Assessing Student Learning Outcomes: A Brief “360” Review

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WICHE Commission Meeting
Boulder, CO
November 8, 2010
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

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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
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)
States: Motives and Methods

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

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