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Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education

Capella University's Journey Toward Sustained Excellence in Assessment

Jaclyn Zacharias, Nancy Ackerman, and Christine S. Yates

Institutional Context

CAPELLA UNIVERSITY IS AN ACCREDITED ONLINE UNIVERSITY WITH A MISSION to extend access to high-quality bachelor's, master's, specialist, doctoral, and certificate programs for adults who seek to maximize their personal and professional potential. This mission is fulfilled through innovative programs that are responsive to the needs of adult learners and involve active, engaging, challenging, and relevant learning experiences offered in a variety of delivery modes.

All Capella curricula are competency-based, defined by scholar-practitioner faculty, and aligned to the expectations and standards of professional associations and accreditors, state licensing boards, and respected employers. Capella offers academic programming in the fields of business; information technology; education; nursing and health sciences; public administration; counseling and therapy, human services and social work, and psychology.

Integration Among Curriculum and Assessment

Capella University's assessment system is modeled on the assessment triangle (cognition, observation, and interpretation) and is operationalized through a fully embedded assessment model (FEAM). Assessment is one component in our academic quality framework, a logic model articulating the elements of the educational ecosystem in terms of input, output, outcome, and impact. The assessment system is founded on clearly stated and defined outcomes at the university, offering, and course level; consistent development of and use of scoring guides; and a tight alignment structure between all the curricular elements.

Outcomes. University outcomes clearly state what learners at all degree levels are expected to demonstrate during their education. Program- and specialization-level learning outcomes express the expectations of the discipline and measurable performance standards. Competencies articulate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions learners are expected to demonstrate and are assessed in multiple assignments in courses.

Scoring Guides. The purpose of a scoring guide is to provide clear, measurable criteria and grading information for each assignment. Faculty use these criterion-referenced scoring guides to directly assess the demonstration of each competency in every

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Assessment Update

Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education

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assignment. The use of standard scoring guides in all sections helps ensure grading consistency across faculty and over time. Faculty judge competency demonstration as reflecting one of four performance levels: nonperformance, basic, proficient, and distinguished.

Alignment Leading to Measurement of Learning. Capella's FEAM embeds curricular expectations—in the form of course competencies aligned to program outcomes—into every graded assignment and assessment instrument. Scoring guide criteria are aligned to competencies and are, therefore, used as measures of outcome and competency demonstration. As a result, faculty judgments can be aggregated over time as a measure of learning at the unit, course, and program level and builds a rich context for interpreting data to improve the learning experience.

Using Measurement of Learning to Evaluate Program Health

Capella conducts regularly scheduled reviews at different frequencies and levels of detail that include data trend analysis, interpretation, and action plan development as needed. The two primary reviews are Academic Program Review (APR) and Learner Performance Review (LPR). Additionally, Capella uses measurement of learning to facilitate transparency to both internal and external audiences.

Assessment is one component in our academic quality framework, a logic model articulating the elements of the educational ecosystem in terms of input, output, outcome, and impact.



Academic Program Review. APR is a holistic analysis of the health of a particular academic offering using the Academic Quality Framework. APRs are conducted every five years by faculty in collaboration with assessment specialists, accreditation specialists, product managers, institutional effectiveness analysts, and others as needed. This team analyzes aggregated competency demonstration and learning outcomes assessment data; alumni survey results; end-of-course evaluation (EOCE) results; a quarterly experience survey that measures learner satisfaction with overall experience at Capella; faculty course evaluation results; faculty performance, enrollment, persistence, and completion rates; and additional measures as appropriate. They also conduct an in-depth review of curriculum elements, course sequencing, and external standards and monitor the success of previously made improvements against goals. The team develops recommendations to address any issues identified and presents these to the dean for resource prioritization.

Learner Performance Review. Assessment specialists conduct LPRs for all academic offerings; these involve an in-depth review of each course in a program or specialization every two to three years, or more frequently if needed for specialized accreditations. The assessment specialists produce a report showing aggregated performance data for each learning outcome and each course competency in every course; they include additional review as needed of assignment-level performance, course revision history, curricular-assessment alignments, and EOCE data. The report includes analysis of data and recommendations for revisions to the overall offering, specific courses, and/or specific course activities as appropriate. A team including the assessment specialist, program director, faculty, academic associates, and accreditation specialist discuss the report and recommendations and determine action plans for moving forward.

Transparency. Capella has a public-facing website (CapellaResults.com) which displays aggregated learning and career outcomes data for Capella's academic offerings. Additionally, every learner at Capella has a personalized competency map which shows their academic progress on each course competency, so they can build on their strengths and improve in needed areas. Learners can share Competency Maps on social media

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Peer Review in Assessment and Improvement: An Overview of Five Principles to Promote Effective Practice

Stephen P. Hundley and Caleb J. Keith

IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF *Assessment Update*, we profile select recipients of the 2021 *Excellence in Assessment* (EIA) Designation, a national-level recognition co-sponsored by VSA Analytics, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). As described on NILOA's website (<https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/eia/>), the EIA Designation recognizes institutions that successfully integrate assessment practices throughout the institution, provide evidence of student learning outcomes, and use assessment results to guide institutional decision-making and improve student performance. This issue features articles from some of the institutions receiving the 2021 honor, including IUPUI, our home institution.

As many readers know, IUPUI also hosts the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, the oldest and largest U.S. higher education event focused on assessment and improvement. Following two years offering a virtual engagement to accommodate disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, **we will resume our in-person Assessment Institute, held October 9–11, 2022, at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown Hotel.** We look forward to presenting an array of workshops, keynote presentations, concurrent and poster sessions, and networking opportunities at the 2022 Assessment Institute. Learn more about this year's event, including registration

details, schedule overview, and program tracks and topics, at our website, <https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/index.html>.

The theme of our Editors' Notes for 2022 is "Peer Review in Assessment and Improvement: Five Principles to Promote Effective Practice." Peer review has long been used in the higher education sector to serve a variety of purposes and meet the needs of several audiences. Activities supportive of assessment and improvement also increasingly rely on peers to offer credible subject matter expertise in respective contexts, provide judgments, develop recommendations for enhanced performance, and make contributions to creating and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. The five principles to promote effective practice in peer review for assessment and improvement are:

1. Recognize the purpose of the peer review process in higher education assessment and improvement.
2. Value the multitude of perspectives, contexts, and methods related to assessment and improvement.
3. Adopt a consultative approach to the peer review process.
4. Make effective judgements using inclusive sources and credible evidence.
5. Provide relevant feedback to stakeholders.

