MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Misconception 1: The results of assessment will be used to evaluate faculty performance.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Faculty awareness, participation, and ownership are essential for successful program assessment, but assessment results should never be used to evaluate or judge individual faculty performance. The results of program assessment are used to improve programs.

Misconception 2: Our program is working well, our students are learning; we don’t need to bother with assessment.

The primary purpose of program assessment is to improve the quality of educational programs by improving student learning. Even if you feel that the quality of your program is good, there is always room for improvement. In addition, various accrediting bodies mandate conducting student outcomes assessment. For example, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requires that every program assess its student outcomes and uses the results to improve programs. Not to conduct assessment is not an option.

Misconception 3: We will assign a single faculty member to conduct the assessment. Too many opinions would only delay and hinder the process.

While it is a good idea to have one or two faculty members head the assessment process for the department, it is really important and beneficial to have all faculty members involved. Each person brings to the table different perspectives and ideas for improving the academic program. Also it is important that all faculty members understand and agree to the mission (i.e., purpose) and goals of the academic program.

Misconception 4: The administration might use the results to eliminate some of the department’s programs.

There are two types of evaluation processes: summative and formative. The purpose of summative program evaluation is to judge the quality and worth of a program. On the other hand, the purpose of formative program evaluation is to provide feedback to help improve and modify a program. Program assessment is intended as a formative evaluation and not a summative evaluation. The results of program assessment will not be used to eliminate programs.

Misconception 5: Assessment is a waste of time and does not benefit the students.

The primary purpose of assessment is to identify the important objectives and learning outcomes for your program with the purpose of improving student learning. Anything that enhances and improves the learning, knowledge and growth of your students cannot be considered a waste of time.
Misconception 6: We will come up with an assessment plan for this year and use it every year thereafter.

For program assessment to be successful, it must be an ongoing and continuous process. Just as your program should be improving, so should your assessment plan and measurement methods. Each academic department must look at its programs and its learning outcomes on a continual basis and determine if there are better ways to measure student learning and other program outcomes. Your assessment plan should be continuously reviewed and improved.

Misconception 7: Program assessment sounds like a good idea, but it is time-consuming and complex.

It is impossible to "get something for nothing." Effective program assessment will take some of your time and effort, but there are steps that you can follow that can help you to develop an assessment plan that will lead to improving student learning. Also, the office of Operational Excellence and Assessment Support (OEAS) is available to provide you with assistance. If you need any help go to http://oeas.ucf.edu, the Operational Excellence and Assessment Support website for guidelines and assistance in conducting program assessment or contact the office (407-882-0277) to make an appointment for a consultation.
Open Doors to Faculty Involvement in Assessment

Pat Hutchings

Foreword by Peter T. Ewell
Pat Hutchings joined the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1998, serving as a senior scholar and then as vice president, working closely with a wide range of programs and research initiatives, including the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. She has written widely on the investigation and documentation of teaching and learning, the peer collaboration and review of teaching, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Recent publications, drawing from Carnegie's work, include Ethics of Inquiry: Issues in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (2002), Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (2000) and, co-authored with Mary Taylor Huber, The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons (2005). She left her full-time position in December 2009 but continues to work part-time with the Foundation on a broad range of higher education issues. She was chair of the English department at Alverno College from 1978 to 1987 and a senior staff member at the American Association for Higher Education from 1987-1997. Her doctorate in English is from the University of Iowa.
Abstract

Opening Doors to Faculty Involvement in Assessment

The assessment literature is replete with admonitions about the importance of faculty involvement, a kind of gold standard widely understood to be the key to assessment's impact "on the ground," in classrooms where teachers and students meet. Unfortunately, much of what has been done in the name of assessment has failed to engage large numbers of faculty in significant ways.

In this paper, I examine the dynamics behind this reality, including the mixed origins of assessment, coming both from within and outside academe, and a number of obstacles that stem from the culture and organization of higher education itself. I then identify more recent developments that promise to alter those dynamics, including and especially the rising level of interest in teaching and learning as scholarly, intellectual work. I close by proposing six ways to bring the purposes of assessment and the regular work of faculty closer together: 1) Build assessment around the regular, ongoing work of teaching and learning; 2) Make a place for assessment in faculty development; 3) Integrate assessment into the preparation of graduate students; 4) Reframe assessment as scholarship; 5) Create campus spaces and occasions for constructive assessment conversation and action; and 6) Involve students in assessment. Together, these strategies can make faculty involvement more likely and assessment more useful.

Pat's paper effectively synthesizes her dozens of years of experience as a faculty member, consultant, and colleague. To her admirable observations and recommendations about engaging faculty in assessment, I would only add one: remember that you don't need everybody on board to move forward.

Peter T. Ewell
Vice President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)
Senior Scholar, NILOA
Foreword

Since the emergence of assessment as a widespread phenomenon at American colleges and universities in the mid-1980s, "faculty involvement" has been repeatedly identified as essential. I repeatedly took this admonition freely at that time, as did Pat Hutchings, the author of this latest NILOA Occasional Paper. But admonishment did not make it so. NILOA's most recent survey of provosts, for example, reveals that gaining faculty involvement and support is among their top concerns, and I always get similar answers when I pose this question to audiences at conferences and workshops.

In the first portion of her paper, Pat effectively enumerates some challenges to achieving greater faculty involvement. One of the most important is the fact that, from the outset, most faculty perceived assessment as being principally about external accountability. As a result, many continue to see little connection between such activities and their day-to-day life in the classroom. To amplify Pat's point, moreover, the entire premise of "assessment to improve instruction"—especially if it is offered by outsiders—is that there is something wrong with instruction to begin with. This posture is not a happy one from which to begin a productive conversation. Another salient challenge that Pat nails is the fact that there is currently little payoff to faculty for undertaking this work. Simply telling them that "it is part of the job of teaching," as too many academic leaders currently do, doesn't work very well because the connection between assessment and teaching isn't obvious to faculty. And things may be even worse: widespread perceptions that assessment is essentially an administrative activity—the stuff of "strategic planning" and "program review"—mean that faculty will shun it if only for that reason. Pat also notes that faculty value expertise and assessment is something that they typically do not know much about. In a similar vein, assessment is prosecuted in the alien language of business and education—not usually the most respected disciplines on any campus.

These are formidable obstacles. But Pat also gives us reasons to hope by reviewing several areas in which we have made progress. First, as she points out, the entire discourse about instruction has acquired a new tone and heightened respectability. And insofar as the connection between assessment and teaching and learning can be clarified, this new rhetoric can only benefit assessment. Related to this is the rising prominence of Teaching and Learning Centers at many institutions. At their best, they can help faculty discover the integral connection between assessment and instruction and show them how to do assessment better. Finally, Pat observes that assessment methods have come a very long way over the last twenty years. When all this began (with the salient exception of Alverno College where Pat once taught), most institutions doing assessment had to content with re-administering the ACT Assessment or giving GREs in various fields. Now we have creative and authentic standardized general skills tests like the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and the Critical-Thinking Assessment Test (CAT), as well as a range of solid techniques like curriculum mapping, rubric-based grading, and electronic portfolios. These technical developments have yielded valid mechanisms for gathering evidence of student performance that look a lot more like how faculty do this than Scantron forms and bubble sheets. At least as important, they have made the job of assessment easier. Given that lack of time is one of the greatest objections that faculty raise about assessment, this also helps engagement. Finally, I'd like to add an item to Pat's reassuring list of "hopefuls." While I have no concrete evidence to back up this assertion, I am becoming convinced through sustained interaction that younger faculty members are more positive about and engaged in
assessment than their "Boomer generation" colleagues. This may be because they are more collectivist and team oriented—eroding the "isolation in the classroom" syndrome that Pat so accurately describes. But wherever it comes from, it is bound to be good for assessment's future.

The meat of Pat's paper is offered in six recommendations for "opening doors to faculty involvement in assessment." The first—embedding assessment directly into the regular curriculum through mapped and targeted assignments, graded validly and reliably through carefully designed and piloted rubrics—has always been a personal favorite of mine, and I argued for it in my Occasional Paper a year ago. The second and third—more emphasis on faculty development offered through campus Teaching and Learning Centers, and greater emphasis on instructional training (and assessment) in preparing future faculty in graduate training—are familiar, though this by no means diminishes their appropriateness. The fourth—making assessment technique and evidence an integral part of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning—reflects Pat's own successful history of doing this over many years at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and as AAHE's founding Assessment Forum Director.

The last two recommendations, though, are not only sound but are fresh as well. The fifth cogently notes the fact that colleges and universities lack spaces and opportunities for faculty to discuss and make meaning of assessment results through sustained engagement. Time constrained committee discussions are no place for serious collective reflection and there is simply no "room" for this activity (figuratively or literally) in current campus discourse. This is a serious limitation and it ought to be addressed. Sixth, Pat urges us to involve students directly in assessment. Now there's an idea! Not only do students have the greatest stake in improving teaching and learning, they also are closer to the data than we are. This means that they can frequently offer much better interpretations of assessment results and I have seen more than one campus assessment committee learn this to its members' benefit.

