

**Palo Alto College**

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**The Keys to a Culture  
of Assessment  
*Value and Respect***

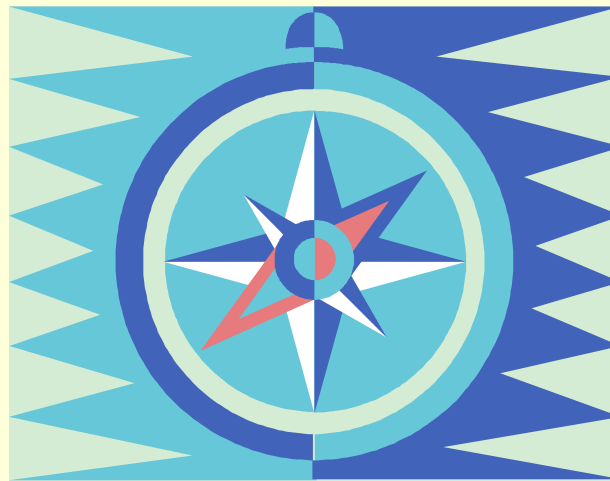
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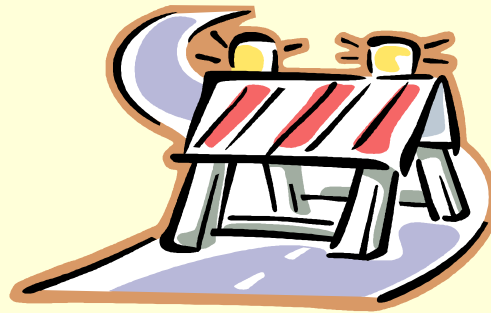
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# Where Are You Regarding Assessment?



A Situation Audit

# Three Major Barriers



1. Lack of understanding of the value & importance of assessment
2. Lack of resources to engage in assessment
  - Marilee Bresciani
3. Fear of change and risk-taking

# *The Critical Role of Campus Leaders*

Assessment permeates campus culture

**ONLY IF**

campus leaders are truly and actively  
committed to assessment.

# 1. Value Teaching and Learning

- Why do we teach?
- What do we most want students to learn?
- Why those things and not others?
- How do we help students learn those things?
- How do we know they're learning it?

# Fostering a “Learning-Centered” Environment

- Learning is a partnership and a shared responsibility.
- Assessment is a tool to improve teaching and learning, not just to assign grades.
- Teaching reflects research on how students learn best.

## 2. Value Campus Culture, History, & Values

- Understand the root cause(s) of resistance to assessment on your campus.
- Link assessment to something faculty & staff care about.
- Learn from & build on past experiences... good & bad.

# 3. Respect & Empower People

- Respect what everyone has been doing.
- Start with successes.
  - What good teachers are doing right
- Value campus-wide collaboration.
  - Within departments
  - Across disciplines
  - Including students
  - Including student development staff
  - Including academic support staff



# Do Faculty Lead Assessment?

- Is there a faculty-led assessment steering committee?
- What is it empowered to do?
- Does it have the right people?
- Is it effective?

# What About Academic Freedom?

- Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject.
  - *AAUP 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom & Tenure*

## 4. Value Innovation

- Value, respect, & reward efforts to *improve* teaching.
- Regard assessment results as evidence of teaching effectiveness.
- Encourage assessment as a form of scholarship.

## 5. Value Assessment Efforts



# Why Should Faculty & Staff Engage in Assessment?

- Incentives & Rewards
  - Mini-grants
  - Assessment recognition event
  - Refreshments
  - Certificate of recognition
  - Thank you note
  - Innovation grants

# Celebrate & Publicize Positive Results.



- Prospective students
- Alumni
- Foundations
- Government policymakers
- Employers

# Use Assessment Results to Inform Important Decisions on Important Goals.

- Give funding priority to resource requests supported by assessment evidence.
- Move programs engaged in serious assessment efforts to the top of the funding list.



**6. Support  
Assessment  
with Time,  
Infrastructure,  
& Resources.**



# *Time?*



- Stop doing something else.
- Keep things simple.

