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# Wake Forest University: Campus Life and Equitable Assessment

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Founded in 1834, **Wake Forest University** is a private university located in Winston-Salem, NC, with more than 8,000 students. The undergraduate population of more than 5,200 hails from 49 states and more than 50 foreign countries. Wake Forest University is currently undertaking multiple large-scale, interdisciplinary efforts in equitable assessment. Teams and projects involved in the initiative include:

1. Campus Life Assessment Committee
2. Wellbeing Collaborative and Wellbeing Assessment
3. Global Connections program's assessment efforts
4. Cross-university data dive discussions on disaggregated data
5. Student feedback

For assessment to be equitable, Wake Forest pays careful attention to a variety of key components, including:

- Incorporation of participant feedback across the assessment process, from measure selection to results interpretation;
- Assessment teams that incorporate multidisciplinary perspectives;
- Construction or selection of the conceptual models upon which assessments are built;
- Content that is relevant across many groups;
- Items that are interpretable across many groups;
- Accessible and inclusive recruitment and sampling practices to gather a diverse range of student voices;
- Sensitivity to potential barriers for students to access and complete assessments;
- Care in confidentiality of data and reporting;
- Fairness in item scoring and data interpretation and report-writing;
- Fair use of aggregate results in research or resource allocation; and
- Relevance and interpretability of assessment feedback to participants.

Because these components of equitable assessment require expert substantive and technical expertise from diverse fields, interdisciplinary collaboration is a requirement. Each of the five are discussed on the upcoming pages of the case.

## **Please Cite As:**

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## I. Campus Life Assessment Committee

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The Assessment Committee was formed in 2014 to support assessment efforts, capacity and skill development, and logistics for all units in the Division of Campus Life. The Assessment Committee is an interdisciplinary group composed of one representative for each unit in the Division. The Division strongly believes that assessment data should shape and inform decisions about programs and services with an aim toward improvement. Assessment is operationalized through annual and mid-year reports, assessment plans, and program-level assessments.

The Assessment Committee is a natural extension of the mission of Campus Life at Wake Forest University, which is to *prepare students to lead lives of meaning and purpose*. The current **Strategic Priorities** for enacting that mission are founded on principles of equity and inclusion:

1. Lead a comprehensive approach to student and community wellbeing.
2. Cultivate an inclusive community where all students feel a sense of belonging and are valued, contributing members.
3. Prepare students to lead in a diverse environment with cultural fluency.
4. Foster an inclusive culture of peer engagement, leadership, and accountability.
5. Integrate civic engagement and responsibility locally and globally.

Two Strategic Plan Priorities points above explicitly reference equity and inclusion: (2) the cultivation of an inclusive community and (3) preparing students to lead in a diverse environment with cultural fluency. The remaining three necessarily require equity and inclusion in order to be met. Comprehensive approaches to student and community wellbeing (1) are not possible without an understanding of wellbeing that accounts for the diverse paths by which people experience wellbeing. Similarly, peer engagement, leadership, accountability, and civic engagement (4 & 5) are not possible without supports that are as diverse as the students we serve.

As Campus Life has continued to evaluate how we accomplish these strategic priorities, it became evident that we should also focus on advancing operational excellence to support people, systems, and processes. Included in this focus on operational excellence is an imperative to foster a culture of **assessment** for programs and processes to ensure access to, and effective use of, resources. The synthesis between our Strategic Plan and the operational excellence imperative supporting a culture of assessment was a natural emphasis on equitable and inclusive assessment practices.

In the Committee, we have been reviewing theory and practice in equitable assessment. Those efforts focus on increasing Campus Life-specific staff awareness and implementation of equitable assessment practices. Campus Life staff members are uniquely focused on assessment as a practice, and the notion of equity is centered in our practices and our mission. The Assessment Committee has an Equity and Research subcommittee that advances efforts around equity-minded assessment throughout the division through a devotion of research and advocacy. Projects include regular research on and revision of best practices in demographics collection, review of measures for equitable and inclusive language, review of survey sampling and recruitment practices, and providing support for conducting and interpreting disaggregated data analyses. For instance, in order to assist all campus departments with their equitable and inclusive assessment efforts, the Assessment Committee created a standard and inclusive set of **demographics items** with the input of measurement of demographics for our students. The committee also created a connection to the University's central demographics information for use in assessment projects, and future efforts include the preparation and dissemination of easy-to-understand tools and presentations.

To support the translation of assessment into practice, the Assessment Committee sponsors an annual Assessment Expo that is open to all members of campus. Although Campus Life members are the primary presenters and attendees, members of other campus departments frequently attend, and some departments also present. You can see examples of posters from the 2nd Annual Assessment Expo [here](#).

## 2. Wellbeing Collaborative and Wellbeing Assessment

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The **Wellbeing Collaborative** is a national research effort supporting student wellbeing. Established in 2014 and housed in Campus Life, the Collaborative is grounded in the Campus Life mission and strategic plan described in the prior section. The primary project of the Collaborative has been the Wellbeing Assessment, a multidimensional measure of undergraduate student wellbeing that is deployed annually as a survey.

