Student Learning Outcomes Assessment in the United States: Trends and Good Practices

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NIAD-UE UNIVERSITY EVALUATION FORUM 2012
JULY 23, 2012
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.

SURVEYS ● WEB SCANS ● CASE STUDIES ● FOCUS GROUPS ● OCCASIONAL PAPERS ● WEBSITE ● RESOURCES ● NEWSLETTER ● LISTSERV ● PRESENTATIONS ● TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK ● FEATURED WEBSITES ● ACCREDITATION RESOURCES ● ASSESSMENT EVENT CALENDAR ● ASSESSMENT NEWS ● MEASURING QUALITY INVENTORY ● POLICY ANALYSIS ● ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
Welcome to NILOA

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

January 2012 NILOA's 13th Occasional Paper, "From Denial to Acceptance: The Stages of Assessment" by Margaret A. Miller is now available.

In the News | Archive | RSS

Assessing Online Learning: Strategies, Challenges and Opportunities
Fri, Mar 16, 2012 - 08:00 am
Faculty Focus
A special report in Faculty Focus on assessing online learning.

Doubling Down on Degrees
Fri, Mar 16, 2012 - 08:00 am
Mitch Smith in Inside Higher Ed
As part of Indiana's performance based funding plan through the Indiana Higher Education Commission, Indiana's public colleges and universities are tasked with finding and using assessments to appropriately track their students learning.

Learning Centers Had Little Impact
Fri, Mar 16, 2012 - 08:00 am
Jack Grove for Times Higher Education
This brief article discusses the successes and failures of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) initiative which ran from 2005 to 2010 and was financed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

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Contact us with questions or comments about the site.

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
Advanced Organizers

• What is student learning outcomes assessment?

• What is accreditation in the United States?

• What is the national picture of student learning outcomes assessment for American colleges and universities?

• What are some best practices in regards to student learning outcomes assessment?
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)
How do we know students are learning?

- The key questions...
  - What are we trying to do and why? Or
  - What is my program supposed to accomplish?
  - How well are we doing it?
  - How do we know?
  - How do we use the information to improve or celebrate successes?
  - Do the improvements we make work?

Bresciani (2003)
How well do we achieve our educational objectives?

Gather Evidence

Mission/Purposes Educational Objectives

Interpret Evidence

Enhance teaching/learning; inform institutional decision-making, planning, budgeting

Assessment Loop

Source: AAHE/NCA Higher Education Learning Commission
Assessment Tools

- **Direct (outcomes) measures**
  -- Evidence of what students have learned or can do

- **Indirect (process) measures**
  -- Evidence of effective educational activity by students and institutions
Direct Assessment Methods

- **Tests**
  - Performance on national licensure examinations
  - Standardized tests
  - Locally developed tests
  - Pre-and post-tests
  - Essay tests blind scored across units

- **Student work/projects**
  - Collections of student work (e.g. Portfolios)
  - Capstone projects
  - Observations of student behavior
  - Internal juried review of student projects
  - Project-embedded assessment
  - Course-embedded assessment

- **External review of students**
  - External evaluations of student performance
  - External juried review of student projects
  - Externally reviewed internship
Indirect Assessment Methods

- **Alumni, Employer, Student Surveys/Studies**
  - National or local surveys
  - Focus groups (depending on the interview protocol, this could be used as direct evidence)
  - Exit Interviews with Graduates
  - Graduate Follow-up Studies

- **Student Success Indicators**
  - Percentage of students who go on to graduate school
  - Retention and Transfer Studies
  - Job Placement Statistics
  - Faculty/Student ratios
  - Percentage of students who study abroad
  - Enrollment trends
  - Percentage of students who graduate within five-six years
  - Diversity of student body
Setting the Context

- Growing Interest in Student Learning
- Policies and Reports
- Accreditation
Accreditation in the United States

- **Role of US Government**
  - No ministry of education to oversee quality
  - Accreditation necessary to receive federal money

- **Characteristics of accreditation**
  - Set of standards/criteria
  - Quality assurance (accountability)/Institutional Improvement
  - Peer review/self-regulation

- **Process for Accreditation**
  - Self study
  - Campus visit
  - Report
Occasional Paper #6

Regional Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: Mapping the Territory

Staci Provezis

This paper examines the policies and procedures at each of the seven regional accreditation organizations, as they relate to student learning outcomes assessment.
What is the national picture of student learning outcomes assessment for colleges and universities?

- Survey Report
- Focus Groups
- Accreditation Study
- Web Scan Study
- Occasional Papers
- Case Studies
Survey Report

Survey asked chief academic officers at all accredited 2 & 4 year colleges and universities about their assessment practices.

