

This document provides a framework for thinking about communicating student learning assessment information. Additional details can be found on the NILOA webpage including examples of institutions that are posting assessment information in innovative and important ways.
See: www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/TransparencyFramework.htm

Providing Evidence of Student Learning: A Transparency Framework



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NILOA NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

NILOA National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

The Transparency Framework serves as a basis for Excellence in Assessment designation. It is also being endorsed by *College Portrait of Undergraduate Education*, *Voluntary Framework of Accountability*, *Association of American Colleges and Universities*, *American Association of State Colleges and Universities*, and *Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities*. To view institutions that are using the Transparency Framework on their websites, see <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/TFfield.htm>

Introduction

Gathering evidence of academic accomplishment – the knowledge, skills and competencies students gain as a result of their college experience, is a continuous process. It occurs at various levels and across many dimensions, and the findings are intended to enable institutions to make improvements, assess the impact of changes in academic programs and provide evidence of learning outcomes to those to whom they are accountable. The Transparency Framework addresses the question: How might these efforts be made more visible? One avenue adopted by many campuses is to share relevant information about student learning on the institutional website.

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) has developed a Transparency Framework to support institutions in sharing evidence of student learning on and off campus. The Framework is based on a review of institutional websites¹ and identifies six key components of student learning assessment. Institutions may use the Framework to examine their institutional websites to gauge the extent to which evidence of student accomplishment is readily accessible and potentially useful and meaningful to the intended audience. Each section of the Framework suggests a component of student learning assessment that may be of interest to specific audiences and outlines opportunities to advance public understanding.

The Framework also incorporates basic premises about website communication. For instance, information placed on websites should be meaningful and understandable to multiple audiences. To effectively communicate with various audiences, the website should enable users to provide feedback or offer comments on the posted material. Just as making student learning outcomes more trans-

parent is a work in progress, so is this Framework. As more institutions make their assessment efforts accessible and post meaningful evidence of student learning, we will update the Transparency Framework using experience from the field.

Transparency Framework

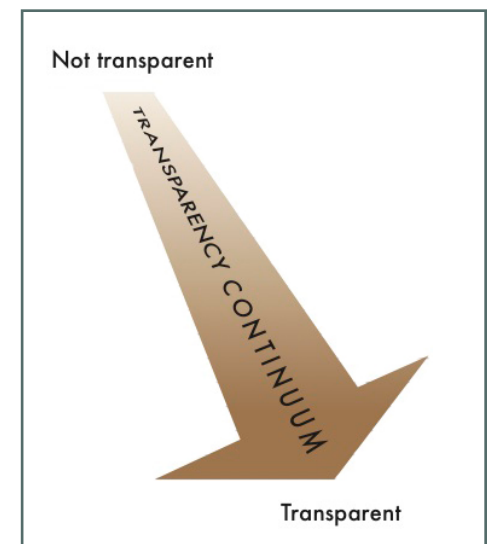
The Framework outlines components of a transparent institutional website in terms of student learning. Institutions should take into account the website's purpose, structure, intended audiences, capacity of technology staff and other available resources when reviewing the components. Information on student learning can and should be presented in language that is understandable by specific and multiple audiences, widely available across the website, updated regularly, receptive to feedback, and accessible by multiple web browsers and in various Internet speeds. A fully transparent website might well contain information about the following six components:

- Student learning outcomes statements
- Assessment plans
- Assessment resources
- Current assessment activities
- Evidence of student learning
- Use of student learning evidence



How to use the Transparency Framework²

The Framework is not a checklist to be followed, but rather a guide to suggest priorities and possibilities with an eye toward communicating meaningful information about student learning that will be useful to various audiences. Our review of institutional website transparency suggests that the degree of transparency can be viewed as a continuum from not transparent to transparent.



At this point in time, few institutions have fully addressed the transparency challenge. For example, an institutional website may be transparent with specific components such as student learning outcomes statements and current assessment activities, but not transparent in others such as references to evidence of student learning and/or the uses of evidence. For these reasons, each component of the Framework should be considered individually when reviewing the entire institutional website to ensure that information related to student learning is prominently posted, clearly worded, and updated regularly.