In short, Pat's paper effectively synthesizes her dozens of years of experience as a faculty member, consultant, and colleague. To her admirable observations and recommendations about engaging faculty in assessment, I would only add one: remember that you don't need everybody on board to move forward.

Peter T. Ewell
Vice-President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)
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Opening Doors to Faculty Involvement in Assessment
Pat Hutchings

Since the institutional assessment of student learning outcomes arrived on the higher education scene some 25 years ago, no issue has generated more attention than the role of faculty in such work. The research and practice literature on the topic is packed with admonitions about the importance of faculty involvement, which has come to be seen as a kind of gold standard, the key to assessment's impact "on the ground"—in classrooms where teachers and students meet. This view, it seems safe to say, is shared by just about everyone who works in, writes about, worries about, or champions assessment.

What is also widely shared is a sense that the real promise of assessment depends on significantly growing and deepening faculty involvement—and, in short, that there has not been enough of it. In truth, the extent to which faculty have been involved in assessment is difficult to know—and the danger here of self-fulfilling prophecy should be kept in mind—but in a recent national survey of campus assessment practice, 66 percent of chief academic officers name "more faculty engagement" as the highest priority in making further progress (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009, p. 9). Similarly, "a strong faculty leadership role" tops the list of criteria for the Council on Higher Education Accreditation's annual award to campuses with exemplary assessment programs (see Eaton, 2008), and the assessment framework put forward by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U, 2008) urges a focus on "our students' best work," in which faculty must clearly play a—perhaps the—central role. Looking back to earlier days, a set of principles developed under the sponsorship of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) (Astín et al., 1993) points in the same direction, urging that assessment be firmly connected to the classroom and the values of educators.

On the one hand, such urgings reflect the fact that on hundreds of campuses faculty have played critically important roles in assessment; their efforts have produced exciting accounts by and about those who become engaged in assessment and discover in it (sometimes to their considerable surprise) a route to more powerful approaches to student learning. At the same time, these urgings reflect a concern that much of what has been done in the name of assessment has failed to engage large numbers of faculty in significant ways.

In this paper I examine the dynamics behind this reality, identify recent developments that may alter those dynamics by creating a more positive climate for serious work on learning and teaching, and propose six approaches that promise to bring the purposes of assessment and the regular work of faculty closer together—making faculty involvement more likely and assessment more useful. While building on the observations of many who have written about these matters, I also draw on my
experience as an English professor at Alverno College (where assessment was fully integrated into faculty work), on my role as inaugural director of the AAHE Assessment Forum,¹ and on my subsequent work (much of it with The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) with faculty from a wide range of disciplines and institutional types seeking ways to make teaching more visible, valued, and effective in meeting the needs of today’s learners.

Why Faculty Involvement Matters

For starters it’s worth looking at what happens when faculty are significant participants in the assessment process—not just token members of a committee cobbled together for an accreditation visit or an after-the-fact audience for assessment results they had no part in shaping but central voices and shapers of activity. Such significant roles have not been the norm. As Peter Ewell (2009) points out in another NILOA paper, from its early days in higher education, assessment was “consciously separated from what went on in the classroom” and especially from grading, as part of an effort to promote “objective” data gathering (p. 19). In response, many campuses felt they had no choice but to employ external tests and instruments that kept assessment distinct from the regular work of faculty as facilitators and judges of student learning. In fact, the real promise of assessment—and the area in which faculty involvement matters first and most—lies precisely in the questions that faculty, both individually and collectively, must ask about their students’ learning in their regular instructional work: what purposes and goals are most important, whether those goals are met, and how to do better. As one faculty member once told me, “assessment is asking whether my students are learning what I am teaching.”

Such questions are not new, they are not easy, and most of all they are not questions that can be answered by “someone else.” They are faculty questions. Ironically, however, they have not been questions that naturally arise in the daily work of the professoriate or, say, in department meetings, which are more likely to deal with parking and schedules than with student learning. Literary scholar Gerald Graff (2006) has written about the skill with which academics in his field manage to sidestep such conversations—which, admittedly, can become difficult, take a wrong turn, or bog down, generating a good deal of proverbial heat and not much light.

But listening to the voices of faculty who have taken on assessment’s questions with colleagues, the power of the process is clear. In interviews conducted as part of the work of the AAHE Assessment Forum, for instance, my colleague Ted Marchese and I heard over and over about assessment’s power to prompt collective faculty conversation about purposes, often for the first time; about discovering the need to be more explicit about goals for student learning; about finding better ways to know whether those goals are being met; and about shaping and sharing feedback that can strengthen student learning. As a professor of English at the University of Virginia told us, although he did not wholly

¹ In preparing this paper, I returned to a 1990 Change magazine article I co-authored with Ted Marchese, my colleague at the AAHE and its vice president. Ted’s view of assessment has deeply influenced my own, and I am grateful to him for thinking with me over the years about many of the issues I deal with here.
endorse its work, the university’s assessment steering committee was worth sticking with because “it’s the only place on campus I can find an important conversation about what students are learning” (Hutchings & Marchese, 1990, p. 23). Such conversations are important in and of themselves, but they matter, too, because they set the stage for the larger cycle of assessment work: designing and selecting instruments and approaches, grappling with evidence, and using results to make changes that actually help students achieve the goals and purposes faculty believe are most important.

All of this is by way of saying that assessment has deep-seated educational roots. A number of forces propelled assessment’s arrival on the higher education landscape, certainly, but among the most notable was the 1984 report, Involvement in Learning, by the National Institute of Education’s (NIE) Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, which called on undergraduate education to 1) set high expectations, 2) involve students in their learning, and 3) assess and give feedback for improvement. Assessment was seen first and foremost as an educational practice, and its champions—like Alexander Astin, who served on the NIE study group—held up a vision of educational quality based not on reputation and resources but on the institution’s contribution to learning—and, therefore, on the work of students and faculty.

Obstacles to Greater Involvement

While the role of assessment in learning has had and continues to have eloquent and prestigious proponents, it has also attracted other, perhaps louder, patrons from its earliest days in higher education. In 1986 the National Governor’s Association (NGA) embraced the idea in a report tellingly entitled Time for Results. A key figure in this initiative was Governor John Ashcroft of Missouri, whose state motto, “Show Me,” captured the tone of policy makers tired of what they saw as higher education’s sense of entitlement and asking for proof and accountability. In fairness, it should be said that external calls for assessment took a range of forms in the early years, and many of them were sensible and well intentioned. Alverno College’s much-touted model of assessment in the service of individual student learning (which was prominently featured in the NGA report) captured the imagination of some policy makers, and the general trend as mandates began to emerge at the state level was toward guidelines that invited, or at least permitted, campus engagement and invention connected to local curriculum and teaching. Nevertheless, the bottom line was that assessment, from its earliest days, became identified with a group of actors outside academe whose patronage cast a pall over its possibilities within the academy. From the faculty point of view, this looked a lot like someone else’s agenda—and not an altogether friendly someone else, at that.

But governors and external mandates have only been part of the scenario. Obstacles to fuller faculty involvement in assessment have been encountered in several directions, including that of higher education itself.

First, for many faculty the language of assessment has been less than welcoming. While some observers—attempting to make a virtue of necessity—have pointed out that the word’s etymology comes from
In many higher education settings, assessment, like teaching more generally, has often been undervalued or invisible in promotion and tenure deliberations, a circumstance that has certainly not encouraged faculty to see assessment as their work.

A third obstacle to faculty involvement has been that the work of assessment is an uneasy match with institutional reward systems. It is important not to overgeneralize here. On some campuses, particularly those where teaching is the central mission, assessment has been recognized and valued as part of the faculty role, either as an aspect of teaching or (as in the case of faculty sitting on an assessment planning or advisory committee) as valued institutional service. In many higher education settings, however, assessment, like teaching more generally, has often been undervalued or invisible in promotion and tenure deliberations, a circumstance that has certainly not encouraged faculty to see assessment as their work.

Fourth, and finally, it may be that faculty have not yet seen sufficient evidence that assessment makes a difference. There’s a chicken-and-egg dynamic at work here; more faculty involvement would presumably make a bigger difference. But the fact remains that the benefits of assessment are uncertain and that faculty facing rising demands on their time and energy must make choices. Not choosing assessment, after all, may be a rational decision. Indeed, assessment is seen as “redundant” on many campuses, duplicating already existing processes and not yielding additional benefits (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009, p. 9). Similarly,
as evidenced by numerous reports over the years, many campuses have succeeded in “doing assessment” but have fallen short in using the results to make changes in the educational experience of their students (Carey, 2007; Hutchings & Marchese, 1990; Lopez, 1998). Faculty perceptions reflect this shortfall, as shown in data from the 2009 Faculty Survey of Student Engagement; while 75 percent of respondents indicated their campuses were involved in assessment “quite a bit” or “very much,” only about a third had positive views of the dissemination and usefulness of assessment findings (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2009, pp. 21–22). Indeed, there is now a growing awareness that the neat logic of “data-driven improvement” is much easier to invoke than to enact (Bond, 2009); a recently announced initiative of the Spencer Foundation, for instance, “questions the assumption that the simple presence of data invariably leads to improved outcomes and performance, and that those who are presented information under data-driven improvement schemes will know how best to make sense of it and transform their practice” (see www.spencer.org). Faculty who are already and increasingly pressed in too many directions would be readier to join the assessment process, one might surmise, if its benefits were easier to see.

