

Using Evidence for Improvement: The 2019 Teaching and Learning National Institute

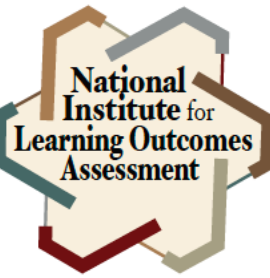
As assessment leaders are well aware, campuses have invested a great deal of energy generating evidence about student learning outcomes, but using that evidence for improvement is often a challenge. Several years ago, to take up this challenge, a small group of national organizations, including NILOA, launched a week-long Teaching and Learning National Institute (TLNI) for campus teams working to develop action plans aimed at “using evidence for improvement.” The fourth such institute was held this year from July 8-11 on the campus of The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.

This year’s event brought together 16 campuses, both two- and four-year, public and private, from across the country. It differed from previous years in that it brought together both TLNI campuses and campuses focused on the development of learning communities and related High-Impact Practices. The merged model was intended to explore and advance cross-cutting principles relevant to both groups: a clear focus on students and their learning, a commitment to equity and inclusion, investments in professional development aimed at improving the learning and success of all students, along with building institutional capacity for ongoing improvement.

Much of the time at the Institute was dedicated to focused work by campus teams as they designed two-year action plans for initiatives back home aimed at improving the learning experience of students. Their planning was supported by a wide range of workshops (including several that drew on NILOA’s work), by interactions with other campuses and a diverse group of resource faculty, and by plenary sessions that provided a larger framing. This year’s plenaries were by Jose Moreno, Associate Professor of Chicano & Latino Studies at California State University-Long Beach (“Pedagogies of Possibilities: Considerations for Equity and High-Quality Learning”); and Rosalie Richards, Associate Provost for Faculty Development, Stetson University (“Raising the Bar: Helping Students Make Meaning as They Move Through the Curriculum to a Degree”).

The TLNI campuses focused on building knowledge, capacity, and models for assessing student learning outcomes in ways that support real improvement for all students. In final action plans and evaluations of the Institute, participants pointed to the value of dedicated time and space for developing (as one put it) “a more robust, sustainable, and transparent system of outcomes assessment.” Several highlighted their success in creating a detailed plan (including a timeline) that builds on existing practices and reflects distinctive institutional culture and history—“drawing on our institutional strengths and wealth” as one person said.

Because using evidence for improvement is impossible without engagement by a full range of stakeholders, the institute put a strong focus on team building and especially on assessment approaches that engage faculty. Participants pointed to their success in developing a plan that would allow and encourage faculty engagement—a “faculty-centric” plan, as one person put it. Additionally, many campuses celebrated their success in building “a strong bond between team members, with a sense of shared commitment,” and in finding ways to “draw on another’s strengths.” One reported having built a “home team” of colleagues back on campus that contributed to their work prior to the institute and who were then ready to support the work when the Institute team returned with their plan.



The Teaching and Learning National Institute is co-sponsored by NILOA, the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and—with leadership from its newly appointed director, Julia Metzker (metzkerj@evergreen.edu)—the Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education.

The Washington Center's National Advisory Board is already at work planning next year's Institute. Watch for details as they become available, at <http://wacenter.evergreen.edu/nsilc>. Or contact Pat Hutchings (hutchings.pat@gmail.com) or Jillian Kinzie (jikinzie@indiana.edu) at NILOA to discuss how the Institute might benefit your campus.

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