

## Communicating the Value of Higher Education through Evidence-Based Storytelling

Gianina Baker, Natasha Jankowski,  
Jillian Kinzie, & George Kuh

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

## National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)

NILOA's mission is to discover and disseminate effective use of assessment data to strengthen undergraduate education and support institutions in their assessment efforts.

- SURVEYS • WEB SCANS • CASE STUDIES • FOCUS GROUPS • OCCASIONAL PAPERS • WEBSITE • RESOURCES • NEWSLETTER • PRESENTATIONS
- TRANSPARENCY FRAMEWORK • FEATURED WEBSITES • ACCREDITATION RESOURCES • ASSESSMENT EVENT CALENDAR • ASSESSMENT NEWS
- MEASURING QUALITY INVENTORY • POLICY ANALYSIS • ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN • DEGREE QUALIFICATIONS PROFILE/TUNING • DQP CAMPUS COACHING • ASSIGNMENT DESIGN AND ONLINE LIBRARY • EMERGING LEARNING SYSTEM NETWORKING

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

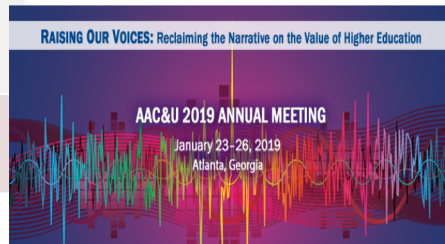
The screenshot shows the homepage of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. At the top left is the logo and URL: [www.LearningOutcomesAssessment.org](http://www.LearningOutcomesAssessment.org). The main navigation bar includes links for 'About Us', 'NILOA Publications', 'Resource Library', 'Degree Qualifications Profile', 'Transparency Framework', and 'FULL NAVIGATION'. Below the navigation, there are several featured articles and resources, including 'DEGREE QUALITY MATTERS', 'Evidence-Based Storytelling', and 'The Student Success website at Hawaii Pacific University'. A search bar is located in the top right corner.

## Here's the plan...

- Explore the shift from providing outcome data elements to telling a coherent student-centered story to communicate the value of higher education
- Suggest resources and provide examples of how to tell persuasive evidence-based stories to advance the higher education quality narrative

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

## But first... How did we get here?



National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

5

## About the AAC&U Annual Meeting

...the media, employers, state and national legislators, and community members in rural, urban, and suburban areas have questioned higher education's value for today's students and, at times, for society at large. The need is clear for **higher education to reclaim the narrative and articulate our role in ensuring that all students achieve success in life, work, and citizenship and that American democracy continues to thrive.**

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

6

"It's like déjà vu  
all over again."

—Yogi Berra

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Asset

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

7

## Public Skepticism

The University Has No Clothes

The nation's top colleges are essentially worthless, according to a new study of the quality of education at elite universities. The study is the most comprehensive yet, and it found that the quality of education at elite universities is declining.

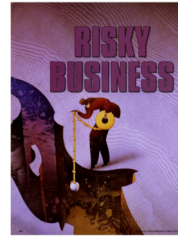


National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

***“Colleges... do so little to measure what students learn between freshman and senior years. So doubt lurks: how much does a college education – the actual teaching and learning that happens on campus – really matter?”***

David Leonhardt, *NYTimes*, Sept 27, 2009

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment



***“The present moment provides an opportunity to educate the public about what higher education does, as well as about how well it does those things.”***

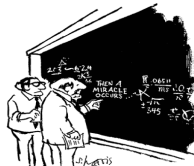
Kuh, G.D. (2007). Risky business: Promises and pitfalls of institutional transparency. *Change*, 39(5), 30-35.

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

10

**Greater emphasis on student learning outcomes and evidence that student performance measures up**



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

### Direct Measures

- ETS Proficiency Profile & Major Field Tests
- ACT Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP)
- Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)
- Competency and content tests (e.g., nursing, education)
- VALUE rubrics
- Demonstrations and performances
- Other examples of authentic student (e.g., writing samples)
- Signature work/culminating projects

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

### Indirect Measures

- National Surveys of Student Engagement (NSSE/CSSE/AUSSE/SASSE)
- Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)
- Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)
- Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)
- Your First College Year (YFCY)
- Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory

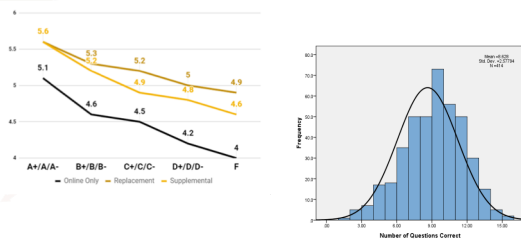
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

