



Student Involvement in Assessment: A 3-Way Win

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College students are arguably the group on campus least resistant to assessment efforts. Yet, they remain an untapped resource as institutions seek ways to prove their value to both students and society. The key to effectively involving students in outcomes assessment is to intentionally match faculty need with student interest. When students serve as statisticians, interns, and researchers, this is a 3-way win for faculty, students, and directors of assessment.

For example, our theatre department stored years of self-evaluations submitted by students during the formidable BFA review. Majors in the fine arts enter degree programs as BA students. The BA is a general degree. Acceptance into the professional degree program, the BFA, requires approval by departmental faculty through a rigorous review process that includes evaluation of live performances, coursework submitted to a portfolio, a written application, and an interview before the BFA committee. Part of the written application for the theatre BFA program includes a self-evaluation that students complete at the end of their first year. Following a recommendation by the assessment office, the faculty began submitting evaluations of each student along with his or her self-evaluation. A student intern interested both in music and statistics analyzed the data and wrote a report that led to a faculty-led focus on the importance of self-discipline for the successful BFA theatre student. Students now report specific ways they are working toward this goal. Improvements in student health, time management, and professionalism have been noted. Other projects that involved students analyzing piles of stored data include: student work constructing difficulty and discrimination matrices for assessment exams, reliability analyses of rubric data for composition courses, mapping of the number and types of writing-intensive courses students take en route to undergraduate degrees, multidimensional scaling of general education goals, and comparisons of global awareness of teacher education students interning in various geographical areas of the state.

Sometimes a simple review of existing data leads to meaningful student research. For example, a group of students curious about discrepancies between student (NSSE) and faculty (FSSE) perceptions of student commitment to academic endeavors hypothesized that one group's low-performing benchmark scores on academic challenge were due to low faculty expectations. They conducted an experiment that resulted in an evidence-based report to deans on just how much faculty would expect of first-year students if they "saw us as we see ourselves." Another experiment that started with a review of masses of unused data resulted in a recitation intervention with one of the university's gatekeeper courses that suffered from high DFW rates. Student-conducted focus groups with participants along with pre-post data analysis have resulted in ongoing changes made to the general chemistry course.

Finally, students can be an asset to the assessment work done by co-curricular units. Assisting the career services unit, four students enrolled in a research methods course were able to double the response rate of senior exit

Viewpoint

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surveys after they hypothesized that mode of delivery was the cause of poor return. In another co-curricular project, seniors who were told that the chancellor wanted to make the commencement ceremony more student-centric conducted focus groups, analyzed data, and, most importantly, witnessed changes made to the ceremony. Imagine the students' delight when the chancellor showed up at their presentation of results to the commencement committee! In other co-curricular areas, students have conducted benchmarking, information literacy, and university mission surveys for the learning outcomes advisory council. Their findings have been used to defend programs and student learning outcomes before the faculty senate.

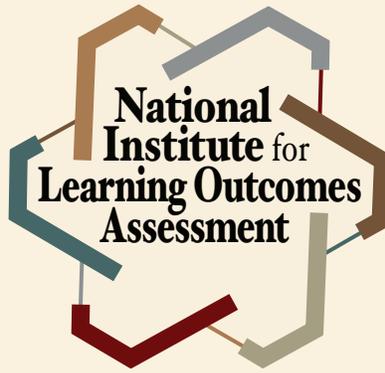
The involvement of students in assessment has rewarded the faculty, the director of assessment, and, of course, the students themselves. Faculty have used student-analyzed data for presentations to curriculum committees, discussions of general education reform, and changes to their own pedagogy. Students boost their graduate-school applications, vitas, and resumes with real-world experience and glowing letters of recommendation. They present their projects and research at our annual [Create@StAte](#), a symposium of student research, scholarship, and creative work. This year, the coveted undergraduate overall poster presentation award went to the students working with assessment in general chemistry. Such accomplishments advance the culture of assessment campus wide.

Some tips for involving students in assessment:

- Identify research methods classes that might require hands-on experiences
- Identify faculty who might have files of data waiting to be analyzed
- Direct formal research proposals to the IRB for exemption for educational research
- Advertise student intern opportunities in the assessment office
- Identify campus leaders of initiatives that most likely are not being assessed
- Expand the assessment office to include faculty fellows and student interns
- Provide students with a venue for disseminating results
- Consider having the assessment director teach a class that includes capstone projects

As an assessment director and faculty member, I require a collaborative research project in a course I teach. Approximately one-half of those students contact me after the course and ask either to continue with assessment work related to their project or to volunteer for work with ongoing assessment research. College students today never have questioned demands for evidence of learning, and they make great outcomes assessment collaborators.

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