Using Assessment Results to Enhance Student Learning
And Convince Others That You are Doing So

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Overview

- The paradoxical context
- Focusing on quality improvement
- Convincing others
Part 1

THE PARADOXICAL CONTEXT
What Do “They” Want From Us?

- **Students**
  - Excellent teachers; access to rewarding careers/professions; academic support; personal enrichment; quality of student life; exposure to people

- **Parents**
  - Personal and professional development; safety; access to positive role models; stay out of trouble

- **Faculty**
  - Small classes; good students; space and resources (library, equipment, etc.) for research and scholarship; good colleagues; support for venture development; lack of bureaucracy

- **Trustees**
  - Effective use of resources; faculty accomplishments (recognition and funding); student progress and achievement; contributions to economic development

- **Legislators**
  - Access by constituents; employability of graduates; contributions to state welfare and development; effective use of resources; ties with business and industry; controlled costs

- **Accreditors**
  - Adequate organizational structures and processes (administration and governance); appropriate credentials of faculty; effective use of resources; demonstrated student learning outcomes; quality assurance processes

- **Business and Industry**
  - Preparation of graduates for workforce; support for research and development
The Assessment Dilemma

- Professionals have responsibility to define and maintain high standards
- There are at least some legitimate external interests
- Professionally-driven assessments for improvement do not satisfy external demands
- External accountability demands require less palatable approaches
The Accountability “Culture Gap”
Nancy Shulock, CSU, Sacramento

- Policymakers want accountability to be unambiguous, concise, and quick. ...[they] want to know...whether goals are reached, whether students graduate, whether transfer rates are up or down, whether students are prepared to take their places in the 21st century workforce. They do not want explanations, caveats, or excuses.
The Accountability “Culture Gap”

- The academic community finds bottom line approaches... threatening and inappropriate... They fear legislative intrusion into matters of educational expertise... They question how educational quality and equity can be quantified and assessed in a neat and tidy way and worry that quantitative measures create perverse incentives...
# Ewell’s Assessment Paradigms and Tension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Dimensions:</th>
<th>Assessment for Continuous Improvement</th>
<th>Assessment for Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Formative (Improvement)</td>
<td>Summative (Judgment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stance</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>External</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant Ethos</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Choices:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>Multiple/Triangulation</td>
<td>Standardized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Evidence</td>
<td>Quantitative and Qualitative</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Points</td>
<td>Over Time, Comparative, Established Goal</td>
<td>Comparative or Fixed Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication of Results</td>
<td>Multiple Internal Channels and Media</td>
<td>Public Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses of Results</td>
<td>Multiple Feedback Loops</td>
<td>Reporting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paradoxical Tensions

- Andreas Wagner (2009). *Paradoxical Life*
- Dualisms
  - Self/other
  - Meaning/matter
  - And many more...
Self-Other

♦ I tripped but you fell

♦ Inside out:
  - Problems are due to insufficiency of materials with which we have to work
    - Student, facilities, finance, equipment

♦ Outside in:
  - Problems are with the people doing the work and the processes they use to get their work done
Meaning/Matter

- Positivist v. constructivist epistemologies
- Outside in:
  - There are simple facts about things we can now across settings
    - Graduation rates, student/faculty ratios, instructional expenditures per FTE
- Inside out:
  - You can’t compare us on common measures because we have different contexts
    - Selective v. open-access institutions
Neither party to a dispute sees that its entrenched position is just one side of a coin. It raises itself over other, whole over part, body over mind, matter over meaning, or vice versa and denies the other side legitimacy. Nothing may be wrong, except the belief that one of them is the truth.
Living with Paradoxical Tensions (cont.)

- Respect various legitimate views and the people who have them
- Focus on “inside out” professional responsibility
- Communicate effectively with individuals on the “other sides”
  - Administrators channeling external accountability agents
  - Colleagues in other academic areas
  - Students, parents, community in general
Working Inside Out with Due Respect

♦ There are two basic reasons to assess student learning outcomes
  ▶ To improve the quality of your programs
  ▶ To demonstrate the level of quality to others
    • prospective students, accreditors, potential funders/collaborators, etc.
Part 2

FOCUSING ON QUALITY IMPROVEMENT
Teaching at UA

- How good a university is UA?
- In what ways is the quality of teaching part of the determination of the overall quality of UA?
  - How well taught are the classes at UA?
- Whose responsibility is the quality of teaching?
  - The faculty, individually or collectively?
- Are students attending UA entitled to quality teaching?
- What makes the classes at UA different from those at other HEIs?
Using Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning

1. Engage faculty
   - Assessment as professional responsibility
   - From “my work” to “our work”

2. Engage students
   - Curriculum-embedded, authentic performance tasks

3. Develop community standards for judgment
   - High expectations for all involved

4. Connect teaching and learning
   - Using assessment results to change teaching practices and processes
What is Assessment for Improvement?