# *Stop Doing Something Else.*

- Reconsider
  - Committees
  - Program review
  - New programs & courses
  - Other new initiatives
  - Specialized accreditation
- What do they contribute? What are the benefits?
- What do they consume in time and dollars?
- Consider scholarship of teaching as a form of research.

# *Keep Things Simple.*

- Start with what you have.
- “Start small.”
- Start with important goals.
- Use quick & easy assessment tools
- Look at samples.
- Stagger assessments.
- Be realistic about quality.
- Only do what’s useful.
- Don’t create unnecessary rules.

# *Are the Right People Coordinating & Guiding Assessment?*

- Sensitivity and open-mindedness to diverse perspectives and values
- Flexibility
- A passion for teaching and learning
- Sufficient perceived assessment expertise

# *How Does the Administration Support Assessment?*

- Promote and facilitate assessment.
- Help faculty find time.
- Build on past & current assessment successes.
- Professional development opportunities
- Technical support

# *How Do Campus Processes Support Assessment?*

- Constructive feedback on assessment reports
- Curriculum approval
- Administrative performance review
- Faculty promotion & tenure
- Resource allocation
- Academic program review



# Identifying Next Steps

### **Exercise 1: Where Are You Regarding Assessment? A Situation Audit**

*Jot down brief answers to each of the following questions. Answer them from your individual perspective, not a collective perspective.*

1. How familiar are you with current thinking on the principles and practice of assessment?
2. Why do you think assessment is important? How will assessment benefit your institution? individual faculty and staff members?
3. Is assessment a priority on your campus? Why or why not?
4. What is your vision of assessment on your campus? Why does that vision appeal to you?
5. How do you share that vision with others across campus? How do you otherwise inspire interest in assessment across campus?
6. Where, in a general sense, is your institution regarding assessment? Where and in what ways are things going well? Where and in what ways are lagging?
7. How familiar are you with **your regional accreditor's assessment standards**?
8. Where is your institution in terms of meeting **your accreditor's** expectations for those standards?

*Look over your answers to the above questions, then discuss the following with your group.*

1. What do your answers say about what you are already doing to foster a culture of assessment?
2. What do your answers suggest about steps you might take to foster a culture of assessment?



## Exercise 2: Promoting Deep, Lasting Learning

A growing body of research evidence indicates that students learn most effectively when:

1. They understand course and program goals and the **characteristics of excellent work**.
2. They are academically challenged and given **high but attainable expectations**.
3. They are **graded on important goals**. While students do pick up some things through faculty and staff modeling, discussions, and the like, they focus their time and energy learning what **they'll be graded on...and therefore learn those things more effectively**.
4. They are **taught with enthusiasm**.
5. New learning is **related to their prior experiences**.
6. They spend **significant time studying** and practicing.
7. They use or apply memorized facts in some way, because **facts memorized in isolation are quickly forgotten**.
8. The diversity of their learning styles is respected. They are given **a variety of ways to learn and to demonstrate what they've learned**.
9. They spend more time actively involved in **learning through hands-on practice** and receiving information visually. They spend less time listening to lectures and reading long texts.
10. They engage in **multidimensional "real world" tasks** in which they explore, analyze, justify, evaluate, use other thinking skills, and arrive at multiple solutions. Such tasks may include realistic class assignments, field experiences, and service learning opportunities.
11. They spend more time **interacting with others**—face-to-face and/or online. They receive individual attention from faculty and work collaboratively with fellow students.
12. They participate in **co-curricular activities** that build on what they are learning in the classroom.
13. They **reflect** on what and how they have learned and **see coherence** in their learning.
14. They have a **synthesizing experience** such as a capstone course, independent study, or research project.
15. **Assessments are learning activities** in their own right.
16. They receive **prompt, concrete feedback** on their work.
17. They have opportunities to **revise** their work.

Source: Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

1. With your team, write one of the following codes next to each of the items on this list:  
Yes! = We already actively emphasize and reward this across campus.  
OK = We encourage this across campus, although we could do more.  
Think = **We're not encouraging this** as well as we could; we have to think about how to encourage this more.  
??? = Realistically, we **can't encourage this at our institution**.
2. With your team, brainstorm some ways to encourage and, perhaps, reward the strategies you marked "OK" and "Think."

