

Literature on Culture of Assessment for Academic Assessment Committee

October 2015

NOTE: These are often quotes and should not be used as is in any document.

Weiner, WF. Establishing a Culture of Assessment: Fifteen elements of assessment success – how many does your campus have? AAUP Academe Online. July - August 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2009/JA/Feat/wein.htm>

There are fifteen major elements contributing to the attitudes and behaviors of a true culture of assessment. These elements include:

General Education Goals

- Core competencies that all students, regardless of major, are expected to demonstrate
- Most colleges and universities stress oral and written communication, critical thinking, quantitative and scientific reasoning, and information literacy
- These goals must be assessed on a regular basis so the number of goals should be manageable
- Skills involved in achieving goals should be taught and reinforced throughout all four years of the program
- Skills should be developed over time and integrated throughout the curriculum
- Faculty must verify that each degree program has multiple opportunities for students to learn and practice all general education goals

Common Use of Assessment Terms

- Glossary of assessment terms and working definitions is imperative
- Everyone involved in assessment should come to table to develop a list of assessment terms and working definitions
- collegewide adoption

Faculty Ownership

- If the faculty does not own it, it is not going to happen
- Faculty members must take part in planning and developing an assessment program
- Successful programs will have a faculty-led team composed mostly of faculty from across disciplines who plan the program, develop tools for and implement it, and use the data obtained

Ongoing Professional Development

- College must offer an ongoing professional development program to build understanding of assessment concepts and increases faculty competence through assessment workshops

- Sending teams to assessment conferences

Administrative Support and Understanding

- College presidents must review student satisfaction surveys, assess institutional effectiveness, and use assessment findings in the budgeting and planning process
- Presidents can also demonstrate support of assessment by attending workshops and committing sufficient resources and incentives to the effort

Practical, Sustainable Assessment Plan

- Each faculty member needs to select a learning objective to assess each year
- Assessment plans should be cost effective and realistic
- Individual effort of faculty members
- Course-embedded assessment is a practical approach

Systematic Assessment

- Assessment of student learning outcomes must be consistent and orderly over time

Student Learning Outcomes

- Faculty must agree on basic learning outcomes for each course and the outcomes should be stated in the course catalog

Comprehensive Program Review

- Each institution needs to customize its review process, which is about improvement, growth, and accountability, not merely meeting the requirement of a regional accrediting body

Assessment of Co-curricular Activities

- If campus support co-curricular activities that may provide learning opportunities, these activities should be included in assessment plan

Institutional Effectiveness

- Considering all areas, in addition to learning outcomes, and how well the college is meeting its mission and goals
- Assessing campus climate- students' perceptions and attitudes about their campuses and college communities
- Areas to assess
 - Opportunities for student-faculty interaction
 - Academic support services
 - Personal support
 - Academic challenge

- Enrichment
- Library services
- President's office
- Administrative services
- Board of trustees
- Workforce development
- The foundation
- Public relations
- All components of student services

Information Sharing

- Sharing results of assessment, good or bad, is essential part of a successful assessment program
- Opportunities to engage in peer review, steer away from failed experiences, and replicate successes where appropriate
- Permits faculty to identify activities from other disciplines that they can combine with their own
- Highlights areas of the curriculum that can benefit from cross-disciplinary efforts

Planning and Budgeting

- Assessment results can demonstrate areas of need within a department and faculty can evaluate how much money might be necessary to rectify a problem
- For an administration committed to a culture of assessment, the planning and budgeting process can help it accomplish this goal. When an administration explains the budgeting process to the entire college community and invites interested parties to participate, it signals that it is going to close the loop in planning, assessment, and budgeting

Celebration of Success

- Celebrating successes demonstrates the importance of assessment

New Initiatives

- An indicator of an assessment culture is what occurs when any new initiative or proposal is advanced
- Discussion of goals and objectives and how the effort will be assessed confirms an institution has culture of assessment

Farkas MG. Building and sustaining a culture of assessment: Best practices for change leadership. Library Faculty Publications and Presentations. Paper 78. 2013. Retrieved from http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1077&context=ulib_fac

- Few institutions of high education have culture of assessment
- Many faculty view assessment as something required that they have to do rather than as a tool to discover more about student learning