Developments to Build On

The four obstacles to faculty involvement in assessment noted above were in place for the most part when assessment first appeared on the higher education scene in the mid-1980s, and they are still in force today. But it is not true, despite metaphors of graveyards and slow-turning ships, that there is nothing new under the higher education sun. A number of recent developments may be creating a more hospitable climate for a faculty role in assessment.

At the most general level is the growth of attention to teaching and learning. Traditionally less visible and valued than other aspects of academic life in higher education, the profile of pedagogy has clearly risen over the last two decades. In 1999, for instance, my Carnegie Foundation colleague Mary Huber set out to map the various forms and forums for exchange about matters pedagogical. “What has been surprising to us,” she reported,

is not only how many forums there are right now for this exchange, but how surprised people seem to be to find this out.

In other words, what we are finding appears to be at odds with the prevailing stereotype that there has been little investment of intellectual interest and energy in teaching and learning in higher education. Perhaps in comparison to traditional research this is so, but the field of teaching and learning in higher education is far more active (if not very evenly distributed) than many might think. (Huber, 1999, p. 3)

In short, higher education, here in the U.S. and internationally, has seen a huge rise in the number of campus events, conferences, special initiatives, funded projects, journals, online forums, and multimedia resources shining a light on faculty’s work as teachers. Assessment, in its broadest and most important sense of making judgments about student learning, has been a part of this expanding “teaching commons” (Huber & Hutchings, 2005), creating a more generous space for faculty engagement with campus assessment activities.
Within this general phenomenon one also finds the growth of more focused communities around specific pedagogies (service learning, problem-based learning, undergraduate research, and so forth) and the teaching and learning of particular fields (chemical education, for example, or the teaching of writing). As champions of their chosen approach, these communities have naturally turned to assessment-like activities for evidence of impact and to shape next steps. External funding for these efforts has, increasingly, mandated such data gathering, and the notion that educational reform should be informed by evidence has become a commonplace—so much so, in fact, that talking about teaching without invoking learning has become a sort of anathema.

At the same time, and running hand in hand with these developments, has been the rise of the scholarship of teaching and learning, a movement that has gained significant momentum over the past decade. Over 250 campuses have been involved in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL, running from 1998–2009), and many more campuses in the U.S. and beyond have embraced this agenda. Today, growing numbers of faculty from a full range of fields and all institutional types are posing and investigating questions about their students' learning, using what they discover to improve their own classrooms and to contribute to a body of knowledge others can build on. Such work has become an entrée for those who perhaps would not be drawn to assessment but feel welcomed by the idea of seeing their teaching and their students' learning as sites for scholarly inquiry—particularly in a community of like-minded educators interested in learning from their findings. A 2009 survey of CASTL campuses indicates that such work, even when involving relatively small numbers of faculty, brings energy and openness to institutional assessment activities:

The scholarship of teaching and learning is often mentioned [in the Carnegie survey] as having had an effect on assessment. Departments where faculty have been engaged in inquiry into the students' experience understand learning outcomes better because "they have assessed student learning in their classrooms," and are "noticeably less hostile to institutional assessment." Respondents also noted specific programs (the first-year experience, general education) and majors (biology) where scholarship of teaching and learning work has been woven into assessment approaches. (Ciccone, Huber, Hutchings, & Cambridge, 2009, p. 9)

Clearly there are productive bridge-building possibilities here, as the scholarship of teaching and learning and assessment share overlapping agendas, practices, and institutional constituencies and as growing faculty involvement in the former shifts understandings of the latter to more clearly align assessment with what faculty actually do as teachers.

Moreover, this kind of serious, intellectual work on teaching and learning is making its way—albeit slowly—into campus practices and policies related to faculty roles and rewards. In a 2002 AAHE national survey, two thirds of chief academic officers reported changes "to encourage and reward a broader definition of scholarship" (O'Meara, 2005, p. 261). It is no accident that for more than a decade the assessment conversation in this country ran in parallel with an energetic national conversation
about faculty roles and rewards. That conversation had waned somewhat by the time the AAHE Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards concluded a number of years ago, but the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) has since stepped in with new leadership—organizing conferences on the topic and recommending in its much-circulated Framework for Accountability that “campus reward systems should incorporate the importance of faculty members’ intellectual and professional leadership in both assessment and educational improvement” (p. 12). One route to this end is the work of the Peer Review of Teaching Project (PRTP)—a national initiative promoting the use of course portfolios—a tool “that combines inquiry into the intellectual work of a course, careful investigation of student understanding and performance, and faculty reflection on teaching effectiveness” (not a bad definition of assessment at its best). The PRTP has engaged hundreds of faculty members from numerous universities, many of whose course portfolios can be found at http://www.courseportfolio.org.[1] These artifacts and the review processes they make possible are raising the profile of inquiry into learning and teaching, by whatever name, and setting the conditions in which such work can be rewarded, as other forms of scholarship are.

Finally, the climate for faculty involvement in assessment is becoming more hospitable with the emergence of new tools and technologies. A wider range of instruments is now available—beyond the small set of standardized tests most visible in assessment’s first decade—and some of these are clearly more related to the tasks and assignments that faculty require of students in their own classrooms. The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), for instance, forgoes reductive multiple-choice formats in favor of authentic tasks that would be at home in the best classrooms; CLA leaders now offer workshops to help faculty design similar tasks for their own classrooms, the idea being that these activities are precisely what students need to build and improve their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. The widely used National Survey of Student Engagement, and its cousin, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, document the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development—practices like frequent writing, service learning and discussing ideas with faculty outside of class. Electronic student portfolios, which over the last decade have become widespread on all kinds of campuses, now provide a vehicle for bringing the regular work of the classroom under the assessment umbrella in manageable ways (see, for example, Miller & Morgaine, 2009). Some campuses are now employing online data management systems, like E-Lumen and TracDat, that invite faculty input into and access to assessment data (Hutchings, 2009). With developments like these facilitating faculty interest and engagement in ways impossible (or impossibly time consuming or technical) in assessment’s early days, new opportunities are on the rise.

Obstacles, it’s true, are also on the rise. On campuses across the nation, the picture is hardly rosy. Cutbacks are everywhere; faculty are increasingly stressed and pressed, with many more in part-time, contingent positions; and higher education is seen by some as “underachieving” (Bok, 2006), failing many of the students who need it most. The point here is not that faculty involvement in assessment will now be easy but that there have been developments to build on going forward.
Opening Doors to Faculty Involvement:  
Six Recommendations

In this spirit, now may well be a good time for campuses to survey their full range of assessment activities, recognizing that not all of them use the language of assessment and that they come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Having the fullest possible picture in view may suggest new ways to encourage faculty activity where it already exists, to support it where it is emergent, and to think harder about where and exactly how the scarce resource of faculty time and talent can be best deployed. The following six recommendations may serve as keys—opening doors to faculty involvement in assessment.

1. Build Assessment Around the Regular, Ongoing Work of Teaching and Learning

Assessment should grow out of faculty’s questions about their students’ learning and the regular, ongoing work of teaching: syllabus and curriculum design, the development of assignments and classroom activities, the construction of exams, and the provision of feedback to students. These kinds of closer-to-the-classroom connections can help move assessment “away from the center, and out to the capillary level,” as one group of practitioners suggested, making it more “centrifugal” (Struck, 2007, p. 2).

This injunction to build assessment around faculty’s regular work in the classroom has been part of assessment’s gospel from the beginning, but doing so has often gone against the grain, as campus assessment practices were consciously separated from what went on in the classroom (Ewell, 2009). In the face of this disconnect, campuses could hardly find a better place to begin (or to resuscitate) assessment than by building on (rather than dismissing) the practice of grading—an approach advocated by Barbara Walvoord (2004). Starting, as it were, at “ground level”—with a practice in which every faculty member is engaged every semester in every class for every student—can bring to the fore important questions about course design, assignments and exams, and feedback to students, which is arguably an aspect of assessment that would benefit from much more attention—and where faculty interests and talents would be particularly to the point. A focus on grading and feedback would also address the long-standing problem of student motivation by assuring that assessment does indeed “count” in ways that elicit students’ best work.

Embedding assessment in the classroom then sets the stage for work at the next level of the department or program, contexts which draw on what most members of the professoriate know and care most about: their discipline or field. Those seeking to engage more faculty more fully in assessment would do well to invite and explore questions about how students “decode the disciplines” ( Pace & Middendorf, 2004) and learn “disciplinary habits of mind” (Garung, Chick, & Haynie, 2008)—to quote from the titles of two recent volumes that map this terrain. When assessment reflects and respects disciplinary interests—recognizing, for example, that learning history is not the same as learning music or chemistry—it is more likely to lead to consequential faculty engagement. Assessment, one might say, must live where faculty live, in the classrooms where they teach the field they love.
2. Make a Place for Assessment in Faculty Development

Over the last several decades many campuses (research universities, first, but now a much broader swath) have established teaching and learning centers that offer a broad array of instructional improvement opportunities—and assessment can be an integral part of their work.

