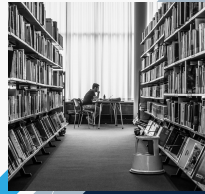


Effective Assessment in Higher Education

Building meaningful, sustainable assessment systems that move institutions beyond compliance toward continuous improvement.



1



Tiphonie Ivey, Ed.D.

The University Compliance Solution
Owner and Principal Consultant
Partner with higher education institutions to achieve accreditation, strengthen assessment practices, and meet compliance requirements so they can secure revenue and mitigate risk.

- Over 10 years of experience in accreditation, and compliance.
- Successfully guided institutions through accreditation, and assessment for:
 - Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE)
 - Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS)
 - Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)
 - Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)
 - Northwest Accreditation Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)
 - Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
- Deep, firsthand understanding of the unique challenges of small – mid-size colleges and universities.
- Practical insights into accreditation, regulatory expectations, assessment best practices, and sustainable compliance strategies.

2

Presentation Overview

- Develop strategies for a practical assessment process that supports continuous institutional improvement.
- Streamline assessment workflows to reduce inefficiencies and minimize frustration.
- Implement approaches that ensure assessment data translates into meaningful improvements across the institution.
- Shift from a compliance-focused mindset to a culture of purposeful, sustainable assessment practice.



3

Assessment is the systematic process used to understand and improve student learning

(Angelo, 1995).



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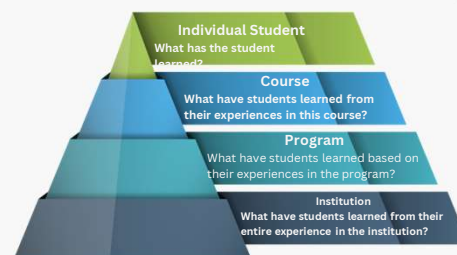
Connecting Assessment to Student Learning

- **Systematic Process**
 - Assessment is ongoing and intentional
- **Understanding**
 - Provides a clear picture of learning and identifies areas where learning has not occurred.
- **Improving**
 - Results are used to improve learning.
- **Student Learning**
 - This is the core purpose of assessment. It connects directly with why faculty teach and why students enroll.



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Levels of Assessment



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Case Study: Rebuilding an Assessment System

The Challenge

- Assessment plan was research-based but not actionable
- System relied on disconnected research, processes, and data sources
- Complexity overwhelmed faculty and staff
- Lack of integration led to inefficiency and inconsistent practices
- Collaboration focused on simplifying, aligning, and rebuilding the process



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Collaborative Assessment Process Review

- Structured interviews to reveal current assessment realities and challenges.
- Mapping differences between actual and ideal processes.
- Engaging faculty and staff through a collaborative process to ensure buy-in in assessment refinements.
- Use an inclusive approach to strengthen assessment quality and secure commitment to ongoing improvement.



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The Wisconsin-Madison Question Framework

The University of Wisconsin-Madison uses four guiding questions:

What?

What are students expected to learn?

Where?

Where in the curriculum do students learn and apply these outcomes?

How?

How do faculty know students are learning what we expect?

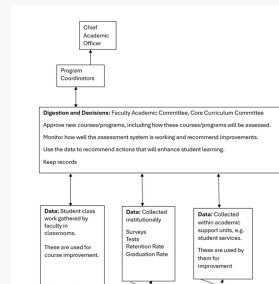
So What?

So what do the results mean for program improvement?

This question sequence provides clarity on expectations while encouraging critical thinking and reflection about the assessment process.

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Diagram of Assessment System



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A Simple, Effective Framework

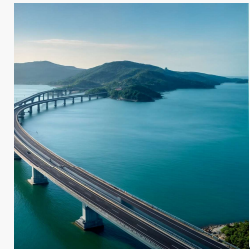
Maki (2004) outlines a straightforward process that works across institutional contexts:



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Program Goals

- Describe the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values graduates are expected to develop.
- Broad statements, not written in measurable terms.
- Serve as the bridge between the mission and the learning outcomes.



"Goals state what you, your colleagues, or your college aim to achieve. Goals can describe aims outside the teaching/learning process as well as within it" (Suskie, 2018)

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Learning Outcomes

- Clearly state how students demonstrate mastery and meet graduation requirements.
- Specify the knowledge, skills, and values students should achieve by the end of the program.