¹ See *Development of NILOA's Transparency Framework*, <http://learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/Transparency%20Framework%20Development%202016.pdf>

² See the NILOA website for clear definitions of Transparency, Audiences, Not Transparent, and Transparent.

Issues of transparency can be found in the following NILOA reports:

Jankowski, N. A., Ikenberry, S. O., Kinzie, J., Kuh, G. D., Shenoy, G. F., & Baker, G. R. (2012). *Transparency & accountability: An evaluation of the VSA college portrait pilot*.

Jankowski, N., & Provezis, S. (2011). *Making Student Learning Evidence Transparent: The State of the Art*.

Jankowski, N., & Makela, J. P. (2010). *Exploring the landscape: What institutional websites reveal about student learning outcomes activities*.

Transparency Framework: Components of Student Learning Assessment

Student Learning Outcomes Statements

Student learning outcomes statements clearly state the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and habits of mind that students are expected to acquire at an institution of higher education.³

Transparent student learning outcomes statements are:

- Specific to institutional level and/or program level
- Clearly expressed and understandable by multiple audiences, including students
- Prominently posted or linked to multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current outcomes
- Receptive to feedback or comments on the quality and utility of the information provided

Assessment Plans

Campus plans for gathering evidence of student learning might include institution-wide or program specific approaches that convey how student learning will be assessed, the data collection tools and approaches that will be used, and the timeline for implementation.

Transparent assessment plans are:

- Descriptive of institutional assessment processes, procedures and activities
- Inclusive of assessment measures including what they are, how they are applied, and frequency of gathering evidence
- Clearly expressed and understandable by multiple audiences
- Prominently posted or linked to multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current activities
- Downloaded or accessed in a timely fashion by multiple web browsers

- and Internet download speeds
- Receptive to feedback or comments on the quality and utility of the information provided

Assessment Resources

Assessment resources encompass information or training provided to faculty and staff to help them understand, develop, implement, communicate, and use evidence of student learning.

Transparent assessment resources are:

- Presented in language that is understandable to the novice
- Prominently posted or linked to in multiple places across the website
- Downloadable or accessible in a timely fashion by multiple web browsers and Internet download speeds
- Updated regularly to reflect current activities and new resources
- Receptive to feedback or comments on additional resources, training, or potential professional development needs

Current Assessment Activities

Current assessment activities include information on a full range of projects and activities recently completed or currently underway to gauge student learning, make improvements, or respond to accountability interests.

Transparent current assessment activities are:

- Clearly stated in language that is understandable for various audiences
- Described and illustrated to clarify how a particular assessment activity is used and how it relates to the institutional mission and vision
- Prominently posted or linked to in multiple places across the website

- Updated regularly to reflect current activities
- Receptive to feedback on the presentation of the current assessment activities by having contact information or a form to send feedback

