

# Humanizing Assessment

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## Introduction

The title of this of Viewpoint is a gift from Peggy Maki. Well over a year ago, in the long-ago days before COVID-19, the four of us authors decided we had something new to share about assessment. When our book, *Advancing Assessment for Student Success: Supporting Learning by Creating Connections Across Assessment, Teaching, Curriculum, and Cocurriculum in Collaboration With Our Colleagues and Our Students* (to be released with Stylus, May 2021) was done, we could not have been more thrilled that Peggy Maki agreed to write the Foreword. Our thrill increased exponentially the moment we read Peggy's words and realized they captured why our book was special to us and, we hope, will be to our readers:

Most important, this book achieves what, I believe, has always been our challenge: to humanize assessment--to uncover the challenges our individual students face and then develop or identify interventions, strategies, or practices to assist each student to persist and achieve along the trajectory of that individual's educational pathways.

The stories, examples, narratives, and conversations emerge from the text to share candid human experiences of success, struggle, exploration, and inquiry. Our readers have the opportunity to hear the voices of students, staff, faculty, and administrators expressing their discoveries, disappointments, and commitments. With us, the authors, they humanize assessment by helping us see that assessment is not just about numbers, it's about people.

Early in our writing we discovered two central themes influenced our thinking about assessment development and use of assessment: 1) creating connections across assessment, teaching, curriculum, and co-curriculum; and 2) collaborating with our colleagues (faculty, staff, administrators) and with our students for development and use of assessment. These themes—which became stronger as we wrote—are threaded throughout each chapter.

The book begins with a chapter describing what we see as major “currents” influencing the practice and use of assessment in higher education: the need to 1) make assessment more equity-minded; 2) strengthen our ability to use assessment to improve student learning and success (i.e., “close the loop”); 3) integrate assessment with professional development; 4) create better assignments and rubrics; 5) more intentionally use assessment to design and improve curricula; and 6) pay more attention to communication and transparency in assessment.

# Viewpoint

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The chapter also considers challenges and opportunities created by accreditation and variation in assessment approaches. We expand on these ideas, and introduce new ones, in chapters on the following:

- Equity in Assessment: Supports For All Students
- Learning Outcomes: Engaging Students, Staff and Faculty
- Aligned and Coherent Assessment, Pedagogy, and Curriculum: Connections for Student Success
- Understanding and Supporting Achievement: Improving Assignment Prompts and Rubrics
- Using Evidence of Student Achievement: Advancing Student Success
- Advancing Reflection: Fostering Conversations that Improve Student Success
- Advancing Communication: Sharing Stories that Improve Student Success

Although these chapters were individually written, they were collaboratively generated. Our work on assessment has been intertwined for so long that each chapter represents our collective thinking. Amy, Swarup, and Dan started working together at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) in the late 1990s, shortly after the institution was founded and recognized as an outcomes-based institution. Nelson joined us in 2015. Thus we have all been immersed in the joys and challenges of implementing assessment for decades.

### **Context of Book**

In 2007, Amy and Swarup described CSUMB's early assessment work in their conversational, how-to book, *Developing Outcomes-Based Assessment for Learner-Centered Education: A Faculty Introduction*. When we began writing, our plan was to update Amy and Swarup's book. However, we quickly realized how much the field of assessment and our own thinking had advanced. At that point, we knew we needed to start from scratch. Dan, Swarup and Nelson have continued to advance assessment at CSUMB. Amy, since retiring from CSUMB in 2008, has consulted widely, mentoring over 60 institutions in assessment. Also, for the past 11 years she has co-coordinated the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) Assessment Leadership Academy (ALA) which has prepared nearly 400 university faculty and administrators to lead learning-centered assessment efforts at institutions across the globe. Dan has also been involved in the ALA, coordinating the ALA project mentor program. Writing the book provided all of us with an extraordinary opportunity to reflect on how far assessment has advanced and how we would like it to grow. Our thinking has been informed by our own experiences and the experiences of many others with whom we have worked. We are particularly grateful to our ALA colleagues for providing a rich source of creative examples that are spread throughout the book to inspire others. Like Amy and Swarup's earlier book, *Advancing Assessment for Student Success* is a conversational, and highly practical, how-to guide for faculty and faculty developers.

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Further, our thinking was influenced by many brilliant assessment leaders whose ideas are infused throughout every chapter. Works such as the following, and so many others—many coming out of NILOA—provided the foundation for the equity-minded, student-centered thinking our book promotes:

Our thinking was influenced by many brilliant assessment leaders whose ideas are infused throughout every chapter.

AMY DRISCOLL, NELSON GRAFF, DAN SHAPIRO,  
AND SWARUP WOOD

## ADVANCING ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS



"THIS BOOK SHOULD SPEAK TO AND OFFER INSPIRATION TO SO MANY"—PEGGY L. MAKI

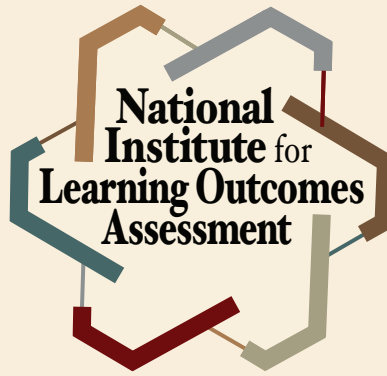
- Erick Montenegro and Natasha Jankowski's (2020) *A New Decade for Assessment: Embedding Equity Into Assessment Praxis* reminded us that now more than ever ensuring assessment is equitable and culturally responsive must be central to our work. Had it been published during the time we wrote our book, we would have benefited greatly from McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux's (2020) *From equity talk to equity walk: Expanding practitioner knowledge for racial justice in higher education*. Anyone wanting to humanize assessment and promote equity needs to read this book.
- Peggy Maki's (2017) *Real-Time Student Assessment: Meeting the Imperative for Improved Time to Degree, Closing the Opportunity Gap, and Assuring Student Competencies* reminded us that if college and university faculty and staff experience assessment as helping them better support the learning of the students in their classrooms and programs today, they will engage wholeheartedly.
- McNair et al.'s (2016) *Becoming a Student-Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success* and Natasha Jankowski and David Marshall's (2017) *Degrees That Matter: Moving Higher Education to a Learning Systems Paradigm* reminded us that every employee at every college and university is an educator who can help students experience our institutions as holistic learning systems. Those educators include all staff—including those who keep our classrooms warm and clean—and student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators.
- Kuh et al.'s (2015) *Using Evidence of Student Learning to Improve Higher Education* reminded us that improving student learning must always be our driving force and that there are many creative ways we can use assessment to improve student learning.
- And, of course, Linda Suskie's (2018) *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* reminded us not to overcomplicate assessment and that if we just follow basic principles of best practice in assessment, we can achieve great things.

## Final Thoughts

We are grateful to these assessment leaders and our assessment colleagues at institutions around the globe for their insightful practice examples and thinking about assessment threaded through *Advancing Assessment for Student Success* (2021). All royalties from this book will go to the CSUMB student emergency fund.

## References

- Driscoll, A., Graff, N., Shapiro, D. F., & Wood, S. (2021). *Advancing assessment for student success: Supporting learning by creating connections across assessment, teaching, curriculum, and co-curriculum in collaboration with our colleagues and our students*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Driscoll, A., & Wood, S. (2007). *Developing outcomes-based assessment for learner-centered education: A faculty introduction*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.



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