Signs of movement in this direction are increasingly evident. Nancy Chism, a national leader in the faculty development community, argues that teaching improves through “naturally occurring cycles of inquiry” in which faculty plan, act, observe, and reflect. Teaching center staff support this process, she says, by assisting faculty with data collection and by suggesting instruments and methods for obtaining “good information on the impact of teaching” (Chism, 2008, n.p.). Bringing faculty together around such evidence, facilitating constructive conversations about its meaning and implications, setting local efforts in the context of a larger body of research—these are important roles that many teaching centers are now taking up, roles that strengthen the growing sense of community around pedagogy and a shared commitment to evidence.

In this same spirit, many centers offer small grants to faculty trying out a new classroom approach, and some now require them to assess the impact of their innovation on student learning and to share what they have learned in campus events, seminars, and conferences or in online representations of their work. While there’s a danger in linking such work too closely to the machinery of institutional assessment (turning an intellectual impulse into a bureaucratic requirement), most faculty are eager to see their work contribute to something larger, and teaching centers can play an important brokering role in this regard, developing faculty habits of inquiry and evidence use that are the sine qua non of assessment—and essential to good teaching, as well. In short, assessment should be central to professional development.

3. Build Assessment into the Preparation of Graduate Students

This recommendation is part and parcel of the previous one (teaching centers often serve graduate students as well as faculty), but it bears highlighting separately as well, especially since signs of progress in this area are beginning to appear.

The chemistry department at the University of Michigan, for instance, offers a program of study for graduate students interested in a more sustained experience in teaching, curriculum design, and assessment. The multicampus, NSF-funded Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL) (see www.cirtl.net), coordinated by the University of Wisconsin–Madison, trains STEM graduate students and postdocs to bring their investigative skills as researchers to their work as teachers. The Teagle Foundation has recently funded a number of similar efforts, some on individual campuses and one—through the Council of Graduate Schools—tellingly entitled “Preparing Future Faculty to Assess Student Learning Outcomes” (see www.teaglefoundation.org/grantmaking/grantees/gradschool.aspx).
These examples are still the exception, admittedly, but they show what is possible. Weaving assessment into courses and experiences designed to prepare beginning scholars for their future work as educators is a promising step forward, with long-term benefits as today’s graduate students become tomorrow’s faculty members and campus leaders.

4. Reframe the Work of Assessment as Scholarship

As scholars, faculty study all manner of artifacts and phenomena; their students’ learning should be seen as an important site for investigation, as well. Creating a place (and incentives) for greater faculty involvement in assessment means seeing such work not simply as service or as good campus citizenship but as an important intellectual enterprise—a form of scholarship reflecting faculty’s professional judgment about the nature of deep understanding of their field and about how such understanding is developed.

In this sense, assessment would do well to find common cause with the scholarship of teaching and learning. This must be done carefully, given the different impulses and motivations behind each, but as noted above the two movements can strengthen each other. Thus, for starters, campus leaders of assessment and those charged with advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning should explore shared agendas and practices. A parallel discussion between these two communities would be beneficial at the national level as well—for example, by including leaders from the scholarship of teaching and learning community at assessment conferences, and vice versa.

Also needed is continued attention to the development and use of new forms, formats, and genres for capturing the scholarly work of teaching, learning, and assessment. The course portfolio model mentioned above is perhaps pre-eminent in this regard, with a growing community of users trading artifacts, reviewing one another’s evidence and reflections, and putting their materials forward in both formative and summative decision-making settings (Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, & Savory, 2006). But portfolios are only one possibility, and inventing other ways for faculty engaged in assessment—be it in their own classroom or beyond—to document and share their work in ways that can be reviewed, built on, and rewarded is a critical step forward that can help propel and reenergize the larger conversation about faculty roles and rewards.

5. Create Campus Spaces and Occasions for Constructive Assessment Conversation and Action

Behind many of the long-standing challenges of assessment is a more fundamental reality: that teaching and learning have traditionally been seen and undertaken as private activities, occurring behind classroom doors both literally and metaphorically closed. As noted above, this reality has shifted significantly in recent years, as teaching and learning have become topics of widespread interest, debate, and inquiry. Campuses seeking to engage more faculty more deeply with assessment must find ways to create such opportunities—and there are now many possibilities and models.
Some readers will recall, as an example of such opportunities, the Harvard Assessment Seminars from the 1990's, sponsored by Derek Bok, led and reported on by Richard Light, and involving a large group of notable educators from across the university (and a few from nearby institutions as well) in gathering and acting on evidence about a range of widely relevant questions about undergraduate learning (Light, 1990, 1991). On the more modest side, departments can set aside time in their regular meetings to examine issues of teaching and learning or set up teaching circles specifically dedicated to such work. Other possibilities include multidisciplinary reading and study groups (perhaps facilitated by a teaching center), faculty learning communities and inquiry groups (Cox & Richlin, 2004; Huber, 2008), and, importantly, opportunities to interact and share findings with peers beyond the institution, as faculty expect to do in other types of scholarly work.

6. Involve Students in Assessment

If faculty have been less than enthusiastic about assessment, it is not for lack of caring about their students’ learning. Indeed, bringing students more actively into the processes of assessment may well be the most powerful route to greater faculty engagement.

One relevant line of work in this vein is student self-assessment—providing the tools and frameworks that allow learners to monitor and direct their own development. Alverno College is arguably the pioneer in this area, but there are many recent efforts as well, including AAC&U’s push for “intentional learning” (AAC&U, 2002); the widespread use of e-portfolios as a vehicle for students to reflect on and to direct their own progress (Yancy, 2009); the creation of rubrics that can serve as frameworks for students to assess their own learning (Rhodes, 2010; Walvoord, 2004); and the interest in approaches that develop students’ metacognitive abilities (see, for instance, Strategic Literacy Initiative, 2007). Similarly, working under the banner of the scholarship of teaching and learning, a number of campuses have invented vehicles for involving students in campus conversations about and studies of teaching and learning, arguing that they should be collaborators and co-inquirers (not simply objects of study) and that they can make distinctive contributions to classroom research projects, curricular evaluation and revision, and institutional ethnography (Werder & Otis, 2010).

Efforts like these speak to the role of students as agents of their own learning, but in a larger sense they are also steps toward making the campus an organization in which all members, top to bottom and across the institution, are focused on improvement—and where evidence and reflection are part of the routines of daily life. These routines must be developed across the campus at multiple levels—from the institution, to the program, to the course and classroom where they manifest themselves in the relationship between faculty and students and in cycles of learning, assessment, feedback, and further learning. Situating assess-
ment within those cycles is the key to faculty involvement and to making assessment—at all levels—a more positive and consequential process.

Many Doors to Faculty Involvement

Behind all of the above recommendations is a broader one: that there is no single best way to support greater faculty engagement with assessment. Significant numbers of faculty have been involved, and more will enter into the work if opportunities present themselves in appealing, doable forms aligned with faculty’s interests, talents, time, and values. For some faculty, assessment will be done primarily in the context of their own teaching—by gathering evidence, for instance, about the impact of a classroom innovation or a new application of technology and using what is discovered to improve students’ learning; this work matters and it should be acknowledged and shared more broadly in ways that are appropriate. Other faculty will be engaged by efforts at the department or program level, perhaps through a curricular reform effort in which assessment will play a part; again, this work should be seen and acknowledged as contributing to the campus’s efforts to use evidence to prompt reflection, innovation, and improvement. Some faculty will find through their assessment activities new scholarly interests and communities that will change their career directions in major ways; others will discover more bounded ways to contribute. Whatever the focus or commitment, the need for significant investments of faculty time are likely to be higher in assessment’s early stages, declining as experience is gained and as processes become more integrated into regular work.

Making all contributions—large or small, sustained or episodic, early or later in the process—more visible and valued, and opening a variety of doors to assessment, is a critical step forward. In this spirit, campus leaders may need to think more broadly and more creatively about where and how faculty can be involved most productively in the work of assessment—matching tasks to talents, needs to interests, and remembering, above all, that assessment is only a part of the larger enterprise of improvement in higher education.
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NILOA Mission

NILOA's primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policymakers, families, and other stakeholders.

NILOA Occasional Paper Series

NILOA Occasional Papers are commissioned to examine contemporary issues that will inform the academic community of the current state-of-the-art of assessing learning outcomes in American higher education. The authors are asked to write for a general audience in order to provide comprehensive, accurate information about how institutions and other organizations can become more proficient at assessing and reporting student learning outcomes for the purposes of improving student learning and responsibly fulfilling expectations for transparency and accountability to policy makers and other external audiences.

Comments and questions about this paper should be sent to sprovez2@illinois.edu.
About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website went live on February 11, 2009.
- www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
- The NILOA research team reviewed 725 institution websites for learning outcomes assessment transparency from March 2009 to August 2009.
- One of the co-principal NILOA investigators, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001. He is currently serving as Interim President of the University of Illinois.
- Peter Ewell joined NILOA as a senior scholar in November 2009.