Evidence of Student Learning

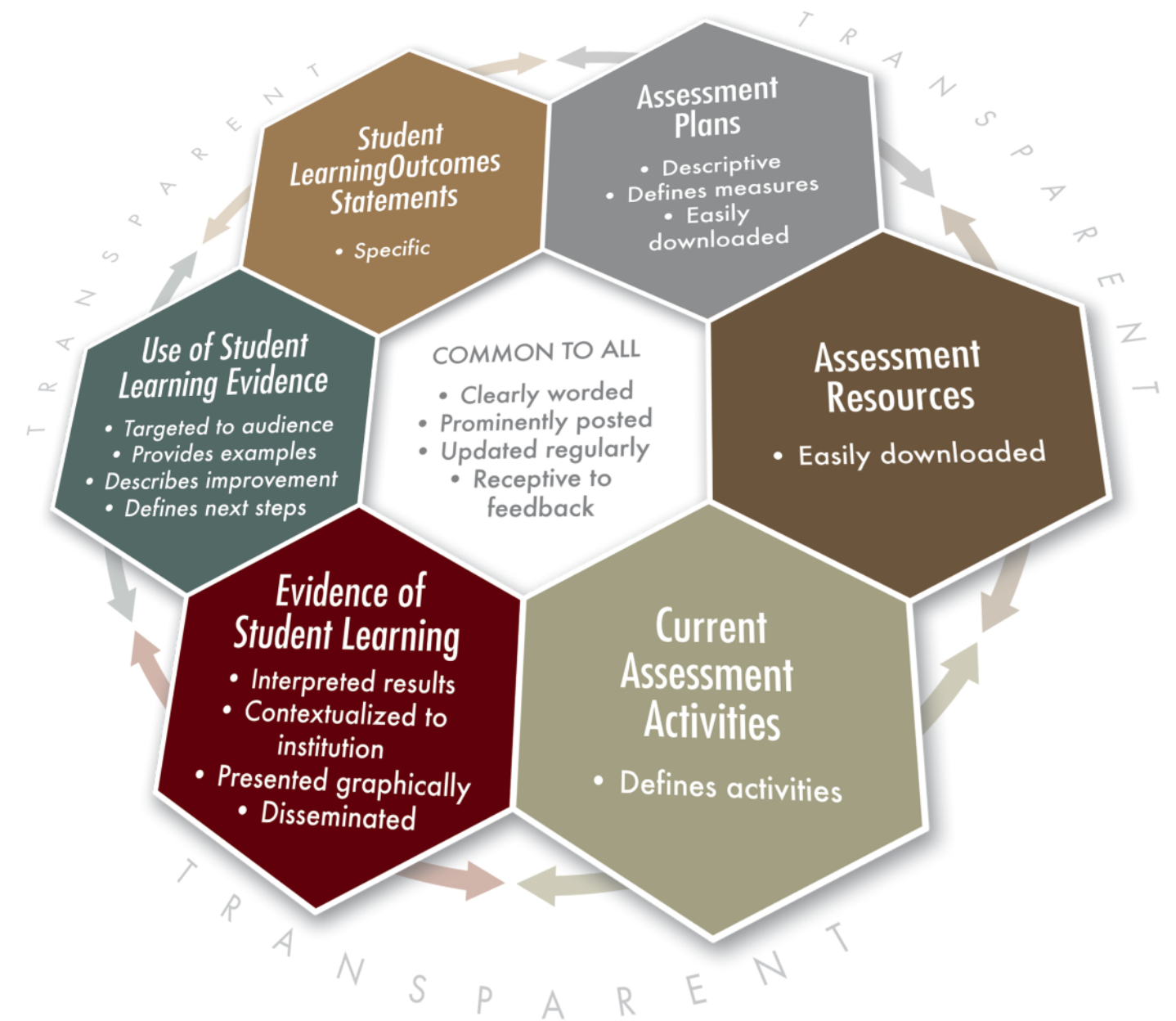
Evidence of student learning includes results of assessment activities. This may include evidence of indirect (e.g. surveys) and direct (e.g. portfolio) student learning as well as institutional performance indicators (e.g. licensure pass rate).

Transparent evidence of student learning is:

- Explained, analyzed, and interpreted in lay person's language
- Contextualized to clarify what the results mean to the institution and to student learning
- Presented using both text and graphics when appropriate
- Disseminated and summarized for different groups, cohorts of students, and compared with peer institutions or programs if appropriate
- Prominently posted or linked to in multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current results
- Receptive to feedback on the meaning and interpretation of the evidence

Use of Student Learning Evidence

This component represents the extent to which evidence of student learning is used to identify areas where changes in policies and practices may lead to improvement, inform institutional decision-making, problem identification, planning, goal setting, faculty development, course revision, program review, and accountability or accreditation self-study.



NILOA Transparency Framework

Transparent uses of student learning evidence are:

- Targeted to a particular audience such as faculty, staff, administrators, students, families or governing board members
- Inclusive of examples of documented use of assessment results and information
- Focused on improvement of student performance and

institutional processes through the use of evidence

- Inclusive of next steps
- Clearly stated in language that is understandable for specific and multiple audiences
- Prominently posted or linked to in multiple places across the website
- Updated regularly to reflect current activities
- Receptive to feedback on selected

courses of action by having a person's contact information or a form to send feedback

³ Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning* (2nd ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.