### Accountability Templates

- ✓ *Voluntary System of Accountability* (APLU/AASCU)
- ✓ *U-CAN /Building Blocks for 2020* (NAICU)
- ✓ *College Navigator* (NCES)
- ✓ *Transparency by Design/College Choices for Adults* (WCET)
- ✓ *Voluntary Framework of Accountability* (AACCC)
- ✓ *College Scorecard* (US Dept of Ed)

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

### What's the story?

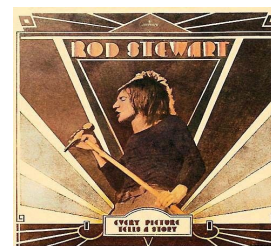


National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

15

### Every picture tells a story, don't it...



National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

16



## Internship stories are increasingly popular!



National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

17

## An evidence-based story with every picture...



- Learn how Kyla's research and courses helped her become an effective French teacher



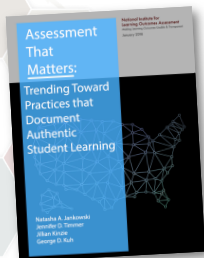
- Read about the non-profit Eli founded and how his college experience shaped his career

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

18

## Communication Finding



**Communicating effectively about student learning remains a challenge.**

Colleges and universities must more clearly and persuasively communicate relevant, timely, and contextualized information on their impact on students and value to society.

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

## Provosts: What's important outcome information to share publicly?

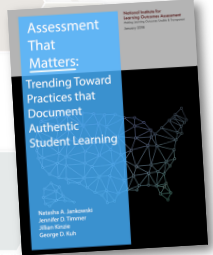
- information on accreditation
- retention, persistence, graduation, & completion rates
- licensure & certification exam pass rates
- job placement & salaries
- return on investment
- costs

National Institute for  
Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

20

## Communication Finding




Effectively communicating information about **student learning** remains a target of opportunity.

Institutions provide limited publicly available information on their websites.

**And, what was most important to provosts was not *what* to share, but *how* to share information.**

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

## Hello? Is anybody out there? Does anyone care?



- Do audiences on and off campus understand the role and importance of outcomes?
- Lack of consensus on whether information shared should be comparable across institutions; should provide program-level or be institution-level evidence only; and present evidence of learner gains, growth, or value-added by the institution

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

## Presentation and Interpretation Gap

**Gap between audience understanding and assessment evidence.**

**“We are not great as an industry at explaining what we do, how our institutions run, and the great value we provide to students and communities. I think the biggest gap is in outsiders understanding student learning. **We can provide all the assessment results or data we like, but if others cannot interpret them accurately there is no benefit to transparency or accountability.**” ~Provost**

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)


## Meaning Making Gap

**Communicating outputs is not sufficient. Outcome results must be made more meaningful for target audiences.**

**“This is something we struggle to accomplish. First, there is the need for constituents to become familiar with and understand the student learning outcomes...and why they are important, how they are measured, and what we learn from the results, as well as what improvements were made in response....This is not easy to share in “sound bites,” and communicating outputs such as employment rates and beginning salaries does not serve as a proxy for student learning and quality of programs. We can, for instance, communicate results of our annual assessment of the general education, but we need to find ways to help the general public make meaning of the results.”**

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)


### Provosts Asked for Help...



- A little about what to share,
- How to share (mostly externally),
- How to communicate a nuanced, complex picture of student learning that couples evidence of learning outcomes with student success data such as persistence and graduation rates.

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

### Example of Transparent, Understandable Outcomes Results



## National Survey of Student Engagement

% of students who reported quite a bit or very much


Indicator	Winthrop First-year	NSSE First-year
4b. Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations	75%	72%

**Academic Challenge Engagement Indicators**  
**Higher-Order Learning**  
 4b. Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations  
 4c. Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts  
 4d. Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source  
 4e. Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

### STUDENT OUTCOMES THE DENISON DIFFERENCE

Denison students are highly engaged in the co-curriculum, and 75% of Denison seniors report having held a formal leadership role in a student organization, which is significantly higher than students at similar institutions.




WRITING  
 MASTER SCHOLARS  
 DIALOGUE  
 OPPORTUNITY  
 THE WHOLE PERSON

<https://denison.edu/the-denison-difference>

### MARYMOUNT CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY

Anchored in the catholic tradition that affirms faith and builds character...

In all our programs, MCU ensures that students advance their **communication analysis** and **decision-making** skills, while broadening their **appreciation of perspectives** and their **from experience**. The Student Learning Outcomes affirm our commitment to Academic Excellence, Real World Learning and Character Formation.



