



# Where is Culture in Higher Education Assessment and Evaluation?

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The **Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA)**, a new center located in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is an interdisciplinary endeavor that brings domestic and international researchers together to address the growing need for practice-relevant and policy-relevant studies that take seriously the influences of cultural norms, practices, and expectations in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social and educational interventions.

Last month, CREA hosted its **inaugural conference**, “Repositioning Culture in Evaluation and Assessment” in Chicago, Illinois. The conference provided critical insight into the landscape of culturally responsive evaluation and culturally relevant assessment, a space that remains largely uncharted. The conference included internationally recognized keynote speakers and invited panelists, 120 papers, roundtables and symposia and was attended by nearly 300 participants and interested visitors from the U.S. (including participants from Hawaii and Alaska), indigenous nations, and seven non-US countries (including Germany, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Greece, Australia and Denmark).

Notably absent from the conference was significant discussion of issues surrounding the role that notions of cultural responsiveness, cultural awareness, and cultural relevance play in evaluating higher education programs and services as well as in assessing higher education outcomes. What little discussion there was of these matters was largely limited to consideration of pedagogical practices and assessment of teacher performance in the context of higher education teacher preparation programs.

Assessment plays a critical role in higher education planning and accreditation. CREA recognizes the importance of assessing learning outcomes at post-secondary institutions and is mindful of the challenges to developing and implementing assessment practices; challenges that are frequently discussed through NILOA’s viewpoints and occasional papers. However, we must be concerned about the limited evidence and lack of sustained discussion on how program and institutional assessment frameworks are responsive to the cultures and cultural contexts of the diverse populations served by institutions of higher education. As the demographic composition of many postsecondary education institutions continues to change, it is imperative that culture is included as a central consideration in designing and implementing systems of assessment. Failure to do so will threaten the validity of inferences about institutional performance based on assessment data.

It is our hope to stimulate discussion at both policy and practice levels of the ways in which higher education institutions document how culture is identified and engaged in assessment planning. There is a growing body of

# Viewpoint

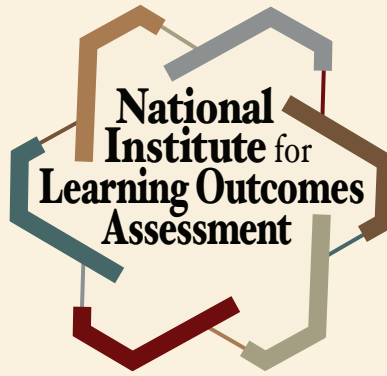
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literature that recognizes the critical role of culture in assessment at all levels in P-12 education and provides at least a starting point from which higher education scholars can build. CREA looks forward to supporting these conversations and continuing to advance the central role that culture plays in assessment theory and practice at all levels of education.

About CREA:

CREA's **mission** is carried out by a **culturally diverse** pool of highly trained evaluators, assessment specialists, researchers, and policy analysts from organizations and institutions around the world. Please visit the CREA website for more information about resources and services: [www.education.illinois.edu/crea](http://www.education.illinois.edu/crea). To join the CREA mailing list, please send your request to [crea@education.illinois.edu](mailto:crea@education.illinois.edu).

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