The Collaborative and Assessment are practice implementations of our belief that we cannot support students' wellbeing without evaluating wellbeing through a lens of equity and inclusion. The Wellbeing Assessment team focused on creating **inclusive definitional models of wellbeing**, careful sampling and weighting of survey data based on demographics, and **qualitative measure development research** designed specifically for young adults and inclusive of multiple demographic groups. The large, national administrations have generated sufficient sample sizes to evaluate measurement invariance (i.e., statistical models of equitable measure performance) across demographic groups, an important foundation for quantitative between-group analyses. In addition to administering the Assessment annually, the Collaborative publishes equity- and inclusion-informed **research**, provides participating schools with interactive data reporting tools, and hosts trainings and discussions on data-informed practice. The interactive reporting tools, trainings, and discussions enable participating schools to disaggregate their data using visualizations they can then communicate effectively to stakeholders at their own institutions.

At both Wake and participating schools, Wellbeing Assessment data and interactive data reporting tools have been used to evaluate between-group differences in wellbeing and access to skills, resources, and conditions that are supportive of wellbeing. Within Wake, we have used Wellbeing Assessment data to monitor changes in trends across time, which has helped us continually evaluate our suite of wellbeing-supportive programs, policies, and practices for inclusivity and effectiveness.

## 3. Center for Global Programs and Studies

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Our Center for Global Programs and Studies oversees various initiatives designed to enhance faculty, staff, and student global mindsets, including an academic and cultural adjustment program for first-year undergraduate international students called Global Connections. Their Global Connections program mission is: *enhance international students' confidence and ability with written and oral communication, self-awareness, and connection with campus leadership, faculty, staff, staff and students*. This mission shares themes with Campus Life's mission to *prepare students to lead lives of meaning and purpose*. The Global Connections program cultivates an inclusive community by providing our international students an early platform to develop university belonging as well as to enhance skills (e.g., academic writing, self-awareness) critical to leading lives of meaning and purpose.

The Center for Global Programs and Studies is independent from Campus Life but works closely with them. The Center believes that equity-minded assessment should be important for all initiatives, especially ones with global and diverse student backgrounds. Global and diverse students participate

in all areas of the educational experience, and so equity-minded assessment should be common and widespread throughout higher education.

The Center convened a student advisory board with students from a range of backgrounds, ethnicities, nationalities, and genders to help shape our mission and student learning outcomes. We designed both a direct and an indirect assessment of student global mindsets. In our semi-structured interview assessment, the first question is ‘what does culture mean to you?’ This unscored prompt allows the interviewer to have a better awareness of a particular student’s perspective on culture before asking scored questions about interactions with people from other cultures and backgrounds. In the development of the indirect survey assessment, we tested the survey via [MTurk](#) (an Amazon crowdsourcing marketplace often used to gather survey samples) with samples of participants from South America, Asia, Europe, and North America, as these were the top sending continents of students to Wake Forest University to ensure that the measurement was reliable across a range of cultures.<sup>1</sup>

**Data** from Global Connections initiative and aligned **research** has been shared with various areas of the university, including the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Academic Advising, the Teaching and Learning Collaborative (i.e., office overseeing faculty pedagogical development), the Intercultural Center, the Counseling Center, and the Office of the Provost. These data have had three main impacts:

1. Increased visibility of international students’ experiences and programmatic outcomes to faculty, upper administration, staff, and domestic students;
2. Creation of additional faculty opportunities to teach in foreign countries, specifically China, to gain a better understanding, skillset, and empathy to work with our international students; and
3. Focused target areas for programming and intervention: faculty and domestic student social support in fall predict international student loneliness, wellbeing, and belonging in the spring.

The increased awareness of the mission and success of the program has kept international students more central in campus life and higher administration discussions of inclusion and program development.

#### 4. Data Dives

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More broadly, the university has shown other commitments to equitable assessment practices. One such example is the practice of ‘Data Dives.’ The Campus Life Assessment Committee sponsors regular Data Dives where participants have an opportunity to dig deeper into an assessment project. This initiative supports the goals of Campus Life to develop and promote a culture of assessment. Frequently, Data Dive presentations involve disaggregating data across demographics or other variables, highlighting the need to understand problems from an equity lens ([Here](#) is an example of a Data Dives presentation). The Data Dives project has increased awareness of assessment projects and methods for understanding the differential impact of programs across diverse perspectives and identities.

These monthly interactive discussions around disaggregated data draw a cross-section of campus and community professionals to make meaning of assessment and explore how programs can impact individuals differently based on their identities. Additionally, the recent creation of a longitudinal

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<sup>1</sup> We encourage individuals engaging in assessment in student affairs to consider how their indirect (e.g., survey) measures may not have been designed or normed on the population they are surveying. We encourage the use of international survey result testing via MTurk or other avenues to test for reliability and measurement invariance across different populations around the globe and within the U.S.

dataset by Institutional Research has already allowed units across the University to begin to understand how policies and practices can be understood through the lens of the student experience.

