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Introduction

***Assessment Assessment Everywhere— And What Are We to Think?*¹**

Susan A. Nolan, Christopher M. Hakala, and R. Eric Landrum

“**N**ot another book on assessment?” you ask with a bit of a sigh. We’re guessing that if you’re reading this chapter, you don’t entirely share this sentiment, but we feel that we’d be remiss not to acknowledge the shrug or the eye roll that so often accompanies earnest attempts at such conversation. In this opening chapter, we hope to convince you that there’s much more to say about assessment and that the particular authors who have shared their ideas and research in this volume do indeed have something to add to the conversation. So, stay with us. We strongly believe this book will leave you with new ideas to ponder, research to explore, and concrete suggestions to try out in the safety of your classroom. *Do* try this at home! (And in your course.)

Assessment-driven pressures increasingly shape higher education at all levels. Until not that long ago, it was sufficient for faculty members to assess their students via course grades without consideration of what they were actually learning. Relatedly, instructors were seldom encouraged to engage in any deep consideration of the skills students were expected to learn in their courses; after all, it’s far easier to give an exam that measures knowledge of content than one that measures attainment of skills. Sure, there have long been discussions about, say, how best to teach communication or critical thinking,

¹With apologies to Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1798/1863) regarding the famous line from the poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: “Water, water, every where/Nor any drop to drink.”

but how often were we really asked to measure students' acquisition of these skills? Moreover, instructors were generally not beholden to assessment-related expectations from their institutions, and, in turn, institutions were not typically asked questions about assessment by the relevant accrediting or governing bodies. Few were asking questions about what, exactly, our students were learning.

Now, however, individual faculty members face pressures from department chairs and administrators to tie their content and pedagogy to clearly outlined learning goals, to develop measures of assessment that map directly onto stated learning goals, and to engage in a process of continual change based on those measures—to “close the loop,” in assessment-ese. Departments and other institutional units face pressures from accrediting bodies or governmental agencies, depending on the institution's country, to create and document assessment protocols across all levels of the institution that demonstrate what students are learning and, often, the relevance of their education beyond our campuses—for employers and the broader community. And as our world becomes increasingly interconnected, a variety of pressures are affecting how we think about assessment from an international standpoint, posing some tricky questions for which assessment must be part of the answer. For example, how can we facilitate the mobility of students and instructors across regional and national borders? How can we compare courses and degrees? How can a degree-holder document what a credential from one place actually means when relocating to another place for further study or employment?

These varying demands have already led to dialog among faculty members and administrators in higher education, but the conversation is just beginning. The goal of this book is to further the dialog by exploring the three main types of assessment pressures—individual, institutional, and international—from a range of perspectives. Throughout the chapters, authors offer case examples, best practices, and evidence-informed discussions. Much of it consists of concrete suggestions that others could adopt or adapt. We hope these contributions will spur additional dialog that might forge connections among people and institutions across borders, connections that can lead to excellent, assessment-driven higher education.

The issue is to quite simply begin to imagine assessment in a way that transcends modern attitudes about assessment. That is, we intend to produce a volume that shows how to assess your students in class for better learning, how to use those data to inform course-level performance and program-level performance, and, ultimately, how that information could help us work toward an international Tuning standard to focus on learning and not performance. And indeed, assessment isn't easy, and there are many reasons why it is often not done well: Faculty don't receive training in assessment in many doctoral programs, faculty feel pressure to assess in ways that they don't control, and faculty feel that assessment robs them of academic freedom. In this volume, we hope to disavow faculty of most of these assertions by

showing how to do it in your class, how to make use of the data to improve student learning, and, eventually, how to use it to ensure that our students are ready to compete in the global economy.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK: FROM MICRO TO MACRO

To further our goal of spurring conversation about assessment and sparking ideas in faculty members and administrators, this book examines assessment across three levels—but we'll start in the middle. At the in-between level, seven chapters explore assessment at the program or institution level, the level at which most assessment work occurs. We then zoom in to the micro level, where four chapters explore assessment from the perspective of individual faculty members. Finally, at the macro level, four chapters offer a big-picture view of how assessment looks when we implement it at a global level.

Institutional Perspectives

As our institutions begin to address assessment questions in meaningful ways, new policies have emerged as well as a new sense of responsibility. In terms of policies, more and more programs are requiring an external accreditation body to evaluate the effectiveness of a program, and colleges and universities are requiring that programs that don't have an external accreditation organization retain the services of an external consultant to evaluate a department. In addition, regional accreditation bodies are also placing larger demands on colleges for accountability.