- Formative in nature, looks at evidence over time
- Internally focused, connected to program and institutional goals
- Uses direct and indirect measures, qualitative and quantitative
- Focused on learning
- Faculty (and administrators) gather and judge evidence
1. Engage Faculty

- Language is important, faculty may react negatively to terms like accountability, measurement, evaluation, benchmarking.
- Assessment should be linked to “regular work of faculty as facilitators and judges of student learning” (Hutchings, 2010).
- Focus on goals for student learning.
- Link to incentives and rewards.
Assessment and Incentives

- Incentives (personal evaluation, unit budgeting, awards, etc.) should never be directly linked to assessment results

Rather...

- They can and should be linked to engagement in and quality of the process of assessment
Engaging faculty (cont.)

- Focus on scholarship of teaching and learning
- Faculty development or support opportunities
- Create space for faculty to faculty conversations and sharing
- Use expertise of teaching and learning or faculty development centers to keep the focus on student learning, rather than reporting and compliance
- Make tools, course portfolios, student portfolios, assessment systems, available
- Provide support or assistance and resources
2. Engage Students

- Engage students in their own learning—learning communities, senior capstones
- Make them aware of learning outcomes—publish widely and encourage discussion
- Involve them in work of assessment—electronic portfolios are a good mechanism for this
- Make assessment results useful to them—portfolios again are a good mechanism
Engaging students engages faculty

Hutchings (2010):

“Bringing students more actively in the process of assessment may well be the most powerful route to greater faculty engagement.”
Choice of Assessment Method Matters

- Students value and learn what we teach and test
- How we teach and test matters as much as what
- What and how we assess also matters.
- We get more of what we test or assess, less of what we don’t
- If higher-order intellectual development is our goal, we need construct validity
Methods for Complex Outcomes

- Are direct and open-ended
- Focus on essentials, principles
- Pose authentic, engaging tasks
- Require meaning-making, judgment
- Require active expression
- Are scored for understanding, not just regurgitation
Methods for Complex Outcomes

- Portfolios
- Capstones
- Performances
- Common assignments, templates
- Secondary readings
- Course management programs
- Local tests, comps in the major
- The CLA??
3. Community Standards for Judgment

- **Absolute standards:** the knowledge/skill level of champions, award winners, top experts
- **Contextual standards:** appropriate expectations for, e.g., a 10-year old, a college student, an experienced professional
- **Developmental standards:** amount of growth, progress over time, e.g., 2 years of college, 5 years
- **(Institutional, regional, national standards?)**
Getting to “Good Enough”

- Program/department judgments
- Benchmarking
- Collaboration, standard-setting with peer institutions
- Input from advisory boards, professional associations
- Use of external examiners
4. Connecting Teaching and Learning

♦ How are teaching practices shaped?

♦ Pedagogical development strategies
  ▶ High Impact Practices
  ▶ Cognitive/Learning Sciences
  ▶ Teaching/Learning Technologies
    • Instructional Systems Design
    • Web 2.0
What are “high impact practices”? 

Effective educational practices that result in student success.

- They are...
  1. First-Year Seminars and Experiences
  2. Common Intellectual Experiences
  3. Learning Communities
  4. Writing-Intensive Courses
  5. Collaborative Assignments and Projects
  6. Undergraduate Research
  7. Diversity/Global Learning
  8. Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
  9. Internships
  10. Capstone Courses and Projects
Kuh: Why HIPs are effective

- Students must invest time and effort and make a commitment to learning.
- Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters are unavoidable.
- Working with others creates opportunities to understand and appreciate diversity.
- Students receive frequent feedback.
- Students have multiple opportunities for reflection and integrative learning.
- Real-world applications help students discover the relevance of learning.
Cognitive & Learning Sciences

Halpern & Hakel – Applying the Science of Learning

1. Practice at retrieval
2. Varying the conditions for learning
3. Re-presenting information
4. Starting from prior knowledge/experience
5. Understanding own/students’ epistemologies
6. Experience alone is a poor teacher
7. Lectures promote recognition but not understanding
8. The act of remembering influences what will be remembered
9. Less is more
10. Learning actions are most significant influence
Once Assessment is in Place

- We need to not only use our findings to make improvements
- We need to reveal our findings
- And use them to set inter-institutional standards for college-level learning
From “My Work” to “Our Work”

- Professional scholars are accountable to disciplinary communities of practice for standards, ethics, and the quality of their research and scholarship.
- Professional college teachers are accountable to <whom?> for the standards, ethics, and quality of their teaching and for student learning.
Part 3