## 5. Student Feedback

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An important and increasingly frequent component of assessment practices across Wake are feedback sessions with students from a range of historically minoritized and majoritized identities and from a range of student interest and engagement groups. Departments across campus often incorporate student feedback into the assessment process, which provides an opportunity to explore the insights and experiences of students from many backgrounds. Several recent examples include the Sexual Campus Climate committee, the Wellbeing Assessment's and Institutional Research's joint Food and Feedback sessions, and the Counseling Center's review of the Healthy Minds survey. As an example, the Wellbeing Assessment's and Institutional Research's joint Food and Feedback sessions invited student groups to review data from the Wellbeing Assessment and student engagement surveys by providing their interpretations of the results as well as suggested action steps. The sessions intentionally invited a diverse range of student groups with faculty/staff group sponsors to ensure that all student perspectives can be incorporated into this process.

Some groups on campus have been working with students to better identify needed areas and methods of assessment. Those conversations emphasize gathering opinions from diverse student groups and have included topics such as: perceived suitability of specific measures, item phrasing, and measure distribution practices. For instance, the SAFE Office provides confidential crisis response and on-going support services to Reynolda Campus students for concerns related to interpersonal violence, including sexual misconduct, relationship violence, and stalking. With the support of the Title IX office and the Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services, the SAFE Office is researching an instrument to deploy as a campus-wide survey of sexual climate in 2020. Their process of reviewing measures includes ongoing assistance from a team of undergraduate students. These students have been helping to identify potential measures and providing feedback about their face validity and perceived utility. Although these reviews are new to our assessment practice, we hope to see them grow in frequency and depth.

Some additional examples of Campus Life departments engaging in at least some form of equitable assessment include:

- The Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services gather data from their end-of-semester surveys with students who sought academic coaching, tutoring, or disability services. Those surveys collect important data on services used and needs from a unique student group. They focus on students' confidence in their ability to self-advocate for needs.
- The Counseling Center has worked with our Office of Diversity and Inclusion to ensure that their intake processes collect robust demographics that are inclusive of a range of non-majority identities and orientations. They also ask students to provide preferred pronouns and names.

## Lessons Learned

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Some of the consistent practices in the assessment efforts described above include:

1. Build assessment teams of faculty and staff from multidisciplinary professional backgrounds.
2. Actively solicit student feedback from students with a range of historically minoritized and

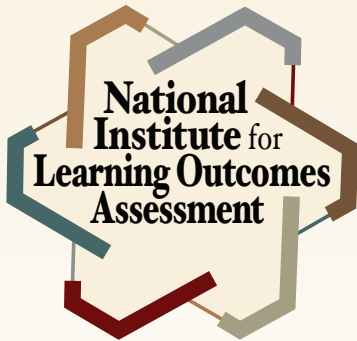
majoritized identities, and from a range of student interest and engagement groups.

3. Disaggregate data using statistical and visualization tools.
4. Use careful quantitative and qualitative analyses of measures' bias and appropriateness for the intended research questions or analyses.
5. Implement wide-reaching communication efforts to ensure that assessment efforts are accessible and to ensure that they are inclusively and accurately analyzed and interpreted.
6. Translate data into programs, practices, and policies for students, faculty, and staff in a cycle of practice and assessment.



## Equity Case Studies

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), and Campus Labs (now Anthology), in collaboration with the field of assessment in higher education, have undertaken a series of case studies focused on providing short, instructive examples focused on equitable approaches to assess student learning. The cases provide lessons learned that are widely applicable, and emphasize collaboration across the institution, specifically between academic and student affairs.



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. NILOA works in partnership with a broad range of organizations and provides technical assistance and research support to various projects focused on learning throughout the U.S. and internationally. Learn more at [www.learningoutcomesassessment.org](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org).



Leading the way for over 40 years, CAS is a consortium of professional associations in higher education that promotes the use of its 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](http://www.cas.edu).

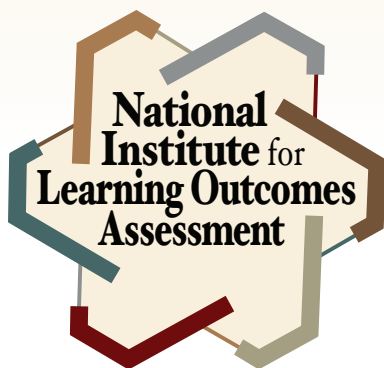


Campus Labs, Campus Management, and iModules have joined together to form Anthology. We exist to help higher education advance and thrive. Through a connected data experience that offers a holistic view, creates efficiencies, and provides intelligence, Anthology inspires constituents to reach their full potential using technology insights in admission and enrollment management; student success and retention; institutional and learning effectiveness; alumni and advancement; and enterprise applications and infrastructure. Anthology partners with more than 2,100 colleges and institutions in over 30 countries to address the needs of all constituents in higher education. Visit us at [www.anthologyinc.com](http://www.anthologyinc.com).



## National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

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# Equity Case Study

[www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/equity](http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/equity)