Principle #1: Recognize the purpose of the peer review process in higher education assessment and improvement

One enduring feature of the higher education sector is its use of peers in processes to generate, evaluate, disseminate, and curate knowledge for a variety of purposes and audiences. Peers are often individuals who are regarded as subject matter experts in a particular domain, and they usually have educational and professional preparation and experiences comparable to those desirous of and reliant on the peer's perspectives, judgment, and feedback. Depending on the purpose of the peer review process, peers may be local in nature (e.g., within the institution), represent a valued external constituency (e.g., community members, employers, or alumni), or have an "arms-length" distance from the activity under review (e.g., colleagues from the discipline or profession working in other institutional settings). The type of review informs which peer(s) are appropriate to engage. Indeed, peers have the potential to contribute to a variety of worthwhile activities, including reviews of teaching; evaluations of academicians for tenure and promotion purposes; making judgements about the significance and quality of scholarly contributions; as part of periodic, internally oriented program review processes; as colleagues serving on accreditation teams; and, increasingly, as part of assessment and improvement activities taking

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Reflections on California State University East Bay's Excellence in Assessment Designation through the Lens of Student Learning and Success

Kevin W. Kaatz, Ana Almeida, Sarah Aubert, Paul Carpenter, Caron Inouye, Danika LeDuc, Balaraman Rajan, Julie Stein, and Fanny Yeung

Institutional Context

INTRODUCTION TO CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY East Bay (CSUEB). Part of the 23-campus California State University system, CSUEB is a designated Hispanic-, Asian-American-Native-American-Pacific-Islander-, and Minority-Serving Institution, serving a high proportion of commuter, transfer, first-generation, international, and non-traditional students. With one of the most diverse student populations in the United States, the university has a strong commitment to building a culture of equitable and inclusive teaching, learning, and assessment.

Summary of ILO Assessment Integration into Existing University Assessment Processes. Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were developed campus-wide with faculty, staff, and students and approved by the Academic Senate in 2012. Cross-disciplinary faculty teams collaborated to build an ILO assessment infrastructure that integrated with existing academic, general education, graduate, and co-curricular assessment. As part of that process, multi-disciplinary faculty developed, piloted, and implemented assessment rubrics for every ILO following a university-wide plan. Today, the campus has a robust campus-wide assessment process including closing-the-loop activities supported by multiple faculty committees and campus leadership.

Focus of Article. CSUEB's award of the Excellence in Assessment (EIA)

designation is a credit to the multidisciplinary collaboration of faculty who shepherded our assessment processes and resulting institutional improvements and growth. Looking ahead, our direction is to increase active learning, become a more unified campus around student success

By improving assignment design to be transparent, anti-racist, and equitable, we better serve our diverse students by giving them the opportunity to be more reflective on their learning, which more authentically represents their learning.



approaches, include more student voices in the assessment process, and build in more assessment of student learning experiences outside the classroom that align to our ILOs.

Top EIA Assessment Achievements Were Pointed Toward Student Success

University-wide Engagement. Hundreds of faculty members from the university's four colleges and university libraries have been involved in all aspects of ILO assessment, including rubric development, collection, and evaluation. Faculty from every college also developed ILO assignment guides for every ILO, which were shared with the campus community.

Peer-to-peer Discussions of Effective Assignment Design. University-wide engagement extended to funded professional development opportunities in the

form of assignment design workshops providing faculty with the time, space, structure, and funding to create tangible and concrete assignments that aligned with the ILOs and deepened student learning. Faculty coaches reviewed assignments, explained learning outcomes,

and brainstormed creative options to help their faculty peers meet the ILO in a particular discipline. Faculty implemented different strategies to elicit student work that clearly demonstrated their learning of that outcome. These facilitated peer-to-peer coaching sessions improving assignment design proved to be a critical part of the assessment process.

Closing the Loop. Closing-the-loop discussions took place in all colleges following the aggregation and reporting of assessment data. Faculty discussed improving pedagogical practices, assignment design, and the format of assignments (e.g., formative vs. summative, scaffolding, self and peer assessment). The results provided a starting point for rich conversations among faculty as to how they define, understand, and use the ILO rubrics to improve engagement and demonstrate student learning.

University-wide Growth. It is clear from this university-wide work that faculty have a passion for student learning and a desire to dedicate more time and energy to best support students' learning. Campus-wide activities and discussions provided forums to remind students that they are doing good, albeit challenging, work. It showed faculty are not alone in helping students attain these learning outcomes. This work also allowed faculty the chance to learn more about their own institution and to realize that they are working collectively toward similar goals. It is also clear that the university as a whole has matured in its collective decision-making ability. We now have a range of faculty and staff highly experienced in assessment who also operate very effectively as a group to make meaningful improvements.

Top Future Directions Are Toward Strengthening Student Success

Assessment Practices that Differentiate Between Teaching and Learning. Engaging students in evidence-based active learning experiences is a priority at CSUEB. Providing students multiple ways to externalize their thinking, with more emphasis on no- or low-stakes assessments, allows us greater insight into student learning and the ability to adapt as needed. We are shifting the metrics of our teaching from "content coverage" to "student mastery." By improving assignment design to be transparent, anti-racist, and equitable, we better serve our diverse students by giving them the opportunity to be more reflective on their learning, which more authentically represents their learning. We are also moving toward the idea that assessment is "student-centered and instructor-supporting." It is our expectation and assumption that improving assignments for assessment purposes will allow for a better understanding of student learning while also pointing out areas for improvement. As part of this, we plan to continue collecting comparative data to show improvement of student learning over time.

Integration of Curriculum and Assessment Processes. We will continue to integrate our curricular and assessment processes in our ongoing work to strengthen student success. This process has intentionally brought together faculty from all over the university at every stage of the process, on every ILO. It is apparent we have a collective responsibility around shaping and developing a student's progress toward any given outcome. This also highlights the need to continue to work together to help better understand the interconnectedness of curriculum and assessment and to provide the most cohesive student experience possible, particularly around the core competencies. Institutional and pedagogical goals will also continue to focus on alignment and supporting student learning and success. As part of this effort, we are evaluating technologies that support a more integrated curriculum development and assessment infrastructure. By better integrating processes into all aspects of curriculum and assessment, faculty have a better understanding of student learning while simultaneously providing CSUEB with the necessary data for accreditation and institutional improvement.

Increased Inclusion of Student Voices in ILO Assessment. Another future direction is to give students more opportunities to engage with the ILO process and listen to their feedback on assessed assignments. As we prepare our students to be life-long learners, a more intentional and structured process for them to reflect on their own development across all the learning outcomes over time will prove useful.

Increased Integration of Experiences Outside of the Classroom. We recognize

students' growth over the course of their college experience extends beyond the classroom to their involvement in activities such as internships and clubs. This engagement contributes to student learning and supports mastery of skills as they apply them in "real-world" settings. We plan to increase assessment across various student experiences over time to gather more on the progression of core competency development. Aligning and assessing students' experiences outside the classroom will also broaden the campus conversation about institutional effectiveness.