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What Faculty Unions Say About Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

Larry Gold (AFT), Gary Rhoades (AAUP), Mark Smith (NEA) & George Kuh (NILOA)

Foreword by Stanley O. Ikenberry
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Larry Gold has been Director of the Higher Education Department of the American Federation of Teachers since 1992. Before joining the AFT, Mr. Gold was president of the consulting firm Public Policy Advocates. From 1981 to 1988, he was director of the Washington office of the City University of New York, where he organized the National Pell Grant Coalition and the Coalition for Aid to Part-time Students. From 1977-81, Mr. Gold served in policy posts in the U.S. Department of Education. Mr. Gold attended New York University, and was a doctoral candidate in Government at the University of Maryland.

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George D. Kuh is Adjunct Professor at the University of Illinois and Chancellor’s Professor Emeritus of Higher Education at Indiana University. Founding director of the widely-used National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), George has written extensively about assessment, student engagement, institutional improvement, and college and university cultures, and consulted with more than 350 colleges and universities in the U.S. and abroad. Two of his recent books are *High Impact Practices* (2008) and *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* (2005, 2010). In 2001, he received Indiana University’s prestigious Tracy Sonneborn Award for distinguished career of teaching and research. George earned the B.A. at Luther College, M.S. at St. Cloud State University, and Ph.D. at the University of Iowa.

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Abstract

What Faculty Unions Say About Student Learning
Outcomes Assessment

Three major national faculty unions – American Association of University Professors (AAUP), American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) – help shape the work conditions of faculty in many postsecondary education institutions. In this paper, representatives from each of the organizations describe their group’s positions on student learning and educational attainment and the role of assessing student learning outcomes. All three affirm the importance of assessment, emphasizing that faculty must have a central role in determining how it is to be done and how the results are used. Indeed, they assert that faculty involvement in assessment is essential in order to insure that the principles of academic freedom and shared governance are honored in all phases of the assessment process. The unions are not opposed to using assessment information for accountability. At the same time, they prefer that evidence of student learning be used by institutions to enhance the quality of the student experience and not allow assessment results to drive resource allocation or other decisions in the absence of other information. Even though the positions articulated in this paper are fairly general, it is noteworthy that the unions have endorsed the value of assessment which promises to advance this important agenda on organized campuses.
Quality in higher education is no less important than is access to higher education. Gauging or judging quality in higher education, however, is especially challenging. It is widely acknowledged that faculty must be actively involved in assessing student learning and in using assessment results to improve the quality of the student experience (Hutchings, 2010). Yet, aside from the American Federation of Teachers' (2011) recent statement about student success, little has been said about the role that national and local faculty unions can and should play in this arena. Indeed, faculty—those who are represented by unions as well as those who are not—are often assumed to be entrenched in the status quo and, thus, are thought to present obstacles to the meaningful assessment of learning.

The very fact that leading representatives of all three major national faculty unions—the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the National Education Association (NEA)—were willing, for this paper, to engage in a dialogue on the assessment of quality in higher education is itself noteworthy and bodes well for advancing the assessment and institutional improvement agenda. As you will see in the following exchange, on many if not most issues that these representatives discussed, the three organizations agree. All three faculty union groups, for example, remain steadfastly committed to the primacy of faculty authority on academic matters—including the assessment of student learning. At the same time, they readily recognize the importance of gathering evidence of student performance and making the evidence public. United in the conviction that the systems used to gather and report such information must be designed by faculty and must be responsive to local circumstances, all three groups challenge the wisdom of externally imposed metrics, arguing that these can too readily be misused and misunderstood. And all three see the standard processes of faculty governance as essential to improving teaching and learning and to insuring quality.

While these faculty union leaders generally support the need to obtain and act on evidence about student learning, they do not cite in this dialogue any specific examples of exemplary assessment efforts taking place on their member campuses. Nor have their organizations yet set forth agendas in this arena. Neither the AAUP nor the NEA has yet adopted a student learning outcomes assessment policy—each referring inquiries on that subject to existing statements by the organization from which one must attempt to ascertain the organization's stance on the matter. Although the AFT comes closest to articulating a policy in its 2011 student success treatise endorsing the premises of learning outcomes assessment, its statement stops short of specific, targeted recommendations.

As the AAUP, the AFT, and the NEA address the challenges of gathering and using evidence of student learning to improve education outcomes and to strengthen higher education's accountability to society, we present this paper—a summary of the views of these organizations on student learning outcomes assessment—in hopes of facilitating that endeavor. The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) and its co-principal investigators are grateful to our colleagues Larry Gold (AFT), Gary Rhoades (AAUP), and Mark Smith (NEA) for joining in this dialogue and sharing their perspectives.

Stanley O. Ikenberry

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What Faculty Unions Say About Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

Larry Gold, Gary Rhoades, Mark Smith & George Kuh

The nation needs more college graduates who demonstrate higher levels of student accomplishment and no group is more critical to attaining this goal than faculty. As Stan Ikenberry stated in the Foreword, little has been said about the role that national and local faculty unions can and should play in this arena. Indeed, unionized faculty are sometimes thought to be a nontrivial obstacle to meaningful assessment because they are perceived as being unreasonably committed to the status quo and as eschewing calls for accountability from external stakeholders.

This paper summarizes the views on student learning outcomes assessment held by the leadership of three major national faculty unions—the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the National Education Association (NEA). While the paper is framed as a conversation, with each spokesperson talking about how organized faculties can contribute their ideas and fashion their practices to enhance student learning and educational attainment, in truth, each of the union representatives responded in writing to four questions we posed to elicit their respective perspectives on student learning outcomes assessment; we then fashioned their responses into a conversational format. These were the four questions:

- Does your organization have a formal position on assessing student learning outcomes in colleges and universities?
- What advice would you give your member campuses for effectively managing the often described tensions between assessment for improvement and assessment for accountability?
- What approaches seem to be effective in encouraging unionized faculty to become involved in assessments of student learning outcomes and using the results to improve teaching and learning?
- What are two or three other key issues that must be addressed effectively for faculty and staff on unionized campuses to become involved in student learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning and respond to calls for accountability?

To be fair, it is somewhat risky for an organization’s leaders and staff to get too far out in front of its members with clarion calls to advance particular activities. The AFT, for example, while making plain that its position on student learning outcomes assessment parallels its student success statement, asserts that this is close to its first word on the topic—not its last. Only time will tell whether what comes next does, indeed, mark the beginning of active faculty union involvement in promoting student learning outcomes assessment. For now, extending the benefit of the doubt seems reasonable; but, of course, we look forward to future developments. Before sharing what these faculty union leaders say, we briefly describe each of the unions to put each of their positions in context.
Thumbnail Sketches of the Three Major Faculty Unions

The three major faculty unions differ in terms of their histories as well as their member numbers and characteristics. The smallest of the three, the American Association of University Professors is the only one devoted solely to postsecondary faculty and professionals. About a quarter of AAUP members work in nonunionized settings. Over its 95-year history, the AAUP has positioned itself to be the voice of faculty-at-large in matters of the basic principles and policies that define academic work including academic freedom, shared governance, and tenure. The AAUP's priorities are defending and advancing those principles through policy statements and recommendations about how institutions can faithfully adhere to these policies and practices that flow from them.

The American Federation of Teachers is one of largest collective bargaining organizations in the country. A member of the AFL-CIO, the AFT has about 1.5 million members in K-12 education, higher education, nursing and health, and public services. Its membership includes about 200,000 postsecondary full-time and part-time faculty members (both tenured and nontenured) as well as professional staff and graduate student employees. The AFT organizes workers on its member campuses and conducts collective bargaining and labor-management relations at the local level—as featured in recent national media reports in Wisconsin, Ohio, and other states. The AFT has also been very active in the areas of public communications, political action, and policy advocacy. The primary example of this is the AFT Faculty and College Excellence Campaign (FACE), the goal of which is to reverse what it considers to be two highly deleterious trends in academic staffing: the decline in numbers of full-time tenure-eligible faculty positions and the exploitation of the growing force of contingent faculty.

The roots of the National Education Association, established in 1857, are as a professional association of K-12 reform-minded school superintendents, but the NEA has always been concerned with the learning conditions of students at all levels of education. Although its leadership often came from higher education in the NEA's early years, during the 20th century, K-12 teachers gradually assumed a predominant role in the association. After the adoption of collective bargaining in the 1960s the association grew substantially, making it the largest union in the country, with 3.2 million members. About 200,000 college and university faculty, academic professionals, and staff belong to the NEA—a number comparable to the AFT postsecondary membership.

Despite their differences in member and other characteristics, all three organizations are important players in the postsecondary arena of policy and practice, representing several hundred thousand faculty and academic and student affairs professionals employed across a range of institutions including two- and four-year colleges, universities, and other types of postsecondary institutions.

Where Faculty Unions Stand on the Matter of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

**GK: Does your organization have a formal position on assessing student learning outcomes in colleges and universities?**
Gary: The AAUP is substantively committed to the quality and integrity of higher education and of instruction, which is best served through academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance. Indeed, the AAUP believes that these three pillars of professional practice are necessary conditions for quality education and for realizing significant student learning outcomes. But it has not issued specific policy statements or institutional recommendations about particular substantive aspects of assessing student learning outcomes or of faculty revising their practices in light of those assessments to enhance such outcomes—because its focus is primarily on process.

