THREE HIGHER ED ORGANIZATIONS REAFFIRM COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, LAUNCH NEW CASE STUDIES EXPLORING EQUITY-MINDED ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

- The first three cases in a new series of seven case studies focused on equitable approaches to assessment in higher education have been published today, exploring the practices of three distinct institutions across the United States: Portland State University, Capella University, and Cornell University.
- The case studies provide examples of equitable practices which institutions and programs can learn from and utilize in planning for the Fall, addressing process, practice, and methods.
- The current social realities impacting students reinforces college and university responsibility to ensure implementation of equitable approaches; assessment being one area of many to address. These case studies provide ideas for faculty, staff, and administrators on where they might address inequities.

CHAMPAIGN, IL— The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), and Campus Labs are releasing the first three cases in a series of case studies focused on exploring equitable approaches to assessment in higher education. As a collective, we recognize that there are practices occurring within institutions of higher education that address issues of equity in assessment, but that awareness of those practices is lacking along with information on their effectiveness, process elements, and the impact of equitable assessment efforts on diverse student populations and their learning. These case studies aim to shine a spotlight on these practices so that others can have examples from which to learn and dialogue about implementing equitable assessment in their own context this Fall.

Inequities plague higher education, and assessment has contributed by promoting approaches that are not mindful of differing student needs, shying away from directly addressing race/racism, thinking assessment is apolitical and free from systems of power/oppression/privilege, and failing to use assessment results to close equity gaps. However, the current social climate, COVID-19 shifts to distance learning, and protests against continuing oppression and systemic racism against communities of color have brought the equity

conversation front and center. We stand at a crossroads that requires examination of practices in higher education to directly address inequities.

"The equity in assessment cases in this series fill a need we often hear from colleges and universities when asked what equitable assessment actually looks like in practice and what would help support equitable assessment practices in a specific institution" says Dr. Natasha Jankowski, executive director of NILOA. "Institutions want ideas and examples to learn from and understand what equity-minded assessment practice entails. Each of the cases provides a unique and different way, depth, and approach to think about equity in assessment through which readers can reflect on their own processes and practices."

The first three case studies in the series are released simultaneously to provide a glimpse of the wide array of equity-minded assessment practices as evidenced by these case excerpts below:

- **Portland State University: General Education and Equitable Assessment**. For Portland State University (PSU), equitable assessment practice includes space for all students and faculty to participate in ways that are meaningful to them, grounded in an appreciation of their strengths and in the understanding that it is assessment's job to find ways to support them in improvement. Equitable assessment practice means that students have the opportunity to show their learning in multiple ways, not just through high stakes standardized tests. At its best, equitable assessment processes consider multiple pieces of evidence of student learning, ideally curated by the student so that their understanding of their learning is part of the assessment process. In the general education program, PSU has made an intentional effort to pair assessment and faculty support efforts so that faculty are willing to engage in critical reflection about their own practice and in conversation about who our students are and how we can best serve them. They offer various lessons learned that can inform practice at other institutions seeking to infuse these values into general education through the use of portfolio.

- **Capella University: Equity and Transparency**. At Capella University, assessments are designed to ensure that learners have opportunities to learn and practice career-relevant competencies. In order to deliver on the quality and fairness of these assessments, Capella ensures transparency for all learners in each course for each assessment, beginning with how the assessment criteria are aligned to the course competencies. Learners are provided with a rubric that has discreet and descriptive performance levels to guide them to understand how their performance on the assessments will be evaluated – there are no surprises. Instructors also provide learners with additional feedback on ways to improve, as well as specific information about why his or her performance was assessed in the way it was. Learners have both a text and visual view of their progress on competency achievement through a Competency Map, which is a course-based dashboard that visually indicates each student's status relative to specific assessed competencies.

- **Cornell University: Ripple Effect Mapping**. Cornell University believes that equity-minded assessment practices should invoke participatory practices aimed at validating diverse stakeholder experiences. They should be aligned with program goals and student learning outcomes and be useful to all stakeholders. Equity-minded assessment practices explicitly name issues of power and actively work against systems of oppression; they should be easy to understand and easily accessible to all stakeholders; and the student or participant should remain at the center of the assessment. Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is used as an alternative means to examine practice by not only learning about equity-minded assessment but also elevating the student voice and experience. REM is an iterative and inclusive assessment process that engages program and community stakeholders

to map a program's impacts. It also holds that we can only identify these impacts by including stories of diverse stakeholders and giving them equal validity in the analysis process.

"By bundling these first cases together as opposed to releasing them one-by-one, we hope that our audience can see right off the bat the different ways that equity-minded assessment can take place", says Dr. Gavin Henning, professor of higher education in New England College. "So, they begin to think-tank through different examples as they plan for their Fall assessments and instruction. Asking themselves questions about what an equitable approach means for their program, for their classrooms, and for their students. How can we leverage different voices and when? What would be a good starting point?"

Erick Montenegro, a researcher and communications coordinator for NILOA and current doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, also thinks these case studies offer a good opportunity for the field to interrogate current practices and improve. "We like to think that assessment is completely apolitical and objective, but we are all human. We all carry assumptions. Departments and institutions are full of norms. And while these may have taken hold due to real circumstances at one point in time, they may not be appropriate for the lived-realities of our current students. Certainly not our future students, especially when we think about how college enrollments will continue to diversify over the next century. These case studies offer examples of practice that we can learn from, and use as a launching point to look at our practice and improve; which is ultimately the essence of assessment."

In addition to these three cases, there are four more in the publication pipeline that will be individually published in the coming months. Knowing very well that equity-minded practices change and can take different forms, NILOA, CAS, and Campus Labs are still seeking examples from institutions who are using equitable assessment practices and are using assessment to actively address equity gaps within their own unique context. The hope is to continue to grow the cache of examples so that these practices become the norm and not the exception.

"The opportunity is currently ripe for those who want to actually work to close inequities" says Dr. Anne Lundquist, assistant vice-president for campus adoption at Campus Labs. "One barrier to adopting assessment that uses an equitable or social justice framework is lack of support for such initiatives. However, it would be hard-pressed for leadership, assessment practitioners, and/or faculty to say that equity-minded initiatives are not essential to the mission of higher education right now. We hope the practices in these cases can inspire or spark initiatives for this Fall semester and beyond. And we hope people keep sharing their practice to in-turn inspire others."

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NILOA is a research and resource-development organization dedicated to documenting, advocating, and facilitating the systematic use of learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning. NILOA supports institutions in designing learning experiences and assessment approaches that strengthen the experience of diverse learners within a variety of institutional contexts. Learn more at www.learningoutcomesassessment.org.

Leading the way for nearly 40 years, CAS is a consortium of professional associations in higher education that promotes the use of professional standards for the development, assessment, and improvement of quality student learning, programs, and services. CAS reflects good practices and promotes intra-campus collaboration among its over 40 collaborating professional associations representing over 115,000 professionals in higher education. Learn more at www.cas.edu.

Campus Labs offers integrated software and cloudbased assessment tools for higher education. Their work focuses on empowering and transforming colleges and universities through the use of strategic data

insights. Campus Labs offers a comprehensive set of solutions for over 1,400 Member Campuses. Learn more at www.campuslabs.com.