Click each major to see student learning and achievement in action!

ACHIEVEMENT DATA  
 SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT  
 PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
[www.marymountcalifornia.edu/studentachievement/achievements/achievements.htm](http://www.marymountcalifornia.edu/studentachievement/achievements/achievements.htm)

### Communicating Learning Outcome Improvement

**As learning organizations, should colleges and universities share their improvement stories?**

Outcomes data suggested our students were not making gains on XYZ, so we took action! Enhancements to the first-year seminar, advising, and writing assignments have made a difference.

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

### Learning Outcome Assessment Communication Continuum

The diagram features a horizontal double-headed arrow with three points along it. Above the arrow, from left to right, are: 'Compliance posting of outcomes & select (favorable) results', 'More tailored posting of outcomes, by program/major experience & results for different audiences', and 'Nuanced, tailored framework for communicating outcomes, improvements, in comprehensive, student-focused, culturally responsive way'. Below the arrow, from left to right, are: 'Oversharing of easy to measure outcomes & results, just to do something', and 'More complete picture of all the places learning occurs, posting outcomes in student affairs/services & results for different audiences'.

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

### Audience Questions

- What pressures are you facing, if any, in communicating your value?
- What are the motivating factors in communicating your story?
- How are you currently communicating your story of student learning? Is it effective?

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

### NILOA Transparency Framework

The diagram is a circular flow of six interconnected components: 'Student Learning Statement', 'Assessment Plans', 'Assessment Resources', 'Current Assessment Activities', 'Evidence of Student Learning', and 'Use of Student Learning Evidence'. A central box labeled 'COMMON TO ALL' lists: 'Clearly worded', 'Historically used', 'Central to the institution', and 'Recognized by faculty'. The word 'TRANSPARENT' is written in a circle around the bottom of the diagram.

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

## Transparency Framework Components

- Assessment Resources
- Use of Student Learning Evidence
- Current Assessment Activities
- Assessment Plans
- Evidence of Student Learning
- Student Learning Outcomes Statements

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

## Excellence in Assessment Designations

- National recognition program for campus assessment leaders at two levels
- Evaluation based on the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) Transparency Framework
- Focus on campus-wide assessment – including student affairs & external stakeholders
- Joint project of the VSA, NILOA, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U)

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment



## Application Components

- Letter from Senior Campus Leadership
- Annotated list of individuals and groups engaged in assessment activities across campus
- Application narrative
  - Self study reflection process
  - Draws heavily on components of the NILOA Transparency Framework
  - Reflection and Growth/Improvement Plan
- Evaluation by national assessment experts

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

## Excellence in Assessment (EIA) Designation

**EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT**  
2018 Designees

**BOWIE STATE UNIVERSITY** 1865  
**Harper College**  
**NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY**  
**MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**UNC CHARLOTTE**

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

37

**EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT**  
2017 Designees

**Southern Connecticut State University**  
**Rio Salado College**  
**JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY**  
**MIDDLESEX Community College**  
**BGSU**  
**Bowling Green State University**

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

**EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT**  
2016 Designees

**CAMERON UNIVERSITY**  
**CAPELLA UNIVERSITY**  
**CCBC**  
**MSJ MOUNT ST. JOSEPH UNIVERSITY**  
**جامعة الزيتونة ZAYED UNIVERSITY**  
**MILLS COLLEGE**  
**ROSE-HULMAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**  
**IUPUI**  
**KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**WISCONSIN UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

## Lessons from EIA Campus Applications

Narrative construction – talk about *\*why\** you do what you do

What's your story?




National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

EIA Designation Rubric	
Dimension	Standard of Excellence
Communication of changes made as a result of assessment evidence from all levels of the institution	Changes made as a result of assessment are <b>communicated to both internal and external institutional audiences, including students</b> . Communications include information on evidence supporting <b>the need for change</b> .
Communication of outcomes from changes made as a result of assessment evidence from all levels of the institution	Changes made as a result of assessment are <b>monitored and evaluated</b> . <b>Outcomes from the changes are communicated to both internal and external institutional audiences, including students</b> . Communications include information on evidence used to <b>evaluate the change</b> .
Distribution and sharing of institution-level results of student assessment	Institution-level assessment results are accessible and actively shared proactively with faculty and staff in ways that facilitate their discussion and application (e.g., not simply made available as a report on a website).
Integration of institution-level results with measures used at other levels to create complete picture of student learning	Results from institution-level assessments are integrated vertically with assessment occurring at other levels of the institution intentionally to create a complete picture of student learning for all students with an emphasis on addressing issues of equity and/or equity gaps. Institution-level assessment results build on and from assessment activities in all other areas of the institution.