To some observers as well as some faculty, the AAUP’s principles and policies might suggest that the association encourages its members to resist the assessment of student learning outcomes, including acting on that data to reform curriculum and instruction. That is a fundamental misreading and a misapplication of the association’s basic principles and policies as they pertain to assessment and institutional improvement. Of principal interest to the AAUP is the process by which assessment metrics are developed and applied and the process by which the findings of those assessments are translated into instructional and curricular reform.

Assessment of student learning and reform of teaching and academic programs are core academic activities. As such, the AAUP sees them as being the primary responsibility of faculty—individually and collectively. In the classroom, a core element of academic freedom is the autonomy of the individual faculty member to determine what and how to teach. At the same time, the AAUP emphasizes the collective responsibility of the faculty as a whole for academic programs, suggesting that an academic department, for instance, can adopt pedagogical or curricular standards that colleagues teaching the course(s) need to adopt. One example of this is general education courses in which various aspects of core courses are prescribed. Similarly, within academic departments faculty committees often develop course sequences prescribing the material that will be covered and in some cases even the sorts of exams that will be given—to actualize standards established collectively by the departmental faculty or to conform to professional or specialized accreditation requirements. And, as I will say later, faculty unions can play a collective role in these matters as well, through joint labor/management committees.

There is no reason that a faculty cannot collectively take on the task of identifying student learning outcomes, conducting those assessments, and revising curriculum accordingly. One such example is the development of writing-intensive undergraduate courses to address writing deficiencies among students. The problem arises when faculty members are not central players in these processes. It is worth emphasizing this point, as it plays out in my earlier examples from general education and professional education, because many if not most of the issues surrounding student learning outcomes are related to institution-wide assessment of what students have learned in terms of basic skills and competencies.

Another key assessment issue is the importance of local control of how programs and institutions respond to local challenges and problems. The AAUP is very much committed to local, campus-based decision making in matters of assessment—with faculty being central in those processes. Part of the genius of the American system, which European and other countries are seeking to emulate in reforming their higher education systems, is the local autonomy of colleges and universities. No one size fits all. National standards make little sense in a higher education system as diverse as ours. Collective faculty influence on instruction and curriculum is most appropriate at the institutional or disciplinary level. Nationally standardized

American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

- Motto: Academic Freedom for a Free Society.
- Mission: To advance academic freedom and shared governance, to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education, and to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good.
- Smallest of the three major faculty unions.
- Over 48,000 members, over 300 local campus chapters, and approximately 30 state organizations.
- Only union devoted specifically to postsecondary faculty and professionals.
- Voice of faculty for basic principles and policies that define academic work including academic freedom, shared governance, and tenure.
- Priorities include defending and advancing those principles through policy statements and recommendations for how institutions can faithfully adhere to these policies and practices that flow from them.

www.aaup.org
outcomes and assessments, such as those embedded in No Child Left Behind (NCLB), at the K-12 level, are inappropriate for higher education, particularly when they get beyond the level of the discipline or professional field.

Along the above lines, perhaps the best marker of the AAUP’s position on student learning outcomes assessment is its formal 1968 statement, *The Role of Faculty in the Accrediting of Colleges and Universities*. The statement accepts the value of regional accrediting associations, emphasizing that faculty should be a part of regular visiting committees and that as part of their assessment these visiting committees should address conditions of academic freedom, tenure, shared governance, and faculty working conditions and morale. At the institutional level, the statement recommends that groups of faculty members, responsible to the faculty as a whole, should be centrally involved in the self-study that is done, that it should concentrate on the matters identified above in preparing the accreditation self-study, and that the findings of the review should be shared with the entire faculty. Although the statement is over 40 years old, the basic principles that underlie it remain as relevant as ever, including the commitment to and primacy of assessment approaches that are sensitive to institutional mission and local conditions.

**Larry:** The most relevant exposition of the AFT’s position on student outcomes assessment is its policy statement released April 4, 2011, focusing on the broader issue of student success in postsecondary education. While that document recognizes the general agreement among the AFT membership that college and university curriculum, teaching, assessment, and accountability all need to focus squarely on student success, there is no general agreement on what student success actually means. Some analysts emphasize the achievement of a baccalaureate degree; others are engaged in a national drive to expand the number of community and technical college degrees. Still others emphasize the need to increase opportunities to attain formal training certifications.

AFT members usually think of student success broadly—defining it as the achievement of the student’s own educational goals. Our members teach students whose goal may be to obtain a degree or certificate; but they also teach students who are looking primarily for job training without a formal credential or for professional skills to enhance their career opportunities. Other students are studying academic subjects strictly for learning’s sake. Further adding to the complexity, students often change their goals during the educational experience.

That is why we believe that measuring student success solely in terms of degree attainment is insufficient. Rather, what is needed is a system that assesses students’ academic goals throughout the educational process and ensures that students have multiple opportunities to re-examine their goals, aided by academic advisors.

The guidelines in the 2011 AFT statement are intended to be helpful to AFT members and to spark local activity, but they in no way should be understood as a mandate to local affiliates. The AFT is grounded in a deep tradition of local autonomy and the union believes that faculty autonomy is the capstone of quality education and academic freedom. With that caveat, the AFT statement is based on the premise that assessment of student learning must begin with a shared understanding of learning objectives and how they should be developed. The statement presents common elements many informed parties have vetted that cut across different programs and disciplines and that can serve as a reasonable framework for the type of educational experience all students should have in some form have. These common elements—knowledge, intellectual skills, and job skills—offer one way (certainly not the only way) to focus professional thinking, collaboration, and planning around the institution’s teaching program and assessment. There are several other frameworks that address similar issues, such as the essential learning outcomes outlined in the LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise) initiative championed by the Association of American

**American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**

- **Motto:** A Union of Professionals.
- **Mission:** To improve the lives of our members and their families; to give voice to their legitimate professional, economic, and social aspirations; to strengthen the institutions in which we work; to improve the quality of the services we provide; to bring together all members to assist and support one another; and to promote democracy, human rights, and freedom in our union, in our nation, and throughout the world.
- **Founded in 1916 in Chicago through the collaboration of eight local teachers unions.**
- **One of the largest collective bargaining organizations in the country.**
- **Member of American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).**
- **Over 1.5 million members in five different sectors: pre-K-12 education, postsecondary faculty and professionals, public employees, and nursing and healthcare professionals.**
- **Specifically, 200,000 postsecondary full- and part-time faculty (tenured and nontenured) as well as professional staff and graduate student employees.**
- **Current campaign: AFT Faculty and College Excellence Campaign (FACE), designed to fight issues threatening the quality of teaching and learning.**

www.aft.org
Colleges and Universities and Lumina's Degree Profile. More important than the details of any particular set of outcomes is the facilitation of meaningful deliberations by faculty individuals and groups about the evidence showing that students are benefiting in the intended ways from their course work and other educational experiences.

**Mark** The NEA believes that faculty should have substantial flexibility in the design, structuring, and teaching of their courses. At the same time, the association has a number of policy resolutions addressing assessment, testing, and student learning—including one specifically entitled *Student Assessment Programs in Higher Education* (National Education Association, 2010–2011). While resolutions that come out of the K–12 experience contain many elements that apply to all levels of education, this resolution focuses specifically on higher education. It welcomes the idea of "student assessment programs in higher education" stating that "properly designed and administered, [they] can be crucial tools for diagnosing student and institutional needs, improving instruction and counseling services, and designing long-range plans" (p. 33). But the NEA stresses that such programs should be "designed institutionally rather than by the state," "planned, designed, implemented, and evaluated by faculty," and "implemented in accordance with collective bargaining contracts where such contracts exist" (p.33). In addition, such programs need to be "sufficiently flexible to accommodate the cultural, economic, and linguistic diversity among students,... provide tests appropriate for students with identified learning disabilities, [and] provide faculty with information to improve individual student learning styles and aptitude" (p. 33).

The resolution specifies the characteristics of student assessment programs in higher education that receive the association's support:

a. They are accompanied by adequate funding for remedial programs and advisement.

b. Remedial programs are designed and provided to meet the deficiencies identified through assessment.

c. Advisement is designed and provided to link the remediation of individual students to the completion of their degrees, certificates, or other appropriate courses of study. (p. 33)

At the same time, the resolution opposes other characteristics of student assessment programs:

a. The use of student assessment programs to deny access to or exclude students from educational opportunities.

b. The use of any single test to deny access to regular credit classes.

c. The use of student assessment programs for the purpose of evaluating faculty, academic programs, or institutions. (p. 33)

This NEA resolution was first passed in 1995, well before the introduction of No Child Left Behind. It was revised in 2001 prior to the passage of that bill, which enormously expanded the use of standardized tests in educational settings. Since that time a number of controversies have arisen among both our K–12 members and higher education members because of efforts to impose accountability and assessment schemes that rely too heavily on simplistic measures such as standardized tests and single assessments. As inappropriate as these proposals are in K–12 education, they are even more inappropriate in higher education situations where the goal is not simply to learn content but also to develop critical thinking and interpretive skills.

