Motives and Methods

Motives:

- Benchmarking and International Comparison
- National Examinations (e.g. Brazil)

Methods:

- OECD—AHELO, PISA, Adult Literacy Assessments
- International Rankings





“Post-Spellings” Developments

- Critiques of Institutional Accreditation
- The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) and Its “Cousins”
- The New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability
- Lumina Efforts: “Tuning” and the Degree Qualifications Framework





Into the Future

- “Mastery-Based” Institutions and Curricula (e.g. Western Governors University)
- Automated Rubrics and Learning Management Systems (e.g. eLumen)
- Remote Proctoring and Student Response Systems
- Simulations and Game Technology
- Portable Personal Electronic Portfolios