CSUEB's President on Assessment Journey. CSUEB President Cathy Sandeen effectively summarized our assessment journey in the August 2021 award announcement. "We know that a Cal State East Bay education is transforming for our students' lives. This honor recognizes how our faculty and staff connect the dots throughout an entire degree program, including our beyond-classroom experiences. The significant collaborations that occur to ensure these learning outcomes are unparalleled and make students' learning equitable, accessible and useful." ■

Kevin W. Kaatz is an associate professor of history, Ana Almeida is an assistant professor and associate director of the Green Biome Institute, Sarah Aubert is the curriculum services project manager, Paul Carpenter is a professor and chair of kinesiology, Caron Inouye is the director of general education and a professor, Danika LeDuc is the associate dean in the College of Science, Balaraman Rajan is an associate professor of management, Julie Stein is the educational effectiveness project manager, and Fanny Yeung is the director of Institutional Effectiveness and Research at California State University East Bay.

Assessment Institute in Indianapolis

Hosted by IUPUI, the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis is the oldest and largest U.S. higher education event focused on assessment and improvement. This year, we will resume our in-person event at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown Hotel October 9–11, 2022.

Learn more at the Assessment Institute website: <https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/>

Nurturing a Culture of Continuous Improvement: Sustaining Excellence in Assessment at the Community College of Baltimore County

Jennifer Kilbourne, Amy Roberts Wilson, Glenda Breaux, and Joaquin G. Martinez

SINCE 2001, COMMUNITY COLLEGE of Baltimore County (CCBC) has had an assessment system in place that draws upon the expertise of assessment professionals and faculty stakeholders to conduct purposeful, systematic, and collaborative assessment at the course, program, and institutional levels. Applying for the renewal of the Sustained Excellence in Assessment award allowed us to re-examine our assessment initiatives through an external lens with the help of the Excellence in Assessment (EIA) designation rubric, and the process revealed areas for improvement. We are honored to have now won the sustained designation in both 2016 and 2021, and we move forward committed to continuous improvement.

Institutional Context

CCBC is a large, multi-campus institution serving more than 45,000 students each year. CCBC offers associate degrees and certificate programs in both career and transfer curricula that complement workforce demand in the Baltimore Region.

The philosophy that all members of the institution share responsibility for improvement of student learning as a collective enterprise guides assessment at CCBC. Collaborative internal reviews and advisory boards work with assessment leaders to monitor best practices, develop assessment resources, and support policies and procedures related to

scheduled stages of the assessment loop. While these entities guide the assessment stages, discipline-faculty teams develop course and program assessment tools and interventions, which are embedded authentically within the classroom. That faculty drive tool development and implementation ensures authentic use and investment in assessment measures. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evalu-

High Impact Practices (HIPs) infusion projects, designed to boost student engagement, success, and retention, provide broad assessment of shared learning outcomes through a data dashboard that allows course, program, and co-curricular stakeholders to disaggregate success and retention rates.



ation (PRE) provides the infrastructure to analyze data used to develop intervention strategies to address learning deficits. These coordinated efforts embed assessment in students' CCBC experience and sustain excellence in assessment at CCBC.

Assessment Strategies Embedded in the CCBC Experience

CCBC's mission and strategic priorities guide institutional assessment. Qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed through the collection of internal survey data, student success data, learning outcomes assessment data, general education outcomes assessment data, and program assessment data. Results determine

intervention strategies in the classroom, guide program improvement, and inform professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. Validation, both internal and external, of assessment instruments ensures the use of high-quality assessment tools and procedures.

CCBC has four primary sets of student learning outcomes that guide all programs of study: core competencies, gen-

eral education (GE) outcomes, program outcomes, and institutional benchmarks. Within each degree, students take both GE and program requirements, where core competencies are fostered. Institutional benchmarks, including course success, retention, completion, and transfer rates, are tracked and reported annually. Combined, these outcomes prepare students with 21st century skills for lifelong learning.

Goals for communication, problem solving, global perspective and social responsibility, and independent learning and personal management are reflected in course-level learning outcomes, general education outcomes, and program-level outcomes. Co-curricular activities and

High Impact Practice infusion projects facilitate the development of these core competencies. These shared learning outcomes form scaffolded infrastructure throughout students' academic and co-curricular experiences.

CCBC intentionally embeds program outcomes in program requirements to ensure students master learning outcomes upon degree completion. All GE courses utilize a common graded assignment that maps both GE and course-level learning outcomes and serves as an authentic assessment tool. On a three-year cycle, student artifacts are scored by trained faculty teams, PRE analyzes and reports data, and faculty teams develop interventions based on the data and plan the next assessment.

Furthermore, multiple targeted assessments work together to capture students' mastery of course, program, and co-curricular shared learning outcomes. Highly enrolled courses assess learning outcomes using faculty-developed and externally validated instruments in Learning Outcomes Assessment projects. Since 1999, CCBC has assessed 50 high-impact (highly enrolled, multi-section) courses through these projects. As a result, intervention strategies have been implemented to improve the learning experience for over 75,000 students.

In addition, academic programs are evaluated through a committee-driven program review process in a five-year cycle. Program review includes curriculum assessment as well as market feasibility analyses. CCBC's program review process uses curriculum mapping to identify and assess program outcomes within program-required courses. Program outcomes assessment projects ensure graduates are meeting outcomes required for entry into the workforce or transfer.

High Impact Practices (HIPs) infusion projects, designed to boost student engagement, success, and retention, provide broad assessment of shared learning outcomes through a data dashboard that allows course, program, and co-curricular stakeholders to disaggregate success and retention rates. While achievement gaps

persist at CCBC, they were significantly decreased in courses such as Biology I: Molecules and Cell (−20%), Fundamentals of Communication (−7%), and Introduction to Psychology (−11%) when HIPs were infused.

Lessons Learned

CCBC benefits from years of thoughtful engagement with assessment practices and policies. As we went through the Excellence in Assessment application process, we were able to examine our assessment infrastructure and processes through an external lens. The EIA scoring rubric was particularly helpful in framing not only the processes involved in assessment excellence, but also engaging the people. During the process we learned we have a robust, multi-level system that is inclusive of many stakeholders, but that some groups do not yet have a seat at the table and others are not included in information sharing. In particular, we learned students have not had a voice in the development and implementation of assessment practices. As a result, student representatives will begin to serve on the General Education Review Board. We also learned that greater integration between Instruction and Student Support Services is required to reap maximal benefit from assessment activities. A reorganization of the college will begin to break down these silos as both areas will now serve under CCBC's Provost, bringing quality learning to the forefront of our mission. CCBC recognizes the central, instrumental role that assessment plays in the life cycle of the academic enterprise. Therefore, we remain attentive to the iterative nature of our work on behalf of our students and appreciate the opportunity to provide

an update of the comprehensive institutional efforts as part of this designation.

Recommendations

CCBC's application for the renewal of the Sustained Excellence in Assessment award embraced the need for continuous improvement by examining our assessment initiatives. CCBC's data-informed decision-making is prevalent; however, institutions can become complacent without continual evaluation. This reapplication exercise pushed us to examine all aspects of our assessment model.