Survey report “More Than You Think, Less Than We Need” released October, 2009

http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/NILOAsurveyresults09.htm
Survey Guiding Questions

1. What learning outcomes are you measuring at your institution?
2. How are you assessing these outcomes and using the results?
3. What are the major factors prompting assessment at your institution?
4. What do you need to further learning outcomes assessment at your institution?
1. *Perhaps* more assessment underway than some acknowledge or wish to believe
Institution-Level Assessments of Learning Outcomes for All Institutions
Program-Level Assessments of Learning Outcomes for All Institutions

- Portfolios: 85%
- Rubrics: 80%
- External Judges: 75%
- Student Interviews: 70%
- Employer Surveys: 65%
- Local Surveys: 60%
- Employer Interviews: 55%
- Alumni Surveys: 50%
- Alumni Interviews: 45%
- National Surveys: 40%
Report Summary

1. *Perhaps* more assessment underway than some acknowledge or wish to believe

2. More attention needed to using and reporting assessment results
Assessment driven more by accreditation and commitment to improve than external pressures from government or employers

Assessment Drivers for All Schools

- Accreditation
- Program Accreditation
- Inst. Commitment to Improvement
- Faculty/Staff Interest
- National Calls
- Governing Board Mandate
- Inst. Associations
- Coordinating Mandate Board
Accreditation tops the list for uses of assessment data.
Objective of Institutional Web Scans
To understand what student learning outcomes assessment information institutions post on their websites and where they post it.
Comparison of Survey with Web Studies

- National Student Survey
- Local Student Survey
- Alumni Survey
- Other Survey
- Standardized Tests

Legend:
- 2010 Web Scan
- 2009 National Survey
- 2009 Web Scan
Major Findings from Website Analysis

• More assessment takes place than is shown.
• Assessment information is typically found on pages geared to internal audiences.
• Accreditation, institutional control, and participation in national initiatives appear to influence website communication on assessment.
• Institutions show results more often than you would think they do, but you have to search for it.
Transparency Framework

http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org
What is Required to Improve Learning Outcomes
Assessment for All Schools

- Faculty Engagement
- More Expertise
- More Finances
- Better Tests
- More Tool Info
- More Policy Info
- Presidential Support
Report Summary

1. Perhaps more assessment underway than some acknowledge or wish to believe

2. More attention needed to using and reporting assessment results

3. Involving faculty is a major challenge

4. More investment likely needed to move from data to improvement
2010 Program-Level Survey Characteristics

✓ Two-staged administration

✓ Usable responses from 982 programs (30% of programs surveyed)

http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/NILOAsurveyresults11.htm
Specialized Accreditation Matters

- *Accredited programs* were significantly more likely to report that specialized accreditation is of high or moderate importance
- “Halo Effect” of programmatic accreditation
Program Learning Outcomes

- More than 8 of 10 programs have established an agreed-upon set of intended student learning outcomes

- Overwhelming majority of programs have established learning outcomes goals
Assessment Methods Used

- Capstone
- Rubrics
- Final Project
- Local Tests
- Alumni Surveys
- External Exam
- Portfolios
- Comprehensive Exam
- Special Tests
- National Surveys
- General Tests
- Employer Surveys
- Interviews/Focus Groups

Most Students

All Students
Use Of Results

Program Review
Improve Instruction
Institutional Accreditation
Improve Curriculum
Inform Planning
Program Accreditation
Evaluate Program
Support Budget
Evaluate Faculty

Quite a Bit  Very Much
Overall Use Index by Discipline
**Few resources dedicated to program level assessment**

- 15% FT person
- 54% PT person
  - 63% tenured faculty, 15% received one course equivalent in release time, and an additional 7% received more than one course equivalent in release time.
- 69% prepare an annual assessment report
- 60% have an assessment committee
- Only 6% have established budget for assessment
What Would Help?
The key to effectively using assessment data to improve student learning is to engage faculty in meaningful ways in this critical activity. This paper discusses the challenges inherent in and opportunities for doing so.
Key Findings

✓ Action at the program level
✓ Perceptions of CAOs and programs differ
✓ Specialized accreditation matters a lot
✓ Disciplinary differences matter even more
Examples of Good Assessment Practice

- Focus assessment efforts
- Harness external accountability for improvement
- Communicate widely
- Reflect on the process and results; make meaning
- Empower an assessment committee
- Communicate openly
- Start small and build
• Allow variability
• Pursue faculty interests
• Faculty development
• Use accreditation
• Improve learning
• Align with faculty interests
• Make assessment meaningful and manageable
• Be intentional from the beginning
• Communicate regularly
• Review assessment activities
• Support from campus leadership
• Embed in campus review systems
• Faculty development
Faculty invested in development of approaches & identification of measures

Multiple measures

More faculty aware of markers of student success & learning (progress rates, troublesome courses)

“Closing the loop”, evidence of change

Sharing results with students, communicating how results are used
What’s Been Accomplished?

✓ Assessment Seen as Legitimate
✓ Goals for Learning Established
✓ A “Semi-Profession” for Assessment
✓ Much Better Instruments and Methods
What Remains to be Done?

✓ Authentic Faculty Ownership
✓ Assessment Still an “Add-On”
✓ Use of Information for Improvement is Underdeveloped
✓ Sincere Institutional Engagement with Accreditors in Assessment
Discussion?  Questions?  Comments?

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