Culturally Responsive Assessment: What to Tackle First

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Ruth Williams
Oakton Community College

When institutions commit to equity work, Montenegro and Jankowski (2017) note that this work should also be reflected in culturally responsive assessment. They identify student learning outcomes statements, assessment methods, and using assessment results as three areas needing to address inequities in student learning outcomes as part of culturally responsive assessment. Oakton Community College's new mission, values, and strategic plan, are founded in Success Matters and we are approaching the fulfillment of our mission, vision, and strategic commitments with an equity-minded focus. In addition to being knee-deep in developing a comprehensive First-Year Experience, laying the groundwork for Guided Pathways, and scaling up our Student Engagement and Persistence Project, Oakton's Program for Assessment and Learning (OPAL) team responded to Montenegro and Jankowski's (2017) *Equity and Assessment: Moving Towards Culturally Responsive Assessment* publication. OPAL is working with curricular programs to pilot student learning outcomes assessment data disaggregation in transfer and career and technical education courses. The departments that volunteered to be a part of the pilot have a strong history of conducting longitudinal course assessments that have resulted in actions that have improved aggregated student learning.

When approaching any equity initiative, sharing and discussing disaggregated student outcomes data allows institutional stakeholders the opportunity to develop a cognitive framework necessary to create an environment to address variations in the data (Bensimon, 2005). Bensimon (2005) notes that if disaggregating data is a common institutional practice, discussing and addressing inequities in student outcomes should also be a part of the institution's continuous improvement culture. At Oakton, course and program assessment data has traditionally been disaggregated by campus, mode of offering (online, hybrid or face-to-face), and by time of day of course offering. In response to the call for culturally responsive assessment, the OPAL team identified several additional student populations or characteristics to include in the data disaggregation, including: first generation, Pell-eligible/non-Pell eligible, age, gender, race/ethnicity, high school attended, student semester credit load, certificate versus degree declaration, number of times student has taken the course, and current English and/or math placement. The disaggregated student outcomes data was shared with the OPAL team and each pilot department in preparation for their assessment plan due this year. OPAL, a team of twenty-nine faculty, staff, and administrators that facilitate transfer, career and technical education, co-curricular, and general education

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assessments, discussed the disaggregated assessment results. The student outcome inequities were evident, yet a resounding concern was the capacity of faculty, staff, and administrators to look at the data without first acknowledging how their biases and assumptions might influence their conclusions and actions. Bensimon (2005) shares similar concerns, that an educator's stereotypes, assumptions or biases about specific student populations will result in these students being viewed as poor performers or underachievers—viewing the data (and the students) from a deficit model. The OPAL team also wants to proactively address any concerns that faculty may not have the knowledge to develop action plans that could address the unveiled student learning outcomes gaps.

Professional Development

Community colleges have provided access to learning opportunities for increasingly diverse student populations. By providing this access, institutions are also obligated to provide equitable learning environments by implementing culturally-inclusive pedagogy and culturally-responsive assessment. To achieve educational equity for all students, faculty, staff and administrators will need to be engaged in professional development to recognize and address assumptions and biases when analyzing disaggregated student outcomes data and to identify and implement strategies in learning experiences that will positively impact the learning of all students. Disaggregating assessment data unmasks disparities in student learning and informs the evidence-based process of assessment. When faculty, staff, and administrators review and discuss disaggregated student outcomes data, they must be able to reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs, values and practices to identify the inequities and to identify what they can do to reach more equitable student outcomes (Bensimon, 2005).

Institutions can provide opportunities for professional development to assist employees in their equity-minded journey and to use disaggregated data to inform practices, procedures and policy-making, and implementation of student success initiatives. This professional development could be used to shift the cognitive frame from one of deficit or color-blindness to one of equity, by immersing educators in inquiry that transforms their perspective and sense of action (Bensimon, 2005; Lee, 1998). The responsibility for learning shifts from students to teachers (McClauchlin, 2007). Dowd (2007) discusses "equity-based inquiry strategies" (p. 412) and how the integration of accountability, assessment, and equity can be used to address "…inequities of stratified resource distribution with and across higher education sectors" (p. 412). Equity-based inquiry strategies can also be used at the course and program assessment level and is like the approach OPAL and program faculty are taking to address disaggregated student outcomes assessment data. Disaggregating student outcome data only will not improve student performance or identify what instructional strategies will address opportunity gaps (McClauchlin, 2007). Data informs understanding, so faculty can know better what is going on in their classrooms, which could motivate change (Bensimon, et al., 2004). Pairing that knowledge with the appropriate professional development will convert that inquiry into action.

Professional development should also focus on how curriculum, including assessment, might need to be modified to promote high achievement of all students (McLauchlin, 2007). The emphasis on teaching and learning that may align with a single set of cultural values results in curriculum and instructional strategies that disadvantage the learning of students with more diverse experiences and different cultures (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Keeping in mind universal design, faculty can develop action plans to improve teaching and learning for student populations that are not meeting assessment performance benchmarks and that are also beneficial for all students (McClauchlin, 2007). When evaluating ideal learning

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environments for African American students, Lee (1998) indicates that culturally responsive performance-based assessments should be authentic and relevant, and provide opportunities for multiple modes of student learning demonstration. Many community college instructors are content or subject-matter experts and may not be able to design assessments that reflect "relevant contextual cultural influences" (Qualls, 1998, p. 297) that recognize and validate varied cultural experiences that would positively impact learning (Qualls, 1998). When students can demonstrate their achievement of course student learning outcomes in various ways, the assessment process is culturally responsive to diverse learning experiences (Qualls, 1998). Faculty professional development should provide educators with a breadth of tools, skills and knowledge that validate the influence culture has on learning styles, prior knowledge, and needs (McClauchlin, 2007; Qualls, 1998). The OPAL team is currently planning professional development opportunities for 2019-2020 to address thoughtful assessment data disaggregation and culturally inclusive pedagogy, including culturally responsive assessment. As a result of this professional development, we expect that faculty, staff, and administrators will be conscientious of their biases and assumptions before they analyze disaggregated assessment data, and that they have the knowledge, skills and tools to develop action plans that consider the impact student learning outcomes statements and assessment methods have on student learning.

Conclusion

Initiatives to improve student outcomes need to include student learning outcomes and assessment (Dowd, 2007). Montenegro and Jankowski (2017) indicate that culturally responsive assessment will address student learning outcomes statements, and assessment and evaluation tools, to reflect the experiences, culture, and needs of all students. With the necessary professional development, educators can positively influence student learning by embracing social justice for all students in curricular and co-curricular experiences through culturally responsive assessment (McLauchlin, 2007).

> We expect faculty, staff, and administrators to be conscientious of their biases and assumptions, and have the knowledge, skills and tools to develop action plans that consider the impact that student learning outcomes statements and assessment methods have on student learning.

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