When applying for the EIA designation, think critically about the criteria and develop a plan to address each component of the application from the institution's perspective. Approaches to assessment are different and exciting. The EIA application is a place to highlight strengths and recognize opportunities for improvement. It is also essential to establish a team of assessment experts throughout the college as contributors. CCBC's Learning Outcomes Assessment Advisory Board, composed of faculty, staff, and administrators, guided our process of self-reflection.

While CCBC has been recognized by this esteemed designation, the journey of continuous improvement never ceases. We look forward to engaging faculty, staff, and students with these sustained efforts for an enriched student experience. ■

Jennifer Kilbourne is the dean of curriculum and assessment, Amy Roberts Wilson is the Honors Program director and an associate professor of English and women's studies, Glenda Breaux is the senior director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, and Joaquin G. Martinez is the provost and vice president of instruction at the Community College of Baltimore County.

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Broadening and Deepening a Campus Culture of Assessment at Cameron University

Karla J. Oty

Institutional Context

CAMERON UNIVERSITY (CU) IS A REGIONAL public university located in southwest Oklahoma. CU is an open admission institution at the Associate in Applied Science level with minimal admissions requirements at the Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, and bachelor's degree levels. CU also offers a limited number of master's degrees in the professional areas of teaching, business, and psychology. In Fall 2020, CU's enrollment was 3,471 undergraduate students and 300 graduate students.

Assessment activities at CU began in annual year (AY) 1992–1993 for academic programs and in AY 2008–2009 for units in Student Services. Units have been added to the assessment process annually since AY 2011–2012. In AY 2020–2021, all academic programs and all but eight non-academic units participated in the formal assessment process. This sustained practice of assessment helped CU be selected to the inaugural class of Excellence in Assessment (EIA) designees and as a continued Sustained Excellence designee in 2021.

Assessment Strategies

At CU, the primary purpose of assessment is to use data to determine if student learning, engagement, and satisfaction is at the desired level and, if not, to develop action items to address shortfalls. CU's comprehensive system of assessment is managed by the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Accountability (IRAA) and the Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC) and is overseen by the Executive Council (EC) of the University. IAC is comprised of 26 faculty and staff members including the vice president for academic affairs, the IRAA director, the

chair of the General Education Committee, the chair of the Developmental Education Assessment Committee, a Faculty Senate representative, and other members representing both programs and units.

Programs leading to a degree or certificate, general education, developmental education, and non-degree granting academic and non-academic units participate in the assessment process each year. Information for programs and units is entered into a software package to create an assessment report. Two members of IAC acting as peer

while programs with a well-developed assessment process participate in roundtables once every three years.

Lessons Learned in CU's Assessment Journey

In 2010 the assessment process was changed in an attempt to shift the mindset away from compliance and toward one that would result in improvements of student learning, engagement, and satisfaction. The implementation of roundtables was intended to ensure there were

Programs leading to a degree or certificate, general education, developmental education, and non-degree granting academic and non-academic units participate in the assessment process each year.



reviewers and the appropriate supervisor use a PDF form to indicate elements that are addressed, provide written comments, and make a recommendation as to whether the program or unit would benefit from a roundtable discussion. The appropriate EC member determines whether the program or unit will participate in a roundtable; all programs and units participate in a roundtable at least once every three years. Each roundtable begins with the program or unit members answering questions about what they have learned from their assessment data and how they have used what they have learned to make improvements. The rest of the allotted time is spent discussing feedback, results of the assessment process, and suggestions for improvements. The flexibility of the scheduling of the roundtables ensures programs struggling with a particular part of the assessment process can participate in conversations each year to help them make progress,

substantive conversations about what was working well and what could be improved. The discussions were also meant to emphasize the role of IAC as peer reviewers providing advice and guidance, and not as individuals who were trying to find something wrong in the assessment report. There was also an added emphasis in encouraging faculty and staff to critically examine the data collected and to use the data to identify strengths and weaknesses. It was, and is, sometimes difficult to admit students may not be doing as well as would be desired on a particular measure, and the roundtable conversations provide a vehicle in which weaknesses in student learning, engagement, or satisfaction can be discussed in a non-threatening manner. The IAC peer reviewers share examples of approaches that they have tried in their program or that they have seen in other programs they have reviewed, which can lead to

a rich conversation on how to make improvements based on data. Although the process is not perfect, and there have been adjustments made along the way, the assessment culture at CU has changed dramatically over the last 10 years.

Other key lessons learned were that training, resources, and timely responses to questions were needed to help faculty and staff. The IRAA director conducts training sessions on the assessment software used for the assessment reports, provides an updated User Document each year, and hosts office hours. Each year IAC members undergo peer reviewer training before beginning their reviews, which helps the reviewers provide consistent, clear, and constructive feedback to the programs. Faculty and staff can send an email to assessment@cameron.edu with any questions or concerns they have relating to assessment; someone in the IRAA office responds within one business day.

CU also provides resources to assist programs and units participating in the assessment process to ensure the processes and methodologies for assessment reflect good practice. The chair of IAC conducts an annual campus-wide meeting to update

and inform faculty and staff on the assessment process. Additionally, IAC hosts workshops to provide support for assessment topics. Workshops in the last 10 years include developing SLOs, rubrics, curriculum mapping, inter-rater reliability and content validity, online assessment strategies, data tables, and co-curricular assessment. In 2021–2022, members of IAC are making short videos on key assessment topics that will be available on demand. Over the last 10 years, additional funding has been available to offset costs associated with assessment, including external reviews of locally developed measures and rubrics for content validity, external experts to conduct workshops on assessment-related topics, and opportunities for faculty to participate in conferences related to assessment. The IRAA Office provides funds to purchase standardized assessment exams.

Recommendations to Other Institutions as They Consider the EIA Designation Application Process

Although the writing of the EIA narrative for the application process can

involve significant time and effort, we found the process to be meaningful and useful. The application process allowed us to reflect and articulate the improvements we have made as a campus and to help focus the discussion on what areas still need improvement. The provided rubric is especially valuable in preparing a successful application. We formed a smaller sub-committee to write the application narrative. This draft was then shared with the relevant committees and leadership to garner feedback and strengthen the application. One of the most challenging parts of the application was to include as much information as possible while still coming in under the word count of the application. Our most recent application was one word short of the limit! The feedback received from CU's successful Excellence in Assessment application in 2015–2016 helped guide improvements in the assessment process, and CU looks forward to using the feedback received this Fall from EIA to guide improvements over the next five years. ■

Karla J. Oty is the director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Accountability at Cameron University.

Capella University's Journey Toward Sustained Excellence in Assessment

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and on resumes to show employers their achievements.