- For individual instructors, assessment can provide information to help improve teaching and student success
- Assessment results can be used to advocate for better integration of information literacy instruction into a particular course or curriculum
- Culture can be changed through leadership by example
- Organizational culture is to blame for the lack of assessment cultures in many libraries
- John Kotter (1995) defined an eight-step process for organizational change:
 - Establish sense of urgency
 - Important first step in which employees determine whether it's worth the effort to change
 - When employees evidence a sense of urgency, they come to work each day excited about contributing to the change effort
 - Urgency is not driven by fear or anxiety, but by opportunities and a sense of possibility
 - A change message of urgency should not be fear-producing as this would produce chaotic and disorganized work
 - Form guiding coalition
 - Hill (2005) conceives of leader as "fixer" working outside of hierarchies to decrease barriers to and encourage assessment
 - Preventing burnout by having 2+ leaders involved at any time (Anagnos et al 2008) or have role rotated periodically (Hill 2005)
 - Kotter (1996) suggests guiding coalition is more effective than individual pushing change forward alone
 - Create vision
 - Develop vision that reflects strong understanding of organizational culture and what its members value (Kotter 1996)
 - Key to successful change is to understand meaning and incorporating it into the change vision
 - Vision must be clear enough to be described in one minute (Kotter 2002)
 - Communicate vision
 - Resistance a symptom of problems w/ change vision or its communication
 - How change leaders respond to resistance determines the fate of the initiative
 - Resistance can be a useful learning tool for leaders
 - First decode resistance—understand real reason individual is fighting proposed change
 - People may resist an idea that is not completely clear to them because of the anxiety created by ambiguity – this can be fixed by better articulating vision
 - Time is major concern for faculty and an administration that doesn't help faculty find the time to do assessment will likely see poor participation and/or poor assessment quality

- Feedback and criticism of vision should be accepted w/ grace by task force members; attachment to finer points is unproductive at this stage
 - Change will only be successful with the active support of administration
 - Important to support assessments by leading by example
 - Develop learning outcomes
- Empower others to act on the vision
 - Faculty and staff should be judged by their participation in assessment
 - Ensure faculty and staff are judged by their participation in assessment, not their assessment results
 - Most important resource for assessment is time
 - With limited time, faculty will look to using assessment tools that require the least investment of their time rather than those that will provide the most meaningful data
 - Faculty and staff need training in best practices, methods and modes, to develop tools, analyze results and use those results
 - Act of becoming “a community of learners” helps build assessment culture
 - Learning about assessment as a group can help faculty and staff develop a common vocabulary and common frame of reference, which help build consensus in developing assessment program
 - Incentives are needed to encourage faculty and staff to be actively involved in assessment
 - Many technologies exist to help faculty and staff collect and analyze assessment data
 - Purchasing assessment technologies and training faculty and staff in their use will help ensure that data actually gets used
 - Experimentation, part of Kotter’s change model, allows trying out assessment tools in a safe and low-accountability environment
- Plan for and create short-term wins
- Consolidate improvements to create more change
 - Assessment should start to be seen as a continuous process rather than something done before an accreditation cycle
 - Task force members can continue to remind people how what they’re doing fits into the larger vision
 - Survey of institutions that have built a culture of assessment—72% said use of data was important to create assessment culture
 - Sharing methodology and results can both help others design effective assessments and can offer valuable feedback to guide improvement
- Institutionalize new approaches
 - Make new approaches part of institutional structure
 - Embedding assessment in library’s culture
 - For administration—using assessment data in decision-making and requiring any new service proposal to come with possible assessment metrics

- Commitment to culture of assessment requires a commitment to inculcating new faculty and staff
- Kotter's model requires a deep awareness of the library's culture in order to develop a vision, communication plan, and steps towards change, but it does not require a specific type of culture in which change can happen
- In a culture of assessment, assessment becomes the norm and a valued part of planning and teaching
- Building a culture of assessment requires cooperation of the entire organization. Faculty and staff must feel empowered to develop their own assessment program and measures
- Choi (2011) argues that the majority of change-related failures are caused by implementation failures

Duff PB. Promoting Change: Moving Toward a Culture of Assessment. Peer Review. 2010; 12(1).

