



Assessing Assessment: Successes, Failures, and the Future

Peter Ewell
National Center for Higher Education
Management Systems (NCHEMS)

2013 Assessment Institute at IUPUI



Part I

Origins and What's Been Accomplished



Origins of the Assessment Movement Almost Thirty Years Ago

- Undergraduate Reform Reports of 1985-86
 - *Internal Stimulus*: Call for More Coherent Teaching/Learning Approaches and Information for Improvement
 - *External Stimulus*: Stakeholder Demands for Information on "Return on Investment"
 - Tensions in Motive and Message Ever Since
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Why Didn't Assessment Go Away?

- Pressure to Produce Evidence of Student Learning Outcomes Never Let Up
 - By Early 1990s, Accreditors Replace States as Primary External Stimulus to Get Started
 - Intermittent Federal Interest in Assessment as an Element of National Accountability
 - But Resulting Faculty Ambivalence About a Process Seen as "External" and "Administrative"
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Looking Back: What's Been Accomplished?

- Assessment Is for the Most Part Perceived as Inevitable and Legitimate
 - Vast Majority of Institutions Have Statements of Learning Outcomes (General and Programmatic) and Most are "Doing Assessment"
 - A "Semi-Profession" of Folks Involved in Assessment
 - Steadily Growing Sophistication with Respect to Methods of Gathering Evidence
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Looking Back: What Hasn't Happened?

- Authentic Integration of Assessment into Faculty Cultures and Behaviors
 - Assessment Activities Still Largely "Added On" to the Curriculum Instead of Being Embedded In It
 - Systematic and Widespread Use of Assessment Results for Institutional and Curricular Improvement
 - Proactive and Sincere Institutional Engagement with Accrediting Organizations Around Topics of Assessment
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■ ■ ■ ■ **Exercise #1: Looking Back at Assessment at Your Institution**

- What Have Been the Two or Three Biggest Successes for Assessment at Your Institution?
 - What Have Been the Two or Three Biggest Challenges or Disappointments?
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Part II

Addressing Common Challenges

■ ■ ■ ■ **Major Challenges**

- Faculty Involvement
 - Consistent Support from Top Leadership
 - Use of Results in Decision-making
 - Lack of Time and Burnout
 - Organizational Incentives and Communication
 - Keeping Assessment Manageable
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■ ■ ■ ■ **Involving Faculty**

- Start with the Curriculum
 - Work on Real Problems Somebody Has
 - Language of Inquiry and Scholarship
 - Colleagues Learn from Colleagues
 - Remember You Won't Convert Everybody
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■ ■ ■ ■ **Top Leadership**

- Don't Change the Rules
 - Transparent Communication and Decision Processes
 - "Packaging" Decisions Around Evidence
 - Board's Fiduciary Responsibility for Institutional Good Standing and Quality of Academic Product
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■ ■ ■ ■ **Using Assessment Results**

- Use Involves More than Just "Decision-Making"
 - Establish Action Expectations *Before* You Start Assessing
 - Avoid the "Perfect Data Fallacy"
 - Create Opportunities for Collective Deliberation and Reflection About Results
 - Map Out Specific Opportunities for Use in the Decision Cycle
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Lack of Time and Burnout

- Don't Try to Do Everything at Once
 - Start Small with a Demonstration of the Complete Assessment Cycle
 - Stop Doing Things when you Add New Things
 - Develop and Implement a "Succession Plan"
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Organization and Communication Issues

- Package Results Around Problems
 - Don't Do a "Data Dump"...Establish a "Data Dialogue" Instead
 - Disaggregate
 - Emphasize Positive (and Collective) Rewards; Avoid "Gotcha"
 - Don't Hold People Responsible for Things They Can't Control
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Keeping Assessment Manageable

- Harness Existing Opportunities for Assessment Instead of Creating New Ones
 - Don't Try to Measure Everything that Moves
 - Sample Whenever You Can
 - Drop Things If You Don't Use Them
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Concluding Thoughts

- The Central Tension of "Accountability vs. Improvement" Is Still with Us After Almost 30 Years...and We Have to be Proactive in Meeting It
 - Assessment Will Inexorably Become More Embedded and Authentic—and Technology will Help this Progression in Multiple Ways
 - Assessment Will Hopefully Link with Standards and the Scholarship of Teaching
 - We Will Probably be Back to These Issues 30 Years from Now!
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