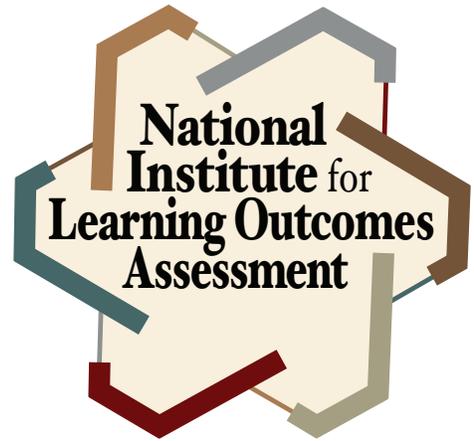


May 2020



Activity: What is Your Philosophy of Assessment?

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One area of consistent disconnect between faculty, staff, and others involved in assessment of student learning is agreement on what assessment is and isn't, along with agreement on the value, worth, and purpose for engaging in assessment of student learning in the first place. In part, this is due to conversations on assessment beginning with a focus on the *doing* of assessment as opposed to *why* we do assessment. It is also due to disciplinary differences and philosophical stances on assessment – the underlying mental models if you will – that drive decisions around assessment processes and practices (Jankowski, 2017). Without clarity on the philosophy behind assessment, faculty and staff can talk past each other, misunderstand one another, and/or reinforce or obfuscate assessment culture.

This activity can be undertaken individually or within a larger group setting.¹ It can serve as a useful tool to explore your own perceptions and philosophical approaches regarding the purpose and value of assessment. As a group activity, it provides a means to determine where people stand in relation to the different approaches and schools of thought around assessment. The purpose of this activity is two-fold. The first is to help uncover underlying tendencies towards different philosophies of assessment based on assessment-related beliefs. The second purpose is for assessment professionals to be better prepared and informed on how to engage in conversations about student learning with people from different philosophical positions and viewpoints such that they do not talk past each other. Knowing the philosophical stances of people, disciplines, units or departments on assessment can help improve communication and lower misunderstanding. For example, one would not be overly successful talking to a person about teaching and learning who believes assessment to be about compliance. Thus, this activity is designed to enable assessment professionals, and faculty and staff within departments and units, to know which philosophies they are aligned with to help them approach different conversations and communicate about assessment to different groups based on different perspectives.

The activity presents statements related to four different philosophical viewpoints on the purpose and function of assessment of student learning as well as beliefs about the best means by which to measure student learning. The four philosophies explored are:

- **Teaching and Learning:** Assessment is viewed as part of pedagogy and student learning, driven by faculty questions about their classroom and programmatic practices in ways that guide future developments in both teaching and learning. The purpose of assessment is formative, and to enhance faculty teaching and student learning. Thus, the process of assessment is viewed as one of learning and as embedded within teaching and learning.
- **Measurement:** Concerns about determining valid and reliable approaches to gathering data on student learning drive decisions and discussions on assessing student learning. Assessment is about measurement and determining the most appropriate and accurate measures to document and record learning as well as programmatic or institutional impact on learning. Comparisons, longitudinal data, and controls are viewed as an integral part of measurement issues.

¹ Modified from an activity for prior-learning assessment created by Nan Travers, Ph.D. (2015, 2019)

- **Compliance/Reporting:** Assessment is viewed as undertaken solely to meet the requirements and demands of administrators, accrediting bodies, and state agencies. Assessment is simply about meeting the needs and requirements of external entities for purposes of reporting. It is about doing what is asked, checking a box, and moving on with your day.
- **Student-Centered:** Assessment is viewed as a mechanism by which students can learn about their own learning by being an active participant in the assessment process. Assessment here is about a reflective and engaged process in which students learn about themselves as learners, how they learn, what they know, and are actively involved in and an agent of their own learning process. Students are not simply the object of assessment, but the primary beneficiaries.

Please note, it is highly unlikely that an individual will fall into only one of the four areas but will instead have several to which there are strongly held beliefs – some stronger than others. For that reason, the scores are based on the direction to which one leans, to understand a picture of the different elements that combine for how assessment is viewed, not to determine which “camp” one aligns with.

Activity Instructions

1. For each of the philosophical statements, indicate your level of agreement ranging from 0-4, where “0” = do not agree and “4” = absolutely agree. It is fine to have a score of 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4. It is even acceptable to give .5 or .7 scores. The only consideration is that you do have to add the scores at the end and sticking with 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 does make the addition process easier.
2. On the second page of the activity, add together each of the scores for each color, or if not in color by each abbreviation (TL, M, C, SC) and put total amounts in the result table. Total sum will range from 0-24 for each of the sets of statements. The colors and abbreviations align with the different philosophical understandings of assessment.
3. For each of the statement types, the closer your score is to 24 (the highest amount you can get by giving all 4s to each statement in an individual category), the stronger you agree with the statements in that group. It is highly unlikely that an individual will fall solely into one category, but instead have two or more to which they align. For instance, it might be that someone is student-centered (score of 19) and focused on teaching and learning (score of 17), but also cares strongly about how best to objectively measure learning (score of 15).
4. If doing this as a group activity, take time to discuss the results with those at your table or participating in the virtual break out room. What do the results mean about how you go about assessing student learning, the types of changes made, and the types of questions asked? If doing this individually, reflect on what that means for your own work and the processes and practices of assessment within your institution. You might even want to examine your beliefs over time, completing the activity again at a later date.