Assessment Efforts in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences: Zero to Sixty in Fifteen Months

- To promote a culture of assessment in the Columbian College, an ad hoc college task force was created
- The task force produced a report offering a clear and simple template to be used by departments to articulate their learning outcomes and assessment strategies
- The dean of the college recognized that the recommendations of the task force could not be effectively implemented without significant faculty development

External Opportunities for Faculty Development

- Among the most helpful of these was the AAC&U Engaging Departments Institute in July 2009 at the University of Pennsylvania
- They were no longer dominated by resistance, but instead turned toward the practical. Chairs began to ask "how" rather than "why." They also began to ask for help in creating their assessment plans
- It could not have happened without the thoughtful deliberation of key faculty members and chairs—including those who attended the Engaging Departments Institute—who realized not only the necessity of implementing assessment but also its potential value to the academic enterprise

The engaging Departments Institute

- Discuss specific ways to advance assessment throughout the college
- Each team member was charged with the task of outlining a programmatic assessment plan for his or her unit. In addition, the team as a whole was asked to consider ways to assess the general education curriculum of the college
- Following the discussion of general education, its possibilities, and the assessment of it, the team shifted its focus to the individual disciplines represented

- This atmosphere enabled each team member to lay out candidly both the challenges facing him or her and aspirations for change
- The issue of subjectivity
- The multiplicity of audiences
- The issue of breadth within some academic fields
- The “factionalization” of the faculty or the isolation of faculty members from one another
- However, documented success is a powerful tool of persuasion
- While faculty may diverge in research interests or teaching expertise, they all share a common cohort of students

Hersh RH, Keeling RP. Changing Institutional Culture to Promote Assessment of Higher Learning. National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/occasionalpaperseventeen.pdf>

- We question the efficacy of current attempts to create “cultures of assessment” in institutions lacking a primary focus on higher learning
- Too often colleges and universities grudgingly and superficially answer external calls for accountability by conducting alumni satisfaction surveys while missing the fundamental issue: too little learning
- Only by taking learning seriously can we understand the necessity of good assessment
- First step is for faculty, administration, staff, and trustees to acknowledge the existence of a higher learning deficit and to commit to cultural change for learning and assessment
- 2010 book, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, Arum and Roksa provide evidence that most students don’t make statistically significant gains in critical thinking, problem solving, analytical reasoning, and written communication skills while in college
- At the heart of the matter is institutional culture – institution’s norms, beliefs, expectations, standards, priorities, reward systems, and structural organization
- Absence in higher education of a serious culture of teaching and learning comes at a time when increased access and higher graduation rates are rightfully national and state priorities
- A cumulative approach to higher learning requires that as students progress through their college careers they are taught to an increasingly higher standard of competence in all courses and programs—as suggested, for example, by the Degree Qualifications Profile (Lumina Foundation, 2011)
- To put student learning at the top of each institution’s priorities logically demands that institutions know the extent to which learning is occurring by establishing and sustaining a conscientious, diligent, and rigorous program of learning assessment. In such a culture, faculty and students understand that assessment usefully connects and reinforces teaching and learning.
- Transparency, however, is insufficient; formal and informal assessment must be far more frequent and formative than is currently the norm
- We insist on high, clear, and well-documented standards for judging

- Measurement is an inextricable part of instruction and advancement, not only through objective tests but also through simulations, comprehensive written and oral examinations, and proofs of performance during as well as at the end of instruction
- Assessment is summative as well and comprises the integrated, cumulative results of learning keyed to high levels of performance
- Understanding the difference between first-draft quality and high-level mastery is learned through much experience and feedback.
- Done well, assessment supports a liberating education helping students learn skills in self-assessment by enabling them to critique the quality of their own performance as measured against those standards

What must be done:

- Rigorous assessment in the service of teaching and learning is central to an institution's commitment to learning at its highest priority
- A systemic, institution-wide effort to make higher learning and its assessment a high priority
- In such a culture, students rise to the occasion and accommodate higher expectations and standards, and they appreciate appropriate and timely assessment when they know this is the institution's cultural norm

After a culture change has begun, we might fairly expect to see:

- Learning impact statements: as part of every proposal for new or directed resources, administrators, faculty, or staff have specified the anticipated effects of the proposed additions or changes on the quantity and quality of student learning – and have provided evidence to support their proposal
- Institutional consensus on student learning goals: All faculty and professional staff have thought, met, talked, and reached strong consensus about the desired learning goals for the whole college or university, and have communicated those goals to all students and to every educator who teaches, at any level, inside or outside the classroom
 - This means the major divisions and departments of an institutions have defined their own learning outcomes and standards, nested within and linked to the overall institutional outcomes and standards, and have communicated to students, through syllabi, descriptions of assignments, etc., what they are expected to learn and the standards against which their achievement of those outcomes will be measured and reported.
- Revised and linked general education
- Elevated expectations and support for students
- Rigorous and comprehends assessment of student learning
 - in both formative and summative ways
 - completed regularly
- Student learning as one basis for faculty and staff evaluation