Lessons Learned

Reflecting on challenges and implementing continuous improvements with our own assessment strategies is no different from the process we do on a regular basis. Here are a few of the lessons we have learned and are actively targeting for improvement:

1. *Closing the Loop:* One of our biggest challenges was “closing the loop” on our quality-improvement efforts. Each of our assessment strategies had well-considered, detailed processes laid out. However, we continued to struggle with the collection and tracking of the final decisions made toward

our continuous quality efforts. To address this challenge, we created best practices and expectations for documentation of improvement initiatives and a standardized tracking document. While still in the early stages, we have seen an increase in follow-through of action plans.

2. *Improved Communication and Visibility:* Many times, assessment work had been unknowingly duplicated or repeated due to lack of visibility and communication. In response, regular quarterly check-in meetings were established with all stakeholders of an academic program to ensure awareness of assessment efforts. Additionally, a centralized SharePoint site was created to house assessment efforts

and is widely available to stakeholders. This has helped increase visibility of current assessment work and allows for previous efforts to be reviewed to help minimize redundancies.

3. *Evidence of Faculty Involvement:* Faculty involvement, both leading and contributing to our assessment systems, is part of our regular processes. However, we recognized there was not always clear tangible evidence of their involvement. As a result, we have prioritized taking thorough minutes in committee meetings and saving email correspondence as direct evidence of faculty involvement.

Recommendations to Future Applicants

When considering the EIA designation application process, we recommend applicants:

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Transformative Principles Contributing to Whatcom Community College's Assessment Progress

Anne Marie Karlberg, Tresha Dutton, Peter Horne, and Ed Harri

Institutional Context

WHATCOM COMMUNITY COLLEGE (WCC), in Bellingham, Washington, served 7,400 students in 2020–21. WCC offers transfer degrees, professional-technical degrees and certificates, Bachelor of Applied Science degrees, basic education, and community and continuing education courses.

In February 2008, the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities expressed “grave concern” that WCC did not have meaningful assessment processes linking data, analysis, and planning. With new leadership and faculty, WCC made critical and meaningful changes to its processes, developing sustainable assessment processes to support student learning and inform college planning. In 2007, WCC created a faculty outcomes assessment coordinator position with release time and, in 2008, hired a director for assessment and institutional research (AIR) to build an AIR office. These two individuals have worked together for the past 13 years. In its 2019 accreditation visit, WCC received no recommendations and three commendations, including recognition of “its widespread and systematic use of data for decision-making and improvement.”

WCC's Guiding Principles for Outcomes Assessment

The following principles are indispensable in guiding the outcomes assessment work at WCC to inspire and support conversations among faculty, staff, and students and to improve student learning.

WCC lives and breathes these principles that have transformed assessment.

1. Creating sustainable processes
 - a. Create simple, meaningful, and sustainable reports and processes: WCC limits report content to the most essential elements that encourage reflection and result in action (preferably 1–2 pages).
 - b. Start with invested faculty and staff: When WCC first developed assessment processes, it started with a

group of faculty volunteers who saw the long-term vision. WCC focuses on faculty who are motivated to create meaningful teaching and learning experiences and promotes opportunities for other faculty to join when they begin to hear the passionate conversations among their peers.

- c. Frame outcomes assessment results as a resource for continuous improvement and support: WCC makes it clear to faculty and staff that assessment results will not be used punitively.
 - d. Start with a proposal and request feedback when creating new assessment-related processes: Starting conversations with the best available ideas, while encouraging critique and the emergence of new

- e. Develop a culture of institutional learning through action: WCC gathers enough information—rather than an exhaustive amount—at an appropriate level, to be able to take a logical next step and, then,

Invest in relationships across campus to build trust, solicit input and feedback, improve relevance and responsiveness, offer support, and increase receptivity.



ideas, often results in more meaningful and substantial feedback and products. For example, when first developing rubrics, consider starting with the NILOA rubrics, rather than creating rubrics from scratch.

- f. Create support and incentives for faculty to participate: In addition to the faculty educational workshop incentives noted in the paragraph below, faculty professional reports, including course outcome reports, are contractually required annually of full-time and adjunct faculty. Embedding this work in the review cycle has created a systematized and valued element of the faculty review process.

2. Engaging in collaborative learning
 - a. Engage faculty and staff in peer-driven professional development opportunities to advance assessment work: WCC is committed to instituting transformational change by encouraging faculty and staff to use innovative, equity-driven strategies for student learning and assessment. To advance this effort, WCC engages faculty and staff in peer-driven professional development. Since 2011, WCC has offered faculty education workshops (FEWs) focused on teaching, learning, and assessment practice. Through these FEWs, which are 15-hour mini-courses, WCC established and institutionalized the foundational work of outcomes assessment and data-driven reflection. Initial FEWs were designed by AIR and focused on topics such as writing course outcomes; creating meaningful rubrics; and aligning course outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessments. Over time, an increasing number of faculty and staff developed FEWs, and WCC now offers about 13 FEWs annually, focusing on assessment, equity, student-centered pedagogy, and using student success data for improvement. As part of WCC's commitment to assessment and equity-driven pedagogy, full-time faculty completing FEWs receive permanent salary increases, and adjunct faculty are paid stipends. This investment has provided a huge incentive for participation in outcomes assessment and data-driven equity work and has reinforced the value of this work by faculty.
 - b. Routinely request feedback on processes and reports: For example, WCC includes a space on its reports for faculty and staff to suggest improvements to its reports and processes. The College then tries to integrate substantive suggestions. For instance, the faculty

reports Canvas page noted below resulted from a faculty suggestion on a program outcome report.

3. Providing transparent communication
 - a. Make outcomes assessment data and resources accessible on a public website: Since 2009, WCC has maintained a comprehensive public AIR website, which includes a wealth of outcomes assessment, student success data, and educational materials and serves as a resource for faculty, staff, students, and the public. Maintaining resources in an easily accessible central location broadens engagement and participation in assessment efforts. Providing access to resources and transparency is central to WCC's assessment work.
 - b. Create a central place for faculty to submit reports: WCC has a faculty reports Canvas page centralizing all faculty assessment resources, reporting, and tracking.
 - c. Provide timely feedback to each faculty and staff member who submits an assessment report: Faculty and staff receive feedback on all reports submitted, to acknowledge the value of their work and appreciation for the time dedicated to creating the reports. The "next steps" identified by faculty in their course and program outcome reports are emailed to faculty during the quarter in which the information is relevant, reminding them of the great ideas generated when the initial reports were submitted.
 - d. Communicate assessment-related information in multiple forums and encourage conversations: In addition to communicating information via the website, professional development day, and other workshops, AIR staff routinely meet one-on-one and in small groups with faculty and staff to discuss assessment information. WCC tries to create spaces—at workshops, in meetings, or one-on-one—where

faculty and staff can reflect about outcomes assessment information and, together, consider possible next steps. Also, in 2018, AIR began sharing recent assessment results in short catchy monthly or quarterly emails to employees titled "What's in the AIR?" In spring 2020, AIR also began sending regular "Assess-Minute" emails to faculty communicating brief, relevant, and timely assessment, teaching, and learning resources.