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Philosophical Statements

Do Not
Agree = 0 to
Absolutely
Agree = 4

		Do Not Agree = 0 to Absolutely Agree = 4	
1.	Assessment of student learning is a necessary element of effective classroom teaching.		TL
2.	Results of assessment of student learning are used to improve teaching processes and practices.		TL
3.	Assessment of student learning should be held to the same evidentiary standards as objective, empirical research.		M
4.	Assessment of student learning does not provide evidence to improve teaching and learning.		C
5.	Assessment measures should be responsive to different student populations.		SC
6.	Assessment of student learning is for reporting to external entities.		C
7.	Assessment of student learning is not a faculty responsibility.		C
8.	Principles of scientific measurement (i.e., reliability, validity, sample size) should drive assessment of student learning measures.		M
9.	Involving students in assessment (beyond completing an assessment) makes the results inherently invalid.		M
10.	The only reason to assess student learning is to meet accreditation or programmatic requirements.		C
11.	Assessment of student learning is a waste of faculty time.		C
12.	Evidence of student learning is used to inform students about their learning.		SC
13.	Assessment of student learning is a shared responsibility of faculty, staff, and students.		TL
14.	Students are active participants in assessment processes.		SC
15.	Assessment is a part of the teaching and learning process whereby faculty learn about their own practice.		TL
16.	Students, when appropriate, should be able to provide their own evidence of learning outcome attainment.		SC
17.	Assessment of student learning is an integral part of faculty responsibilities.		TL
18.	To determine if learning has occurred, pre- and post-measures are necessary.		M
19.	Students should co-design learning outcomes and related assessments with faculty and staff.		SC
20.	Assessment evidence is composed of embedded assignments in courses.		TL
21.	Consistency in assessment measures is the most important element of assessment practices.		M
22.	Student learning can only be assessed through tests or exams.		M
23.	Students are a valuable source of information on what could be improved to advance student learning.		SC
24.	There is one, right way to assess student learning, for reporting purposes.		C

For each of the statements on the prior page, indicate your level of agreement ranging from 0-4. Add your score for each of the following statement types.

Results Table

Statement Types	Total (0-24)
Teaching and Learning (TL)	
Measurement (M)	
Compliance/Reporting (C)	
Student-Centered (SC)	

For each of the statement types, the closer your score is to 24, the stronger you agree with the statements in that group. The statement groupings are related to different philosophical views on the purpose and function of assessment of student learning as well as the best means by which to measure student learning.

Teaching and Learning: For those with higher scores on teaching and learning, assessment is viewed as part of pedagogy and student learning, driven by faculty questions about their classroom and programmatic practices in ways that guide future developments in both teaching and learning. The purpose of assessment is formative, and to enhance faculty teaching and student learning. Thus, the process of assessment is viewed as one of learning and as embedded within teaching and learning.

Measurement: For those with higher scores on measurement, concerns about determining valid and reliable approaches to gathering data on student learning drive decisions and discussions on assessing student learning. Assessment is about measurement and determining the most appropriate and accurate measures to document and record learning as well as programmatic or institutional impact on learning. Comparisons, longitudinal data, and controls are viewed as an integral part of measurement issues.

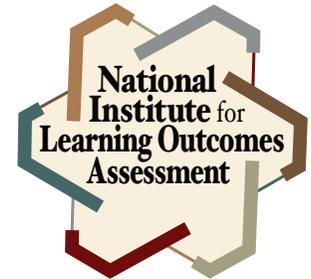
Compliance/Reporting: For those with higher scores on compliance and reporting, assessment is viewed as undertaken solely to meet the requirements and demands of administrators, accrediting bodies, and state agencies. Assessment is simply about meeting the needs and requirements of external entities for purposes of reporting. It is about doing what is asked, checking a box, and moving on with your day.

Student-Centered: For those with higher scores on student-centered, assessment is viewed as a mechanism by which students can learn about their own learning by being an active participant in the assessment process. Assessment here is about a reflective and engaged process in which students learn about themselves as learners, how they learn, what they know, and are actively involved in and an agent of their own learning process. Students are not simply the object of assessment, but the primary beneficiaries.

To read more about the different types, see Jankowski, N. A. (2017). Moving towards a philosophy of assessment. *Assessment Update*, 29(3), p. 10-11. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/au.30096>

About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org>.
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.
- NILOA's Founding Director, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001.



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