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org 41

## Evidence-Based Storytelling

- Why stories?
- How does this relate to our conversation thus far?



National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org 42


## What do we want to know about students?

- What argument do you want to make about your students' learning?
- What type of evidence would be necessary to make the argument?

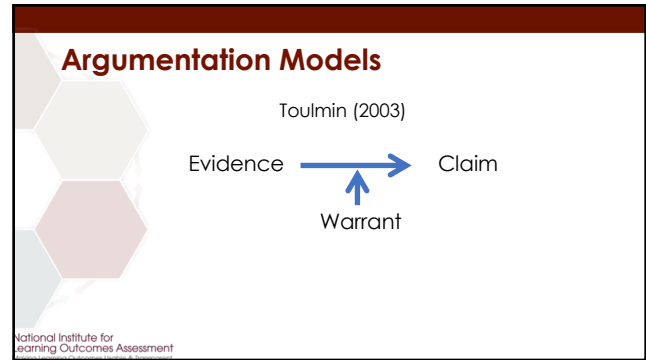
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

## What does good assessment look like for us here?

- Why do we think that what we are doing, for these students, will lead to enhanced learning, at this time?



National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment



### For instance...

"Educational assessment is at heart an exercise in evidentiary reasoning. From a handful of things that students say, do, or make, we want to draw inferences about what they know, can do, or have accomplished more broadly."  
 (Mislevy & Riconscente, 2005, p. iv).

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

47

### Assessment as part of our story

Makela and Rooney (2012) write of telling a story – that assessment "is essentially a process of telling a story about our people, programs, and services" that are told to many different people, in many different ways, with many different foci. They argue that the "storyline surrounding an assessment ultimately aims to include enough evidence to make well-reasoned assertions..." (p. 2)

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

48



## Why Storytelling...

- Shadiow (2013) presents a process to see stories "as something other than sentimental anecdotes with thinly veiled lessons" but instead as a mechanism by which we may reflect on our practices and teaching (p. viii).
- Stories allow us to go "assumption hunting" (Brookfield, 1995)
- Our stories tell others about our assumptions about the roles of students, faculty and content, and they "help inform—even alter—the thinking of others" (Shadiow, 2013, p. 16) we seek to "make believers out of our readers" (p. 17).

## Toolkits for Reviewing Stories

1. **Audience:** For whom is this narrative written? What counts as evidence for the different audiences of the report?
2. **What kind of story are you telling?** (i.e., compliance, improvement, loss, struggle, quest, tragedy, fantasy, etc.) What context is needed for readers to understand the story? What is the setting?
3. **Who are the character(s) in your story?** (Is there a protagonist in your story—someone who is driving the action and/or someone with whom your audience is likely to identify? What are the motivations of the characters?)


## Toolkits for Reviewing Stories

1. What is the plot? (The plot is the causal sequence of events and includes setting and conflict.)
2. What evidence do you have to assert your claims?
3. Based on the story you crafted, what is the best medium through which to share it? Video, written narrative, shorter visual image pieces, a combination, others?
4. If you are using visuals in your narrative – are they appropriate? Do they support the story you are trying to share or detract from them?
5. How will you make your target audience(s) aware of the story?

## Evidence-Based Storytelling

Evidence of student learning is used in **support of claims or arguments about improvement and accountability** told through **stories** to persuade a specific audience.






*Many institutional leaders have little experience talking publicly about data that represents the core of their school's performance—about what actually happens to students in classrooms, laboratories, studios, practice fields, and beyond. **But with practice and patience, we will all get better at deciding what to measure, how to measure it, and using what we learn to improve the quality.***

-George Kuh (2007), Risky Business, Change Magazine

<https://video.search.yahoo.com/video/search?ru=https://www.illinois.edu/niloa/2018/03/28/learning-outcomes-assessment/>

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

63





## Questions

Email us: [niloa@education.illinois.edu](mailto:niloa@education.illinois.edu)

**National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment**  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
51 Gerty Drive, MC-762  
Suite 196  
Champaign, IL 61820

Assignment Library: [www.assignmentlibrary.org](http://www.assignmentlibrary.org)  
Degree Qualifications Profile: [www.degreeprofile.org](http://www.degreeprofile.org)  
NILOA Website: [www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)  
Join Our Email List: [goe.ai/DDU56a](mailto:goe.ai/DDU56a)

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)

 @NILOA\_web  @LearningOutcomesAssessment

64