- e. Invest in relationships across campus to build trust, solicit input and feedback, improve relevance and responsiveness, offer support, and increase receptivity. When possible, respond to individuals requesting assistance through a phone call, in-person, or zoom, rather than through email.

Next Steps in WCC's Assessment Journey

Embracing its guiding principles of creating sustainable processes, engaging in collaborative learning, and providing transparent communication, WCC is focusing on two major initiatives this academic year:

1. WCC's core learning ability process, which has been in place for the past eight years, is being revised by its outcomes assessment committee to increase the meaningfulness of the data and simplify the process.
2. WCC will be more proactive in engaging students in all assessment processes by forming an AIR student advisory group (with paid students), which will take WCC's assessment work to the next level, providing more systematic student input and feedback. ■

Anne Marie Karlberg is the director for assessment and institutional research, Tresha Dutton is a professor of communication studies and faculty outcomes assessment coordinator, Peter Horne is a senior research analyst, and Ed Harri is the vice president for instruction at Whatcom Community College.

Sustaining a Culture of Assessment Excellence at IUPUI

Susan Kahn and Stephen P. Hundley

Our Context

WITH 30,000 STUDENTS, 300+ programs (including undergraduate, graduate, and professional), more than 4,000 faculty members, and a budget of some \$1.7 billion, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) represents a unique and enduring partnership between Indiana's two major public universities. Formed in 1969 from an array of graduate and professional programs offered by Purdue and IU in Indianapolis, IUPUI built its undergraduate core within a non-traditional, decentralized framework. Degree programs are connected to either IU or Purdue and students receive degrees from one or the other, depending on the program. In addition, IU, our managing partner, was an early adopter of Responsibility-Centered Management, a budget model that supports the fiscal decentralization and independence of each budget unit. Given this history and context, academic cultures across the campus vary widely and top-down academic mandates are typically difficult to implement. For us, then, "excellence in assessment" arises from a *culture* of evidence-based teaching and learning informed by strategic and distributed leadership that vests assessment primarily at the program level.

In 2016, we were recognized as one of the inaugural recipients of the Sustained Excellence in Assessment designation, and we were pleased to receive this honor once again in 2021. IUPUI has created an enduring and pervasive culture of assessment and improvement for more than 30 years. Supporting this culture are an array of campus-wide resources, including a robust data infrastructure, a rich variety of professional development opportunities, and distributed assessment expertise.

Assessment and improvement are also strengthened by effective leadership and governance at the campus, school, and department levels.

At the undergraduate level, we envision students' educational experience as a coherent learning pathway, beginning with the First-Year Experience; advancing through general education core and elective courses, the major, and at least four validated "engaged learning" experiences; and culminating in a senior capstone experience. Ideally, these experiences combine and cohere, as students gain progressive mastery of both their chosen discipline and our institutional learning outcomes, known as the Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success ("the Profiles"), which incorporate both intellectual and personal growth.

Ongoing assessment, improvement, and evidence-based decision-making are essential to realizing this vision for all students. Thus, to qualify for inclusion in the general education program, courses must present evidence of student learning of one or more of the Profiles. All undergraduate degree programs have integrated the Profiles into degree-level learning outcomes, introductory courses, key courses in the major, and capstone experiences. Many have gone beyond this minimum requirement and aligned all courses, and even assignments, with the Profiles.

Because of IUPUI's decentralized structure and culture, we do not mandate specific assessment strategies, methods, or instruments; rather, we build capacity for assessment and improvement through professional development, collaborative campus-wide initiatives, and committees that engage in ongoing assessment work, discussion, and exchange. Annual unit assessment reports are reviewed through our campus-wide Program Review and

Assessment Committee (PRAC), and, collectively, enable us to gauge progress in student achievement of campus-wide learning outcomes.

IUPUI's Conceptual Learning Framework

To encapsulate the myriad instructional and assessment activities taking place across IUPUI, our conceptual learning framework depicts how we intentionally develop, implement, and align campus-wide efforts to promote student learning. At IUPUI, we prepare graduates for a variety of post-degree roles and contexts. Some of these broad outcomes include demonstrating civic-mindedness, finding employment, engaging in lifelong learning, pursuing graduate and professional education, thriving in a diverse and global world, and remaining connected to us as alumni. Students participate in a variety of purposeful learning experiences on their pathway to graduation to prepare them for a dynamic, meaningful, and resilient future.

As noted, the Profiles are IUPUI's institutional-level student learning outcomes (SLOs). All our learning activities intentionally prepare students to be *communicators*, *problem solvers*, *innovators*, and *community contributors*—learning outcomes we desire of all our graduates, regardless of major. They are cascaded and aligned throughout IUPUI. Program-level SLOs represent specific learning achievement required of graduates in individual degree programs. These reflect the various disciplinary ways of advancing our broader institutional SLOs. Course- and activity-level SLOs are the individual contexts in which learning occurs. These include academic courses, along with experiential, community, global, and cocurricular learning opportunities involving

on- and off-campus partners. The Profiles and program-level SLOs get introduced and/or reinforced in these learning experiences. Finally, assignment-level SLOs include specific interventions and assessments designed to implement course- and activity-level goals for learning. These also give students plentiful opportunities to demonstrate competence related to the Profiles and program-level learning goals.

Undergirding these activities is IUPUI's mission, vision, values, and strategic plan. Our #1 strategic plan goal is to promote undergraduate student learning and success. In addition to academic affairs, student affairs, and the academic units, a host of offices and committees engage in distributed leadership to support our efforts, including: PRAC; Center for Teaching and Learning; Planning and Institutional Improvement; Institute for Engaged Learning (IEL); Student Experience Council; Institutional Research & Decision Support (IRDS); Undergraduate Affairs Committee; Division of Undergraduate Education; and Office of Community Engagement. Several processes and tools enable faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders to facilitate and document student learning and assure our ongoing commitment to quality. Processes include degree proposals, periodic general education and program reviews, strategic plan and PRAC reports, and accreditation activities. Tools such as our Learning Management System, The Record (IUPUI's version of a Comprehensive Learner Record), ePortfolios, degree maps and audits, and transcripts all support and encapsulate student achievement of learning at IUPUI.

Recent and Ongoing Priorities

Since 2016, IUPUI has focused evidence-informed improvements in five high-priority areas that advance our strategic plan goal of promoting undergraduate learning and success:

1. *We developed capacity to disaggregate data to highlight needs and uncover equity gaps among various populations.* Robust data infrastructure in IRDS enables campus-, unit-, and

program-level decision-makers to access context-specific student data to identify and address equity gaps. We also provide professional development to enhance decision-makers' ability to understand and respond appropriately to assessment data.

2. *We focused on holistic learner support.* Enhanced collaboration and coordination across campus-level units enabled implementation of needed improvements: expanding Bridge and the other programs above; increasing capacity in Counseling and Psychological Services; expanding resources to address student financial, housing, and food insecurity; and organizing scattered services into a comprehensive Center for Transfer and Adult Students.