The goal of this section is to provide the reader with context regarding the way assessment really does happen at the course level, the program level, and the institution level. In addition, the way that assessment takes shape and the results of those assessments help hone our educational practices so that our students have the highest probability of succeeding in their learning.

To kick off this section, Regan A. R. Gurung discusses in Chapter 1 how the scholarship of teaching and learning serves to inform our assessment practices. With the results of the studies, we are able to make informed decisions that not only impact individual courses but also serve to guide the development of programmatic changes to best serve our students.

Melissa Beers follows in Chapter 2 with a call to develop a teaching support and pedagogical team. In her chapter, Beers describes how alignment of learning objectives across similar sections of courses can provide students with similar outcomes as well as ensure that faculty have a deeper understanding not only of what they are teaching but also of what they should expect from students in their courses.

In Chapter 3, Jane S. Halonen and Dana S. Dunn address the role of program review and how such a review can begin to help a college or university align assessment practices in ways that best serve student learning at the

institutional level. Halonen and Dunn outline how program review can uncover which assessment practices are effective and which are ineffective. They also provide practical advice to guide the reader through the program review process.

In line with this, Rob McEntarffer, a high school educator, talks in Chapter 4 about how the terminology of assessment, including the use of formative assessment, often clouds the issue. McEntarffer argues that a clearer sense of purpose is obtained by using feedback or responsive teaching, which not only lends credence to the mission of assessment but also provides an opportunity for faculty to engage in it without feeling as though their academic freedom is being impinged upon. High school educators often approach assessment differently than do undergraduate educators, in part because of the expectations of different stakeholders. All of us who engage in assessment can benefit from dialog with our counterparts at other levels.

In Chapter 5, Jason S. Todd and Elizabeth Yost Hammer lend advice on how a teaching center can, through faculty development, begin to develop a culture of assessment on campus by tying the notion of assessment more closely to student learning and moving away from assessment as a requirement. The chapter pairs discussions of effective practices that promote a culture of assessment (e.g., workshops and programming, midcourse reviews) with concrete advice for the faculty developers who might implement these practices.

In Chapter 6, Claudia J. Stanny describes how assessment processes can be used to improve curriculum and teaching in ways that involve considering using faculty development as a mechanism for campus change. Specifically, she outlines how institution-level initiatives can support instructors as they not only develop assessments tied to learning outcomes but also use those assessments to make changes at the course and program levels. In particular, Stanny promotes interdisciplinary approaches that place individual courses within the context of overarching curricula.

In the last chapter of this section (Chapter 7), Catherine E. Overson and Victor A. Benassi provide guidelines for using backward design, with the assistance of a teaching and learning center. Backward design places assessment in the forefront of the course and helps instructors use that evidence to better design learning experiences for students. With backward design, instructors begin by developing learning goals for the course as well as assessments for those goals; they then use that structure to develop instructional activities and assignments that align with the goals and assessments. Overson and Benassi make a strong case for backward design using in-depth examples from their own experiences.

Individual Perspectives

Perhaps you have heard the phrase “think globally, act locally.” Meaningful assessment practices start with individual faculty member efforts, and our

edited volume offers four different perspectives and approaches for how faculty members approach assessment in their own work. In Chapter 8, the first chapter in this section, Bridgette Martin Hard shares her own personal, developmental changes as a researcher as she became interested in exploring pedagogical science using what she likes to call a “stealthy approach.” By leveraging the processes of assessment and harnessing what existing grade data can tell us, Hard presents multiple examples of how she has changed her own teaching practices by closing the loop with her own assessment data. She generously ends her chapter with steps for how to get started on your own journey with pedagogical science.

In Chapter 9, Danae L. Hudson presents a departmental journey of evidence-based course (re)design, using the experiences of her own introductory psychology collaboration at Missouri State University. From design to implementation to refinement, using her own case study experiences, she presents the ups and downs of the process in clear detail, generously sharing with all of us.

Raymond J. Shaw addresses in Chapter 10 the push–pull situation of being caught in the middle regarding assessment; that is, the faculty member is the person who performs assessment work often, collecting data from students (which might make the faculty member unpopular at times), and then the faculty member reports these assessment outcomes to stakeholders such as department chairs and deans, who at times may not find the data very valuable. In this context, he makes a cogent argument that finding a personal, meaningful reason for putting time and effort into assessment can lead to a process and outcome that is first self-satisfying and then secondarily satisfies other necessary audiences.

Eva Seifried and Birgit Spinath provide readers in Chapter 11 with a deeply rich framework for self-assessment in educational psychology courses that they label inquiry-based teaching, which has a number of iterative cycles that has teachers as researchers checking the effectiveness of their teaching practices, much like an action researcher would, and using that cycle of continuous improvement to always be striving to improve one’s teaching. Not only do they draw parallels between how students learn and how faculty members improve, but they also present multiple additional strategies for faculty members who are engaging in meaningful self-assessment practices over time.