### Exercise 3: Creating an Environment for Learning, Innovation...and Even Risk-Taking

*Discuss the following questions with your group. If you don't have time to consider all these questions, discuss those that are most pertinent to you.*

1. How much is collaboration valued on your campus? How much is cross-campus collaboration valued? Should your campus further encourage and reward collaboration? If so, how?
2. How are faculty expected to spend their time? How is this communicated? What does this say about **the value placed on efforts to reflect on and improve one's teaching?**
3. How, if at all, do you define **"teaching excellence"** at your institution? Does your definition reflect research-based practices that promote deep, lasting learning? Would a clearer—or different—definition be helpful?
4. How much does teaching and learning **"quality" or "excellence"** *really* factor in to faculty promotion and tenure decisions? in evaluations of academic leaders (deans)? Are assessment results considered evidence of teaching effectiveness? If not, should they be?
5. How do you encourage and reward faculty efforts to *improve* teaching and learning? What happens when changes in curricula and pedagogies initially fail?
6. How much of your budget is spent on helping faculty improve teaching and learning? How are those resources deployed? How *effectively* are they deployed?
7. Is your campus doing enough to promote an environment that fosters learning, innovation, and risk-taking? What else might you do?

#### **Exercise 4: Identifying Sources of Resistance to Assessment**

*Discuss the following questions with your group:*

1. Who is foot-dragging at your institution: faculty? staff? campus leaders?
2. Why are they foot-dragging at your institution?
3. Why are the “hard core resisters” so resistant to assessment?
4. How might you address those sources of resistance?
5. Do faculty understand what academic freedom means and doesn't mean? If there are misunderstandings, how can you correct them?

## Exercise 5: Identifying Strategies to Foster a Culture of Assessment

*Discuss the following questions with your group. If you don't have time to consider all these questions, discuss those that are most pertinent on your campus.*

1. Incentives and rewards for engaging in assessment: What incentives and rewards might work at your campus? How can you celebrate, honor, and reward efforts to assess student learning...in a cost-effective way?
2. Faculty leadership of assessment:
  - i. What is the steering committee's charge? Is the charge appropriate?
  - ii. Who chairs it? Who is on it? Are they the right people?
  - iii. How effective is the committee in fulfilling its charge? Why is it effective or ineffective?
3. Administrative support of assessment
  - a. How do institutional leaders promote and facilitate assessment? Are the communication strategies effective?
  - b. Is assessment an "add-on" expectation? What can be put on a back burner to help make time for assessment?
  - c. What kinds of professional development opportunities do faculty need? What kinds are most effective?
  - d. What kinds of technical support do faculty need?
  - e. What are faculty already doing well regarding assessment? How can you build on those successes?
  - f. How can you foster assessment in a period of contracting resources?
4. Support of campus processes for assessment (Resource allocation, administrative performance review, and faculty promotion & tenure are discussed at other points today.)
  - a. Academic program review: What is the balance of emphasis on inputs, processes, and outcomes? Should this balance be modified?
  - b. Curriculum approval: What is the balance of emphasis on inputs, processes, and outcomes? Should this balance be modified?

## Exercise 6: Using Assessment Results

*Discuss the following questions with your group.*

1. How do you use assessment results? What kinds of decisions do assessment results inform?
2. What data and information inform campus planning discussions? Are plans based on anecdotal or systematic evidence? Are assessment results folded into campus planning discussions? If so, how?
3. How, if at all, do planning priorities and assessment results inform budget decisions?
4. How do funding priorities reward those programs that are seriously engaged in assessment efforts?
  - a. Is funding priority given to resource requests supported by assessment evidence?
  - b. Is funding priority given to pervasive rather than isolated problems?
  - c. How do funding priorities address disappointing assessment results?
5. How might you use positive results to tell the **story of your institution's successes**? **Who would be** the audiences for that story?

## **Exercise 7: Identifying Next Steps**

*Review your answers to today's exercises, then discuss the following questions with your group.*

1. What would you like your campus's assessment culture to look like two years from now?
2. What three strategies would most likely help you achieve that vision?
3. What immediate steps will you take to begin implementing those strategies?