3. *We reorganized our work on High Impact Practices (HIPs).* The creation of IEL brought campus offices leading HIPs under one organizational umbrella. This realignment enables us to promote fidelity, equity, and scalability of HIPs and to integrate HIPs engagement into guided, coherent educational pathways.

4. *We pursued a strategic equity agenda.* These efforts have included a holistic, test-optional admissions process designed to broaden access for historically underserved students; updated promotion and tenure guidelines that recognize and reward faculty achievements that enhance equity and inclusion; and professional development on culturally responsive instructional and assessment approaches.

5. *We disseminated our assessment work, strengthened our reputation for assessment leadership, and advanced assessment as a field.* Along with organizing the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis and producing *Assessment Update*—both sites for disseminating IUPUI assessment work—campus assessment leaders implemented the podcast series *Leading Improvements in Higher Education*, and produced a volume, *Trends in Assessment*, that draws on Institute tracks to discern new and emerging assessment trends and issues.

Reflection and Conclusion

Three decades of sustained effort have enabled IUPUI to establish and maintain a flourishing assessment culture. Special strengths include:

- Abundant opportunities for professional development in assessment.
- Widespread understanding of the importance of ongoing assessment and improvement.
- Knowledgeable leadership for assessment.
- Distributed assessment expertise at the institution, school, and program levels.
- Varied approaches to assessment among our diverse academic units, enabling assessment to reflect unit missions and disciplinary standards of evidence, thus supporting sustainability of assessment.
- A reward structure that recognizes assessment achievements and leadership.
- Significant contributions to the development of the assessment as a field.

Finally, our goals for the future include:

- Continue implementing the Profiles and promoting “whole student” development through use of authentic assessment approaches.
- Expand the number of experiences included in The Record, based on evidence of student learning of the Profiles.
- Implement a campus-based assessment award to complement the Trudy W. Banta Lifetime Achievement in Assessment Award conferred at the Assessment Institute.
- Continue to broaden stakeholder engagement in assessment and improvement.
- Continue promoting increased campus assessment capacity through professional development.
- Enhance IUPUI's national leadership role in developing the assessment field.
- Continue to sustain excellence in assessment. ■

Susan Kahn is director of planning and institutional improvement initiatives (retired) and Stephen P. Hundley is senior advisor to the chancellor and executive editor of Assessment Update, both from IUPUI.



NILOA Perspectives

What's Next for the Excellence in Assessment Designation

Gianina Baker and Kate Drezek McConnell

Context

THE EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT (EIA) Designation was introduced at the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities in 2016 under Peter McPherson's leadership and Teri Hinds' direction. Jointly sponsored by VSA Analytics, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), and the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), the EIA Designation has evolved since its original release. Each year, we, the co-sponsoring organizations, get a chance to take stock of what we've learned from the current class of designees, hear feedback on the process from our expert reviewers as well as prior designees, and discuss the future of the Designation. In this NILOA Perspectives column, we celebrate our 2021 EIA Designation class, reflect on the past five years, and share an announcement with readers.

2021 Excellence in Assessment Class

First, congratulations to our 2021 EIA Designees! The 2021 class includes five Sustained Excellence in Assessment Designees—Cameron University, Capella University, the Community College of Baltimore County, IUPUI, and Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology—all of which earned either Excellence or Sustained Excellence Designations in 2016. We are also excited to welcome two new Excellence in Assessment Designees—California State University-East Bay and Whatcom Community College—which now increases our total to 41 EIA Designees!

Particular to this year's class is their collective commitment to transparency

in the assessment of student learning. From implementation of solid, mature assessment infrastructures to intentional involvement of internal *and* external stakeholders to evidence of thoughtful, reflective data discussions, these institutions' processes affirm that there is no one right way to do assessment, as they were able to write balanced, organized, and cogent narratives. These institutions, along with previous designees, continue to serve as models of scaled, aligned assessment practice.

Designee institutions overcame challenges in a time of rapid change and inequity during the pandemic, demonstrating they are true exemplars in higher education assessment practice.



This year's class literally weathered the storm that is COVID-19. We, the co-sponsoring organizations, questioned if the institutions would be able to write a cohesive narrative and have active participation and support from staff so as to not divert from their priorities in a time of rapid change and inequity during the pandemic. Designee institutions overcame challenges in a time of rapid change and inequity during the pandemic, demonstrating they are true exemplars in higher education assessment practice.

EIA Designation Changes Through the Years

Just as institutions practice continuous improvement with their institutional processes for assessment, we too engage in a robust evaluation of the process through which we bestow institutions the EIA Designation. Over the years, we made several improvements to the application process, the application itself, as well as the evaluation rubric. For

example, we experimented with using weighting multipliers after the first year of the EIA Designation, but ultimately decided to remove them based on several conversations with reviewers, applicants, and designees. We worked diligently to clarify the language of the application and added additional detail to our scoring instructions so reviewers could more easily score applications. Most importantly, we worked to ensure the application and scoring criteria truly reflected our collective sense of excellent praxis

in assessment, including expanding key stakeholders to include community partners and community-based organizations; emphasizing the importance of educating the whole student by adding co-curricular and unit-level assessment to the application and the rubric; and finally, providing institutions ample space within the application to address how they were connecting assessment of student learning and success and equity.

Collectively, the co-sponsoring organizations worked to steady the EIA Designation process, despite staff turnover at each of our respective organizations. We have worked to promote the process and Designees through our various channels, provided opportunities to celebrate each Designee, and we continue to answer questions as institutions seek the Designation.

Most recently, with a variety of conversations and deep discussions about what the EIA Designation is and what it means to applicants, previous designees,

reviewers, co-sponsors, endorsers, and the assessment community writ large, we recognize that to ensure relevance the EIA Designation needs to evolve.

What's Next?

NILOA is now going through its own transitions, and we, too, need to acknowledge change. In response to these changes, AAC&U, a long-time collaborator on the EIA, will take on stewardship of the award beginning in January 2022. Under the leadership of Kate Drezek McConnell, Vice President for Curricular and Pedagogical Innovation and Executive Director of VALUE, AAC&U will engage the broader assessment community in a robust and reflective evaluation of the EIA Designation's mission, processes, and outcomes in order to identify areas of excellence within the current protocols as well as opportunities for change, growth, and enhancement. Drawing on its history of community engagement and crowdsourcing within the higher education community, AAC&U is excited to embark on this

important work. You can expect a call to engage in this process in the near future.

At AAC&U, we believe now is the right moment for further reflection, review, and possible enhancement of the EIA designation. As we work to ensure the long-term viability and relevance of the EIA designation, there are questions we will continue to ask of ourselves and of the designation, from deciding whether or not there should be additional levels (e.g., a "Rising to Excellence" or "Honorable Mention" for those institutions who were told to resubmit their application) to addressing the dynamic tension between articulated and enacted assessment practices, along with demonstrated results of these processes. These questions and more will assist in our evaluation of the EIA process and help decide the path forward.