International Perspectives

Increasingly, universities and other organizations that focus on higher education are taking an international approach to assessment. Indeed, the United States, a world leader in some aspects of higher education, lags behind much of the world in other aspects, including outcomes-based assessment (Adelman, 2008, 2009; Gaston, 2012). In much of the world beyond the borders of the United States, outcomes are increasingly based on input from a broad range

of stakeholders that includes not only direct university constituents such as students and alumni but also employers, policymakers, and the general public. The consensus gold standard for such a market-driven, outcomes-based model is the Bologna Process. Briefly, the Bologna Process is a collaboration among 48 European countries that together form the European Higher Education Area. These countries aim to develop comparable programs and outcomes with the dual goals of employability of graduates and mobility for students and faculty members across the region. (For a primer on the Bologna Process, particularly for those in the United States, we recommend Clifford Adelman's 2009 essay *The Bologna Process for U.S. Eyes: Re-Learning Higher Education in the Age of Convergence*.)

With Bologna as the seminal program, these processes are programs of international cooperation that have developed relatively interchangeable programs in terms of preparation for future study and for careers. Through the flexible process called Tuning (see <http://www.tuningacademy.org>), higher education programs in various global regions are harmonized rather than standardized, so that a student from any participating program may relatively seamlessly continue their education at another member institution, yet each country and institution maintains a degree of academic freedom that true standardization would obstruct. These efforts toward harmonization provide models for how the United States—or other areas that are lagging—might improve.

We, as coeditors of this book, believe that the United States must work to overcome reluctance and resistance to join our international counterparts in harmonization, at least to some degree; however, more urgently, we want to address ways in which we can work toward these goals in the meantime.

To kick off our exploration of international assessment, in Chapter 12 we hear from a multinational team of assessment experts: Jacquelyn Cranney (Australia), Julie A. Hulme (United Kingdom), Julia Suleeman (Indonesia), Remo Job (Italy), and Dana S. Dunn (United States). They identify overlap among assessment initiatives across the five countries that they represent, including pressures from a broader range of stakeholders than in the past and a lack of training and resources related to assessment. They also offer recommendations, including an increased emphasis on assessment of skills (e.g., scientific thinking) and assessment of programmatic outcomes, rather than just individual courses. And they highlight the importance of professional organizations in effecting improvements in assessment.

Next, in Chapter 13, the Australian and U.S. team of Jacquelyn Cranney, Dana S. Dunn, and Suzanne C. Baker asks us to consider ways in which faculty members and programs around the globe might begin to approach assessment in similar ways. They outline an internationally recognized procedure that scaffolds the development of assessments, the Assessment Design Decision Framework, a method that “aims to keep the focus on both the learner’s experience as well as the educator’s reality.” The authors outline the framework’s six categories related to assessment decisions, provide international perspectives, and offer a range of practical resources and suggestions for faculty members and institutions.

The final two chapters in this section describe specific assessment initiatives that expand beyond the usual (assessment) suspects in innovative ways: One explores a dynamic assessment of skills, and the other delves into assessments of values and worldviews. In Chapter 14, Doris Zahner, Roger Benjamin, and Jonathan Lehrfeld from the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) and Dirk Van Damme from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) introduce global assessment initiatives that are not tied to any particular Tuning region. They introduce readers to the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) International, a measure of generic skills developed by the CAE and endorsed by the OECD. Measures such as the CLA+ can help students to market their skills, including via digital badges, and can help employers to find talented students. Moreover, CAE and OECD are developing benchmarks that allow for international comparisons.

Finally, in Chapter 15, a team of researchers from U.S. universities and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)—Kris Acheson, Ashley Finley, Louis Hickman, Lee Sternberger, and Craig Shealy—aims to expand our perspectives regarding what we even think to assess in the first place. They particularly emphasize assessment of our students' understanding of and values related to cultural and global issues. The chapter introduces the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI), the AAC&U's Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education rubrics, and the Cultural Controllability Scale, all of which move us beyond the typical constructs targeted by assessments. The BEVI, for example, has scales that assess constructs such as Socio-cultural Openness, which measures how open students are to cultures other than their own, and Global Resonance, which assesses global engagement.

The dream goal of truly international mobility may be out of reach at the moment; however, we can all start thinking more internationally in terms of how we highlight commonalities in our approaches, use frameworks that move us toward similarities in how we approach the development of assessments in the first place, nurture a growing international emphasis on assessing skills and not just knowledge, and assess our cultural and international mind-sets themselves.

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