- Members of the faculty and staff have definitively “closed the loop” in the assessment process, using the data obtained by measuring student learning to plan, complete, and deploy improvements in educational programs and to reassess learning after improvements are made
- Learning-oriented promotion and tenure criteria
 - Learning- in place of institutional satisfaction surveys
- Faculty members in all categories (tenured, tenure track, non-tenure track, and contingent) are assigned teaching responsibilities based on the learning needs of students
- The institution provides strong support for faculty development in pedagogy, learning, and the assessment of learning
- Tighter coupling of academic and student affairs
- Benchmarking learning within and across peer institutions

Conclusion

- Assessment must reflect the institution’s collective commitment to the cumulative nature of higher learning and the understanding that assessment – done well – promotes learning
- What the academy has been missing is the will to act boldly in making higher learning and its assessment the priority

Fuller MB. The Survey of Assessment Culture Conceptual Framework. DRAFT 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.shsu.edu/research/survey-of-assessment-culture/documents/TheSurveyofAssessmentCultureConceptualFramework.pdf>

- The advent of assessment in higher education warrants a deeper consideration of its philosophy and logic
- Methodological guidance has overshadowed the deeper, philosophical reasons assessment is done

What is culture of assessment?

- The deeply embedded values and beliefs collectively held by members of an institution influencing assessment practices on their campus (Banta & Associates 2002; Banta et al 1996)
- System of thought and action reinforcing what “good” conduct of assessment looks like on a campus
- Maki’s (2010) Principles of an Inclusive Commitment, describes structure of institutional partnerships, which, when operating efficiently, indicate a commitment to assessment of student learning (p.9):
 - “an inclusive commitment to assessment of student learning is established when it is (!) meaningfully anchored in the educational values of an institutions – articulated in a principles-of-commitment statement; (2) intentionally designed to foster interrelated positions of inquiry about the efficacy of education practices among educators, students, and the institution itself as a learning organization; and (3) woven into roles

and responsibilities across an institution from the chief executive officer through senior administrators, faculty leaders, faculty, staff, and students.

- Culture of assessment is defined (in this research endeavor) as the “overarching ethos that is both an artifact of the way in which assessment is done and simultaneously a factor influencing and augmenting assessment practice”
- Assessment methods and activities an institution chooses to employ or engage in are a reflection of institutional values, pressures on the institution, and assumptions about learning and are perhaps the best source of evidence about an institution’s culture of assessment
- By exploring how an institution’s assessment activities reflect its values and commitments, researchers and practitioners can begin to explain what institutions truly value in assessment
- A strong culture of assessment is touted to lead to improved participation in assessment processes, improved results, and improved student learning (Ewell 2002; Banta 2002; Maki 2010; Suskie 2009)
- However, a strong culture of assessment might also be committed to the rote compliance with external mandates or warding off fears of external “intrusion”
- Often assessment is criticized for an exclusive focus on meeting bureaucratic ends; serving accountability, finance, and accreditation (Driscoll, de Noriega, & Ramaley 2006; Banta & Moffett 1987)
- Assessment that serves only the aims of improving student learning often neglects important institutional processes such as program review, accreditation, or planning
- A health balance of assessment cultures is needed and a tool capable of exploring and measuring this balance is needed

The problem

- Without a more comprehensive exploration, the concept of “a culture of assessment” will continue to operate as what Gunzenhauser (2003) terms a “default philosophy”: a philosophy entrenched in a phenomenon simply because no other philosophy is defined
 - Under such situations, “that’s the way we’ve always done assessment” remains firmly entrenched with little criticism of the anchors, forms, and purposes of assessment and its role in a campus community
- How does a culture of assessment act as a binding ethic that draws everyone together in support of assessment and high-quality student learning?
 - Mentkowski et al (1991) contends one of the reasons assessment has failed to have the impact many practitioners had hoped it would is that institutional cultures do not “allow other ways of knowing to surface in the assessment process. There is a hegemony of traditional psychometric theory and ways of knowing” (p. 17)
 - Scholars have also noted the difficulty in “proving” assessment makes a difference in improving student learning as the relationship of assessment to student learning is situated at a critical nexus of the complex relationship between the institution and students

Why is the Survey of Assessment Culture a valid solution to this problem?