Final Thoughts from NILOA

NILOA has shepherded the EIA process through its many changes, and while it is tough to let go of the reins, we are excited for EIA's future. We know and

trust it is in the good hands of AAC&U, and we look forward to assisting where needed. We want to recognize the hard work of our expert assessment reviewers in providing feedback to institutions that applied each year.

And most of all, we want to thank the 41+ institutions that have applied and made the EIA Designation what it is today. As we continue to highlight and celebrate your excellence in assessment, we hope to have earned your trust and friendship. For those of you with whom we have interacted over the past few years discussing and lifting up your excellent assessment practices, it was our pleasure. ■

Gianina R. Baker is the acting director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment and the associate director for evaluation, learning, and equitable assessment in the Office of Community College Research & Leadership at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; and Kate Drezek McConnell is the vice president for curricular and pedagogical innovation and executive director of VALUE at AAC&U.

Peer Review in Assessment and Improvement: An Overview of Five Principles to Promote Effective Practice

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place within learning experiences at the course, program, and institutional levels. We will discuss Principle #1 in greater detail in Volume 34, Number 2.

Principle #2: Value the multitude of perspectives, contexts, and methods related to assessment and improvement

Peer review processes require an understanding of how perspectives, contexts, and methods support assessment and improvement activities. *Perspectives* in peer review include those of reviewers, stakeholders, and decision-makers. The value of peer review is often maximized by leveraging and incorporating feedback from multiple peer reviewers,

including internal colleagues, external subject matter experts, community members, and other important constituents of the activity undergoing review. Stakeholders include administrators, who may sponsor the peer review process; faculty and staff of the activities involved in the peer review process; students and alumni who are often direct beneficiaries of learning interventions; and partners, including those on-campus or elsewhere, who make specific learning contributions. Decision-makers are individuals at various levels who lead and champion the work being peer reviewed and are often able to affect change as an outcome of feedback received from reviewers. *Contexts* for peer review in assessment and

improvement include both the type and scope of activity undergoing peer review and its placement in the activity lifecycle, along with the institutional culture for assessment and improvement, the motivations for peer review, and how outcomes from peer review processes are used. Finally, *methods* employed in the peer review process are often informed by the goals and scope of the activities being reviewed. Such methods may include a blend of direct, indirect, quantitative, and qualitative approaches to data gathering; use in-person, virtual, hybrid, or independent review of artifacts; involve observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis; rely on individual or team judgements; and range from highly prescribed/structured to highly emergent/semi-structured review processes. We will discuss Principle #2 in greater detail in Volume 34, Number 3.

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Principle #3: Adopt a consultative approach to the peer review process

Effective peer reviewers often adopt a consultative approach to the peer review process, which involves reviewing information, querying stakeholders, evaluating evidence, making judgements, and generating recommendations. Such a consultative approach entails having the peer reviewer serve as a “critical friend” to the program, entity, or context undergoing review, along with understanding desired roles, behaviors, and expectations of a consultant. The consultative process in which peer reviewers participate include phases such as preparation, initial entry, engagement, analysis, judgment, feedback, clarification, and exit, with specific stakeholder relationships unfolding in each phase. There are numerous other considerations involved in the consultative approach, including using specific tools and resources to engage in peer review; adopting an appreciative inquiry perspective to the work; placing the review of an activity in its broader context, such as institutionally, disciplinarily, or nationally; navigating ambiguity, complexity, and interpersonal or political dynamics; and fostering an environment that allows for candid exchange of ideas and experiences. We will discuss this principle in Volume 34, Number 4.

Principle #4: Make effective judgements using inclusive sources and credible evidence

One principal role of peer reviewers in their assessment and improvement work is to make effective judgements using inclusive sources and credible evidence. This entails determining who are “inclusive sources” and what counts as “credible evidence” in reviewing the activity. It also relies on peer reviewers ensuring that all necessary stakeholder perspectives are included in the process; such stakeholders often include students, alumni, faculty, staff, administrators, colleagues elsewhere in the institution supporting or interacting with the activity undergoing review, and external partners. The goal

is to invite and promote the multiplicity of sources to inform themes. As peer reviewers engage in their analysis of feedback from stakeholders, it is necessary for them to identify isolated incidents, patterns of behavior, and systemic issues, all of which should yield information about what is working well, what are areas for improvement, and what are specific recommendations or observations. As peer reviewers make effective judgements, they will need to recognize the broader environmental considerations; this entails placing the activity in its proper comparison context. Often this involves an understanding of satisficing vs. maximizing performance or outcome of the activity being reviewed, with an appreciation of the activity’s resources, contexts, and priorities. Finally, peer reviewers need to always keep in mind the scope of the review and remind themselves—and others involved in or benefitting from the peer review process—of the type of information the reviewer is being asked to provide perspectives. We will discuss this principle in Volume 34, Number 5.

Principle #5: Provide relevant feedback to stakeholders

Ultimately, effective peer review processes yield outcomes that can make a positive difference to enhancing the performance of individuals, learning environments, programs, and institutions. This requires peer reviewers to provide relevant feedback to stakeholders. There should be distinctions made between

evaluative and improvement-oriented feedback, along with an understanding of the format in which feedback is expected and the intended audiences and uses for feedback. The timing and nature of feedback—*formative*, to make improvements vs. *summative*, to provide evaluations—also needs to be clarified as part of expectation setting for peer review processes. Often feedback from peers involves sharing of recommendations; thus, care and attention is necessary to prioritize recommendations, including identifying sequential or interdependent actions and the time or cost horizons associated with recommendations. In some instances, it may be necessary for the recipients of feedback to grapple with differing perspectives held by multiple peer reviewers—either from reviewers as part of a multi-reviewer team or from feedback received by multiple individual reviewers. Finally, responding to feedback, socializing the feedback with stakeholders, adopting recommendations, and institutionalizing components of the peer review process are all vital components to ensuring feedback from peers is used effectively by stakeholders. We will discuss this principle in Volume 34, Number 6.

There are plentiful opportunities and contexts for using peer review to support assessment and improvement in higher education. Thus, we look forward to focusing more fully on each of these five principles in Editors’ Notes throughout the remainder of 2022. Thank you for reading *Assessment Update*. ■

Capella University’s Journey Toward Sustained Excellence in Assessment

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- start early and identify required sections within the application. It’s especially helpful to *begin with the end in mind*: start your project with a clear vision of your desired direction and destination;
- identify subject matter experts who can contribute knowledge to the plans, strategies, and use of data that will be showcased in your application;
- create a project management timeline with agreed upon deadlines; and
- get an editor involved to review your application to ensure flow, accuracy, clarity, and lack of errors in your final product. ■

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