**GK:** What advice would you give your member campuses for effectively negotiating the tensions between assessment for improvement and assessment for accountability?
Larry: The AFT believes that efforts to use student learning outcomes for either improvement or accountability should start with a clear recognition of the thoughtful work on curriculum and assessment already going on at most campuses and should avoid perpetually reinventing the wheel. Because institutional missions and student bodies are so diverse, and because we need to capitalize on the mix of faculty expertise particular to each institution, the AFT believes it best to conduct the process of program development at the college or university level rather than cross-institutionally. The AFT also believes that front-line faculty members must drive the process to ensure that educational practices are effective and practical in the real-life classroom. As a result, many union members have been suspicious of cross-institutional assessment mechanisms imposed from the outside, and our members have mixed opinions about assessments grounded in intellectual skills as opposed to subject matter.

For example, tests such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) may offer some valuable information pertaining to a particular sample of students in a specific time or place. However, questions have been raised about whether the CLA is a reliable assessment of the growth in student learning from one year to the next and about the risks inherent in drawing sweeping conclusions from student samples and employing those conclusions to evaluate institution-wide student learning and teacher performance.

AFT members overwhelmingly favor reasonable accountability mechanisms, but they also believe that accountability standards need to flow naturally from clearly delineated and mutually understood responsibilities. That is why our recently published student success statement lists the roles and responsibilities of four types of stakeholders—institutional administrators, faculty members, students, and government.

To ensure that curriculum and assessment materials translate into real gains for students, the AFT believes the following:

- Faculty should be responsible for leading discussions about how the elements of student success are further articulated and refined to help students succeed.
- The implementation process should respect the principles of academic freedom.
- Professional staff should be closely involved in the process, particularly with regard to how the elements will be articulated vis-à-vis academic advising and career counseling.
- Implementing common elements for student success should both respect differences among disciplines and programs as well as strive for an integrated educational experience for students.
- New curriculum frameworks, assessments, or accountability mechanisms should not re-create the wheel.

Assessment of the effectiveness of this process should focus on student success, academic programs, and student services, but it should not be used to evaluate the performance of individual faculty or staff.

Mark: The NEA strongly believes that assessment programs should be used to improve student learning, teaching, and general curriculum design, not just to highlight a particular measure of student outcomes. With this in mind, our advice is to understand that the tension between accountability and improvement does not have to be confrontational, which makes the matter moot in practical terms. To be clear, the association is not opposed to basic accountability, although we would describe accountability as taking responsibility for one's professional activity. In colleges and universities across the
country, faculty hold themselves accountable to a wide variety of standards—disciplinary, departmental, and peer review—and have very good reasons to resist systems imposed on them by nonpractitioners. Such resistance is not a rejection of accountability but rather a recognition that faculty practitioners combine the training and the experience to best determine how subject matter is to be taught. It is important that our members continue to insist that programs on their campuses be appropriately tailored to the circumstances of their campuses—the students and the institutional missions.

Gary: In the current context, there is great potential not only for increased tension between assessment for improvement and assessment for accountability but also for the latter to force out the former. At the institutional level, most colleges and universities have undertaken some sort of restructuring of academic programs in the last decade. We are seeing and can anticipate not just restructuring but the elimination of academic programs as well. At the state level and institutional levels, we are also seeing pressure to increase “productivity.” Both patterns threaten to subsume formative assessment into high stakes accountability, with substantial costs to enhancing student learning outcomes.

Another pattern in the current context that undermines a focus on student learning is the push for greater productivity from state legislatures as well as from system-wide and institutional boards. Productivity is generally conceived quite narrowly and in the short term as increased credit-hour production and/or graduation rates. The focus is on increasing throughput. The two easiest strategies for realizing such productivity are to reduce standards or to recruit students who are more likely to graduate. Neither strategy enhances student learning.

In a time of fiscal constraint, with the focus on cutting costs, unfortunately, colleges and universities pursue practices that run counter to what we know works in enhancing student learning outcomes. For example, what we are seeing nationally, even in difficult financial times, is a continued increase in the share of administrative as compared to educational expenditures (on personnel and activities). The Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity, and Accountability (http://www.deltacosproject.org/) has tracked this pattern nationally, as have various higher education scholars. It is important to emphasize that these shifts are not primarily a function of increases in spending on student affairs programs and personnel who work with students to increase student learning outcomes; those expenditures are basically flat.

Unfortunately, the current accountability push to do more with less is translating into trying to educate more students with fewer full-time faculty, increasing class size, and decreasing the amount of time faculty have to be available to students. As for student support services, the push for greater productivity can lead to cuts in demonstrably effective initiatives, such as learning communities, and it could swell advisor/student ratios, reducing the time that academic support staff have to spend with students.

One step toward resolving the tension between assessment for improvement and assessment for accountability is to acknowledge it—and to explicitly address the sorts of tradeoffs involved in various policy choices and organizational practices. Some metrics of productivity that colleges and universities are adopting are actually counterproductive to student learning. Pushing departments and individual faculty to increase credit-hour production and number of classes runs counter to producing better student learning outcomes. If faculty members are spending more time in larger classes and less time outside of class with students—in labs, service learning opportunities, and informal settings—that does not serve to enhance student learning outcomes. If colleges and departments hire more just-in-time adjunct faculty to teach students and do not provide them with the time or space to meet with students and to work with other faculty to enhance the curriculum, student learning outcomes can suffer.

It is important that our members continue to insist that programs on their campuses be appropriately tailored to the circumstances of their campuses—the students and the institutional missions.

Mark Smith
In order to change the status quo, institutions must prioritize and reward practices that enhance student learning, even if in the short term they are more labor and costly. It takes an investment to substantially enhance the yield in student learning outcomes. That means concentrating attention on and tracking patterns in personnel and other expenditures that are designed to stimulate greater learning. It means investing in enhancing student learning outcomes, not just in assessing them. To do otherwise, to have assessment without investment, is to have the academic equivalent of an unfunded mandate.

**GK:** What approaches seem to be effective in encouraging unionized faculty to become involved in assessments of student learning outcomes and in using the results to improve teaching and learning?

**Mark:** The best approach for any institution on any issue is to talk with the union and offer to work to develop the issue. That means faculty leaders need to work together with administrators as assessment systems are being developed. This is in contrast to approaches where an administration develops a system, or has a system imposed by an outside entity such as the state government, and demands that faculty follow this new system. Outside imposition has been attempted too often and violates basic principles of faculty governance and academic freedom. The NEA’s principles of faculty governance hold that faculty members in higher education should have primary responsibility to

1. Determine the curriculum, subject matter, methods of instruction, and other academic standards and processes;
2. Establish the requirements for earning degrees and certificates, and authorize the administration and governing board to grant the same;
3. Exercise, where the faculty deems it appropriate, primary responsibility for determining the status of colleagues, especially via appointment, reappointment, and tenure; and
4. Establish procedures for awarding promotions, sabbaticals, research support, and other rewards or perquisites (National Education Association, 2011).

The principle of academic freedom applies not only to the content of what is taught but to the approach taken by faculty to teach the content. These are academic decisions that need to be left to the academic practitioner. It is also important to remember that in most cases faculty do not need to be encouraged to develop methods and systems to improve teaching and learning. It is what they do every day of their work lives. Many faculty in both unionized and nonunionized settings have developed quite sophisticated systems of assessing student learning outcomes, and they adjust those systems constantly to changing circumstances.

**Gary:** As a baseline for understanding how to get unionized faculty more involved in assessment and in using assessment, it is worth remembering that the productivity push discussed earlier has reduced the time and the incentive for faculty to get involved in student learning assessment teams and activities. Another baseline condition is the continued growth in the proportion of faculty working in contingent positions. Both of these conditions make it harder to get faculty and unions involved in assessing student learning outcomes and utilizing the results of those assessments to plan and implement curricular and pedagogical improvements.
At present, in collective bargaining agreements and in academic reward systems, the focus is on classroom teaching and advising. There is too little consideration of the time and energy faculty members put into assessing student learning and revising curriculum and pedagogy accordingly. In a unionized setting, this sort of work should be contractually identified as part of the basic instructional responsibility of faculty members—counting as much as teaching a class. Moreover, it is common in collective bargaining agreements for there to be consideration of pay or release time for developing an on-line course; there should be the same recognition of learning outcomes assessment work.

Another mechanism that can enhance faculty involvement in assessing student learning is the memorandum of agreement. Not uncommonly, collective bargaining agreements have additional, nonbinding letters of agreement surrounding some aspect of the institutional work. Typically, such memoranda involve the formation of a joint labor-management study group. Student learning assessment would be a natural focal point for such a letter of agreement.

Moreover, it would be innovative for an administration and a faculty union, perhaps in conjunction with an academic senate, to develop a grant proposal focused on enhancing student learning outcomes. A similar approach could be utilized to advance the redesign of learning environments along the lines of the Red Balloon project of the AASCU (American Association of State Colleges and Universities). This would be a variation on a labor-management study group that would provide incentive for doing the work.