CONVINCING OTHERS
Methods for Effective Communication

● A few examples
  ● History Learning Project: A SoTL example
  ● JMU Pervasive Institutional Assessment
  ● Washington State Assessment Portfolio
  ● Lumina “Tuning”

● A couple of templates
  ● NILOA Transparency Framework
  ● The Degree Qualifications Profile
IU History Learning – a SoTL Project

- http://www.iub.edu/~hlp/
- Decoding the discipline
- Defining bottlenecks
- Identifying and modeling operations
- Practice and feedback
- Motivation
- Assessment
JMU Assessment

- [http://www.jmu.edu/assessment/JMUAssess/Overview.htm](http://www.jmu.edu/assessment/JMUAssess/Overview.htm)
- Assessment days
- General education
- Assessment in the majors
- Alumni assessment
- Student affairs assessment
- Assessment awards
- Doctoral program in measurement and assessment
The Washington State University Assessment Portfolio

- [https://universityportfolio.wsu.edu/2009-2010](https://universityportfolio.wsu.edu/2009-2010)

- **The Process**
  - Team and system
  - Goals, Outcomes, and Performance Measures
  - Evidence and Action
  - Leadership and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

- Undergraduate Assessment Reports
Lumina Tuning Project

- http://www.luminafoundation.org/our_work/tuning/
- Derives from EU Bologna Process
- Clear learning expectations for students in each subject area by degree level
- Faculty developing consensus on learning outcomes in a language that students and employers can understand
NILOA Transparency Framework
Turning Inside Out Outside In

http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/TransparencyFramework.htm
Assessment Plans

- Descriptive of institutional assessment processes, procedures and activities
- Inclusive of assessment measures including what they are, how they are applied, and frequency of gathering evidence
- Clearly expressed and understandable by multiple audiences
- Prominently posted at or linked to multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current activities
- Downloaded or accessed in a timely fashion by multiple web browsers and Internet download speeds
- Receptive to feedback or comments on the quality and utility of the information provided
Assessment Resources

- Presented in language that is understandable to the novice
- Prominently posted or linked to in multiple places across the website
- Downloadable or accessible in a timely fashion by multiple web browsers and Internet download speeds
- Updated regularly to reflect current activities and new resources
- Receptive to feedback or comments on additional resources, training, or potential professional development needs
Current Assessment Activities

- Clearly stated in language that is understandable for various audiences
- Described and illustrated to clarify how a particular assessment activity is used and how it relates to the institutional mission and vision
- Prominently posted or linked to in multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current activities
- Receptive to feedback on the presentation of the current assessment activities by having contact information or a form to send feedback
Evidence of Student Learning

- Explained, analyzed, and interpreted in lay person’s language
- Contextualized to clarify what the results mean to the institution and to student learning
- Presented using both text and graphics when appropriate
- Disseminated and summarized for different groups, cohorts of students, and compared with peer institutions or programs if appropriate
- Prominently posted or linked to in multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current results
- Receptive to feedback on the meaning and interpretation of the evidence
Use of Student Learning Evidence

- Targeted to a particular audience such as faculty, staff, administrators, students, families or governing board members
- Inclusive of examples of documented use of assessment results and information
- Focused on improvement of student performance and institutional processes through the use of evidence
- Inclusive of next steps
- Clearly stated in language that is understandable for specific and multiple audiences
- Prominently posted or linked to in multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current activities
- Receptive to feedback on selected courses of action by having a person’s contact information or a form to send feedback
Student Learning Outcomes Statements

- Specific to institutional level and/or program level
- Clearly expressed and understandable by multiple audiences
- Prominently posted at or linked to multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current outcomes
- Receptive to feedback or comments on the quality and utility of the information provided
The Learning Outcome Dilemma

- Can we agree on common concepts across the diverse higher education institutional landscape?
- If not,
  - Can we “map” our variety of learning outcomes to a more or less common framework?
  - Is there a framework by which we can maintain diversity yet demonstrate quality effectively?
AAC&U LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
  *Focused* by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including
- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving
  *Practiced extensively*, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

Personal and Social Responsibility, Including
- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
  *Anchored* through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Integrative and Applied Learning, Including
- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies
  *Demonstrated* through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems
Intellectual Skills: **analytical inquiry**; use of information resources; engaging diverse perspectives; quantitative fluency; communication fluency

**Analytical inquiry** – At the bachelor’s level, the student differentiates and evaluates theories and approaches to complex standard and non-standard problems within his or her major field and at least one other academic field.
Final Word

- Assessment should not be the raison d'être
- Identifying and adopting better teaching and learning strategies, processes and supports should be job 1


Bibliography (2)