- It gathers information about the status of institutional contexts and assessment culture on America's college and university campuses
- The culture of assessment should be a collective institutional commitment (Maki, 2000)

Limitations in this kind of inquiry

- Maki's (2010) Principles of an Inclusive Commitment represents the most useful paradigm for developing a study of assessment culture, perhaps the best "jumping off point" for this topic
- There is no universally-ideal culture of assessment against which an institution can judge its merits and there is no desire to move the scholarly discourse down a path of theorizing a "one right" model for the conduct of assessment.
- There is no mold to press upon colleges and universities in their quest for a culture of assessment
- However, many practitioners will benefit from a deeper understanding of what such a culture looks like and how it might be developed

Survey Constructs

- The Survey of Assessment Culture was developed using Maki's (2010) Principles of an Inclusive Commitment The survey explores:
 - Shared institutional commitment
 - Clear conceptual framework for assessment
 - A cross institutional responsibility
 - Transparency of findings
 - Connection to change-making processes
 - Recognition of leadership or involvement in assessment

Survey administration

- The Survey of Assessment Culture is administered annually to a representative, stratified sample of assessment practitioners, many of whom serve as the Chief Assessment Officer for their institution

The Survey of Assessment Culture is meant to spark dialogue into the state of assessment culture in America and to provide an empirical foundation on the factors influencing this culture

Lakos A, Phipps S. Creating a culture of assessment: A catalyst for organizational change. Portal-Libraries and the Academy. 2004; 4(3): 345-361. Retrieved from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0843106w>

- "The importance of communicating and reinforcing the measurement of success and constant benchmarking constitute the strategic focus of leadership" (p. 347)

- While this is explicitly about libraries, it applies. “One challenge associated with creating a culture of assessment in libraries relates to professional values. A profession that inherently believes that it is a “public good” does not feel the need to demonstrate outcomes and articulate impact. There is a deeply held and tacit assumption that the “good” is widely recognized and that the value of library service is universally appreciated. In the current environment of competition and of questioning every assumption, this deeply held value results in resistance to change and resistance to continuous assessment” (p. 350)
- “Leaders must have a clear performance ethic and be visibly and continuously committed to assessment work and understand its importance to the success of the organization. If leadership is perceived to lack commitment, meaningful culture change will be difficult, if not impossible. Role modeling, teaching, and coaching must be practiced. Management decisions must show evidence of utilizing assessment and evaluation data. Open sharing of information is key if all units are to share accountability for making data-based decisions. Leaders have to understand the importance of assessment to the success of the organization. Since assessment may produce information that major change is needed, leaders need to encourage risk-taking” (p. 352)
- “The design of such a system should reflect the need for critical information to be readily available, easily accessible, and retrievable by all involved in making decisions. Meaningful data should be routinely input, harvested, and updated. Resources should be allocated to support the design, development, and maintenance of the system, as well as coordination of data collection and interpretation” (p. 354)

Ndoye A & Parker MA. Creating and sustaining a culture of assessment: the guiding principles of institutions that have established a culture of assessment can be described as internally driven.

Planning for Higher Education. 2010; 38(2): 28-39. Retrieved from

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA221021301&v=2.1&u=gain40375&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=fcc6cd22f52be7809b32b7cfffac94d0>

Ndoye wrote that guiding principles of building and sustaining a culture of assessment can be described as internally driven. “Leadership, faculty involvement, resources, student participation, and access to and systematic use of data were found to be important factors in establishing and sustaining a culture of assessment” (p. 36).

- The strategies effective in developing and sustaining a culture of assessment (integrating assessment in daily practice, leadership, use of assessment data, and communication) suggest that higher education leaders must be consensus builders. Building a culture of assessment requires all stakeholders to have a voice in the process” (p. 37)
- Results of this study indicate that policies should incorporate an innovation diffusion component that encourages small pilots. Starting assessment on a smaller scale and expanding it later was shown to be an effective strategy in building a culture of assessment” (p. 38)

Longenecker PA. Institutional assessment in colleges with multiple programmatic accreditations: A multiple case research study. CAPELLA UNIVERSITY, 2012, 160 pages; 3505961

After a college makes a commitment to multiple accreditation organizations and begins to incorporate various assessment strategies into the institutional assessment process, this appears to contribute to a culture of assessment. The term assessment culture has been used to describe the connection between assessment processes and an educational community committed to improvement in student learning (Magruder, McManis, & Young, 1997). (I don't have this document; thanks to Rajeeb for this comment).