The current structure of academic employment compromises the ability of faculty to engage extensively and meaningfully in assessing student learning and fostering improvements accordingly. Tenure track faculty attend to the professional reward structure, and those institutional pressures limit their involvement in such assessment work. Similarly, for the large numbers of contingent faculty teaching a majority of classes in the academy, the terms of their employment also undercut involvement in assessment work. Involvement in curriculum planning and in discussing, assessing, analyzing, and seeking to improve student learning beyond the individual classroom is not in the job description of most contingent faculty. Furthermore, the all-too-often physical reality of their employment—no office space or infrastructure that would embed them in the life of the department—effectively prevents them from having any substantial role or engagement in departmental thinking, decision making, and work with regard to assessing student learning.

The extensive use of non-tenure track faculty who lack a variety of professional conditions of work makes a focus on student learning highly problematic. Engaging students requires engaging faculty. Part of the scope of responsibilities for contingent faculty could be defined in contracts to include assessment, analysis, and redesign focused on student learning. Such responsibilities could count for a particular number of classes. Similarly, contingent faculty should be involved in student advising and curricular planning, and collective bargaining agreements’ definition of responsibilities is one vehicle for achieving that.

In an academy increasingly focused on reducing labor costs and concentrating labor on classroom teaching and credit-hour production, it is important to advance a different conception of productivity—one defined in terms of learning outcomes attained and dropout rates reduced. The challenge is that producing better learning outcomes is an inherently labor intensive endeavor.
Larry: Resources must be adequate to the tasks and challenges we face in terms of helping students attain the skills and competencies demanded by this century. First, in order to help students succeed, faculty members need to work under professional conditions: a living wage, adequate benefits, job security, academic freedom, the ability to participate in shared governance, and access to professional development. College and university administrators are responsible for securing adequate funding for their institutions. Once funding is obtained, it is their job to ensure that resources are targeted first and foremost to instruction and support services that help students advance toward their goals.

Faculty and staff members also have key responsibilities—they are responsible for working individually and collaboratively with all their colleagues to produce a quality educational experience, to develop curricula that are academically strong, and to provide the tools students need to be successful in their lives. Students are responsible for doing their course work and engaging professionals to help them in their individual classes and overall course of study. Federal, state, and local governments are responsible for providing sufficient public funding to support general operations (traditionally a state responsibility) and to ensure that college is affordable to students (both a state and a federal responsibility). The AFT’s student success policy statement explores these roles in greater detail, urging all stakeholders to collaborate on institutional accountability mechanisms tracked back to the roles and responsibilities.

GK: What are two or three other key issues to get faculty involved in student learning outcomes assessment?

Gary: One critical issue that must be addressed is responding effectively to the changing demographics of the student body. This has profound implications for faculty work. A second has to do with conceptions of student engagement in learning as it relates to modal patterns by which students go to college. In both cases, we must also deal with the relationships between college readiness, success in college, and success after college in graduate and professional school as well as in the workplace.

As the country pursues the big goal of dramatically increasing the proportion of the age group that has a college education, it confronts at the same time a fundamental change in the demographics of the student population. Virtually all of the growth in traditional college-age students in the next 10 to 15 years will be among lower-income, first-generation students of color (as well as of immigrants)—students that colleges and universities have served the least effectively in the past. This presents a particular challenge in efforts to affect student learning outcomes. It also poses a challenge in facilitating the adjustment of faculty members to this new student population (as well as to the continued growth of nontraditional students, now arguably the new traditional students). For this "new majority" of students, there is a particular need for mentors and enduring relationships. That, in turn, points to the need for institutional policies and programs that encourage and reward interaction between faculty and students.

Student engagement is important to student success and satisfaction in a whole range of areas—and student engagement is a function of engaging faculty. Thomas Jefferson had it right in constructing the University of Virginia in such a manner that faculty and students would live in close proximity on "the lawn." After all, that type of connection and interaction is evident in exemplary programs aimed at increasing student engagement and success. But when a high proportion of students are nontraditional (or the new traditional) and are living off campus, new models are needed for engaging faculty and students. Currently, one of the most effective ways of encouraging faculty to work with students outside the classroom is to involve students in a variety of research and internship opportunities on and
off campus. Whether that means students working with faculty on research projects or experimenting with engaging pedagogies in the classroom, connecting faculty and students in authentic settings—in activities that are real and that have an impact beyond the classroom—could be a good way to engage faculty, just as one of the high-impact instructional practices is to embed learning in genuine workplaces.

**Larry:** A critical need for front-line faculty and staff is for correct and up-to-date information about the range of accountability and assessment measures proposed or implemented so they can develop their own local capacity to respond and make constructive recommendations in this area. To accomplish this, the AFT has developed an open website called “What Should Count?” (www.whatsshouldcount.org), which includes a clearinghouse of information about accreditation standards, major assessment and accountability proposals, state and international accountability systems, and the latest news in the field. As the site matures over the coming year, it will include more analysis and debate to supplement the basic information provided.

The AFT is also beginning to work with local affiliates to identify areas where the union can promote practices on campus that advance student success through collective bargaining, labor-management agreements, interchange with the faculty senate, and other shared governance mechanisms and direct union activities. Such activities might include union-sponsored mentoring, tutoring, and professional development around teaching issues. There are many other possibilities as well. For example, unions representing locals in both K–12 and higher education can have a forum in New York and other cities for K–12 and higher education faculty to discuss aligning K–12 exit standards with the requirements of introductory college courses. Key members of faculty and staff unions can work collaboratively with other campus leaders to coordinate learning objectives with student assessment criteria. As key actors on the political front, unions can mobilize stakeholders to generate a more sophisticated understanding of student success, such as pointing to the long-term quality of student tracking of students over a longer period of time. Most of all, unions can generate activism to promote a better public support for instruction.

Finally, AFT leaders believe the national union can make a contribution to public debate on issues of student retention and attainment. While acknowledging that the current measurement of graduation rates—the IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey—is deeply flawed, the union leadership fully agrees that retention is not what it should be and that action is needed to improve the situation. At the same time, making progress in any of these areas—goal setting, curriculum, teaching, retention, or assessment—will need to begin at tables where faculty and staff members hold positions of leadership.

The union staff sometimes tells people inside and outside the union that genuine discussion of issues such as these has to begin with a willingness to “hear a discouraging word” about our preconceptions. The AFT believes such discussions have to begin in many more places than they do today. Front-line faculty and staff will not agree with every idea that comes down the pike, nor should they; but they and the AFT are strongly committed to engaging in constructive efforts to improve student success.

**Mark:** Throughout this discussion, all three organizations have emphasized the importance of meaningful faculty and staff involvement in the design and implementation of any system of student learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning and achieve real accountability. This requires a strengthening of shared governance structures and practices, a renewed commitment to academic freedom in all its aspects, and a willingness on the part of administrations to work with faculty and staff unions. Unions must
also agree to work with administrations to achieve progress in designing and implementing systems that improve teaching and learning within the parameters of the institutions' missions. All elements of the campus should be united in rejecting the outside imposition of overly simplistic approaches. That type of system distorts education, dumbs down curriculum, and substitutes bureaucratic-administrative decision making for educational process. It violates the principle of academic freedom by telling faculty what and how to teach. And finally it destroys the very purpose of higher education. You cannot build a knowledge base for the future if you only fund current preoccupations. The last thing American higher education needs is a federalized system that brings the mistakes of the No Child Left Behind approach into what is still the finest system of higher education in the world.

One of the fundamental strengths of that system is the diversity of institutions that respond to the educational needs of an increasingly diverse population. We can respond to the pressures of the moment and improve our campuses, if faculty, staff, and administrators in both unionized and nonunionized settings work together and create the working conditions that foster the richest learning environments possible. This can be done, but not by standardized systems imposed by outside entities.

GK: Larry, Gary, and Mark, on behalf of my NILOA colleagues and those committed to improving the student experience through systematic inquiry, thank you so much for clarifying the positions of your respective organizations. As with any large scale effort to change what happens on the ground on a college or university campus, the approaches to student learning outcomes assessment have to be sensitive to local conditions and must be designed and implemented by those who will sustain the good work. Unionized faculty represent a large fraction of the professional staff in postsecondary institutions. Their leadership, cooperation, and participation in student learning outcomes assessment and the large student success agenda is essential. It is reassuring to know that the three largest faculty unions are supportive of these priorities and are willing to work toward these desired ends.

Unionized faculty represent a large fraction of the professional staff in postsecondary institutions. Their leadership, cooperation, and participation in student learning outcomes assessment and the large student success agenda is essential.

George Kuh
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NILOA Mission

NILOA's primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

NILOA Occasional Paper Series

NILOA Occasional Papers are commissioned to examine contemporary issues that will inform the academic community of the current state-of-the-art of assessing learning outcomes in American higher education. The authors are asked to write for a general audience in order to provide comprehensive, accurate information about how institutions and other organizations can become more proficient at assessing and reporting student learning outcomes for the purposes of improving student learning and responsibly fulfilling expectations for transparency and accountability to policy makers and other external audiences.

Comments and questions about this paper should be sent to sprovez2@illinois.edu.
About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website went live on February 11, 2009, www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.
- One of the co-principal NILOA investigators, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and 2009 to 2010. He also served as president of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001.
- Peter Ewell joined NILOA as a senior scholar in November 2009.

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