Key Components

- Opening phrase:** "Students will..."
- Action verb:** Measurable verb (e.g., from Bloom's Taxonomy).
- Learning Statement:** What students should know, do, or value.



Curriculum Maps

- Depicts alignment between the program's curriculum and its student learning outcomes (Massa & Kasimatis, 2017).
- Outlines the path students follow from entry to graduation.
- Identifies where program learning outcomes (PLOs) are introduced, reinforced, and mastered in required courses.
- Shows how often students are exposed to each PLO across the curriculum.

Learning Outcomes	Required Courses							
	Prep 001	Prep 002	Prep 003	Prep 004	Prep 005	Prep 006	Prep 007	Prep 008
Summarize the central aspects of the history of knowledge	x			x	x	x	x	
Identify biological bases of behavior and development	x			x	x		x	
Write an research report				x			x	x

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Improving Non-Academic Assessment

SMART Goals

- Focus on increasing, improving, reducing, saving, making, or developing something within the department.

Objectives and Outcomes

- Develop 3 - 5 objectives that describe the department's primary functions.
- Outcomes are required **only** for departments involved in student learning (e.g., Registrar, Library, Student Services and Student Life).
- Develop 1 - 2 learning outcomes for those applicable departments.

Measures

- Use direct or indirect measures to assess three areas:
 - Department effectiveness
 - Department efficiency
 - Student satisfaction
- Do not measure items outside the department's scope of control.

Targets

- For each measure established, set a performance target that indicates the expected level of achievement.

Eliminating Ineffective Assessment Practices



Meaningless Assessment Data

If student achievement is not measured against clear learning outcomes, the resulting data lacks meaning and cannot guide improvement.



Ineffective Curriculum Mapping

Learning outcomes that are not clearly linked to specific courses or programs fail to give faculty actionable insights.



Missed Improvement Opportunities

Not discussing the end of each course eliminates a key moment for reflection, refinement, and continuous improvement.



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Shifting the Narrative

- Encouraged leaders to move away from "we assess because accreditors require it".
- Reframed assessment as a toll for studying and improving the curriculum.
- Helping faculty and staff see the value of assessment beyond compliance.
- Strengthening an assessment culture supports continuous improvement and accountability.



Leveraging Existing Structure for Assessment

Faculty Meeting

- Integrate assessment discussion into regular meeting agendas.
- Review identified strengths and weaknesses.
- Select one weakness and pinpoint where it appears in the curriculum (Walvoord, 2010).
- Develop a strategy for improvement, establish a plan and monitor progress.
- Document the discussion.

Adjunct Involvement

- Ask adjuncts to submit a brief report on students' strengths and weaknesses as part of their grade report.
- Hold two short meetings each semester to discuss assessment findings and next steps.

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Shifting from Compliance to Faculty Ownership

- Let faculty drive academic assessment.
- When assessment originates from administration or accreditation mandates, engagement and effectiveness suffer dramatically.



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When Faculty Choose Assessment, Culture Changes

- Voluntary, faculty grassroots adoption of learning assessment practices leads to a genuine “culture of assessment” (Weiner, 2009).
- When assessment is embedded in the institutional culture rather than imposed, it transforms from burden to opportunity.



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Key Functions of a Strong Assessment System

- Approving new courses and academic programs.
- Supporting and coaching assessment efforts across all levels.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the overall assessment system.
- Collecting, explaining, and sharing assessment findings with key decision makers.
- Recommending strategies to improve student learning outcomes.
- Maintaining records and preparing assessment reports for internal and external audiences.



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Assessment Resources

Resource	Link/ Citation
LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes	https://www.aacu.org/trending-topics/what-is-liberal-education
Degree Qualifications Profile	https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/dqp.pdf
Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Student Learning and Development Outcomes	https://www.cas.edu/student-learning-development-outcomes.html
Bloom's Taxonomy	Krathwohl, D. & Anderson, L.W. (Eds.). (2001). <i>A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives</i> . Allyn & Bacon.
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment	https://www.nihoa.org/index.html
Assessment Institute in Indianapolis	https://www.assessmentinstitute.indianapolis.iu.edu/

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Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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