Assessing Assessment: Successes, Failures, and the Future

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Looking Back: Origins of the Assessment Movement Two Decades Ago

- Undergraduate Reform Reports of 1985-86

- *Internal Stimulus*: Call for More Coherent Teaching/Learning Approaches and Information for Improvement

- *External Stimulus*: Stakeholder Demands for Information on “Return on Investment”

- Tensions in Motive and Message Ever Since
Why Didn’t Assessment Go Away?

- Pressure to Produce Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes Never Let Up

- By Early 1990s, Accreditors Replace States as Primary External Stimulus to Get Started

- Intermittent Federal Interest in Assessment as an Element of National Accountability

- But Resulting Faculty Ambivalence About a Process Seen as “External” and “Administrative”
Looking Back: What’s Been Accomplished?

- Assessment is for the Most Part Perceived as Inevitable and Legitimate

- Vast Majority of Institutions Have Statements of Learning Outcomes (General and Programmatic)

- A “Semi-Profession” of Folks Involved in Assessment

- Steadily Growing Sophistication with Respect to Methods of Gathering Evidence
Looking Back: What Hasn’t Happened?

- Authentic Integration of Assessment into Faculty Cultures and Behaviors
- Assessment Activities Still Largely “Added On” to the Curriculum Instead of Being Embedded In It
- Systematic and Widespread Use of Assessment Results for Institutional and Curricular Improvement
- Proactive and Sincere Institutional Engagement with Accrediting Organizations Around Topics of Assessment
Major Challenges: Institutional

- Faculty Involvement
- Consistent Support from Top Leadership
- Lack of Time and Burnout
- Use of Results in Decision-making
- Organizational Incentives and Communication
**Major Challenges: Technical**

- Truly Authentic Instruments and Evidence-Gathering Techniques
- Benchmarking Against External Standards
- Student Motivation and Involvement
- Managing the Assessment Process
Involving Faculty

- Start with the Curriculum
- Work on Real Problems Somebody Has
- Language of Inquiry and Scholarship
- Colleagues Learn from Colleagues
- Remember You Won’t Convert Everybody
Top Leadership

- Don’t Change the Rules
- Transparent Communication and Decision Processes
- “Packaging” Decisions Around Evidence
- Board’s Fiduciary Responsibility for Institutional Good Standing and Quality of Academic Product
Lack of Time and Burnout

- Don’t Try to Do Everything at Once
- Start Small with a Demonstration of the Complete Assessment Cycle
- Stop Doing Things when you Add New Things
- Develop and Implement a “Succession Plan”
Using Assessment Results

- Use Involves More than Just “Decision-Making”

- Establish Action Expectations *Before* You Start Assessing

- Avoid the “Perfect Data Fallacy”

- Create Opportunities for Collective Deliberation and Reflection About Results

- Map Out Specific Opportunities for Use in the Decision Cycle
Organization and Communication Issues

- Package Results Around Problems
- Don’t Do a “Data Dump”…Establish a “Data Dialogue” Instead
- Disaggregate
- Emphasize Positive (and Collective) Rewards; Avoid “Gotcha”
- Don’t Hold People Responsible for Things They Can’t Control
New and More Authentic Assessment

- Electronic Portfolios
- Embedded Examination Questions and Associated Rubrics
- Behavioral Inventories
- Complex Simulations and Assignments
- Authentic Large-Scale Assessments (e.g. RAND/CAE CLA)
**External Benchmarking**

- Look First at Existing External Examinations (e.g. Licensure)
- Periodic Validation of Local Assessments with National Instruments
- Institutional Partnerships or Consortia
- Stakeholders as External Examiners (or as Partners in Designing Assessments)
Student Motivation and Involvement

- Make It Count
- Transcript Individual Results
- Share Individual Results for Diagnostic Purposes
- Share Collective Results and Actions Taken in Response
- Involve Students in Interpreting Results
Keeping Assessment Manageable

- Harness Existing Opportunities for Assessment Instead of Creating New Ones
- Don’t Try to Measure Everything that Moves
- Sample Whenever You Can
- Drop Things If You Don’t Use Them
Looking Forward: Changes that Might Affect Assessment in the Next Decade

- Technology
- Changes in Teaching/Learning Process
- Accountability
- Student Attendance Patterns (e.g. Multi-Institutional Attendance)
Impact of Technology

- Individually-Tailored Assessments
- Complex Simulations with Participant Intervention and On-Demand Resources
- Immediate Feedback
- Mastery-Based Self-Paced Instructional Designs
- Portable Personal Portfolios
“Revolution” in Teaching and Learning

- Increased Modularization with Culminating Mastery Assessments
- Assessments Emphasize Connection-Making Across Contexts and Fields
- Assessing Collaboration and Team Behavior
- Assessing “Deep Understanding”
Increased Accountability

- Demand for Comparative or Benchmarked Results
- Pressure for More Public Disclosure of Assessment Results
- Use of Results to Allocate Resources
- Outcomes Aligned with Public Purposes
Complex (Multi-Institutional) Attendance

- Competency-Based Articulation (Qualifications Framework)
- Assessment-Based Sub-Credentials Awarded on Completion of Modules
- Aligning Discipline-Based Standards Across Institutions (e.g. QUE)
Concluding Thoughts

- The Central Tension of “Accountability vs. Improvement” Is Still with Us After 20 Years

- Assessment Will Inexorably Become More Embedded and Authentic

- Assessment Will Hopefully Link with Standards and the Scholarship of Teaching

- We Will Probably be Back to These Issues 20 Years from Now!