The Assessment Leadership Institute: An Evidence-Based Professional Development Model to Improve Faculty Skills, Knowledge, and Attitudes

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Why Faculty Development?

- An approaching external accreditation motivated the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) to examine and improve its assessment practices.
- Working with the University Assessment Council, the Director of Assessment appointed six faculty members (one from each college) to help UNC improve its academic, program-level assessment practices.
- The Faculty Assessment Fellows conducted listening tours with faculty members in their colleges to identify needs and challenges associated with program-level student learning assessment.
- From the listening tour, the Faculty Assessment Fellows identified the following needs and challenges:

  1. Faculty needed to increase their knowledge and skills to conduct effective program-level assessment.
  2. Faculty felt that they did not have time to conduct program-level assessment.
  3. Faculty had a negative attitude toward assessment.

To address the needs and challenges identified through the listening tours, we developed the Assessment Leadership Institute (ALI).

Assessment Leadership Institute

- The ALI was designed as a two-year professional development program focused on improving faculty knowledge, skills, and attitudes and transforming the current culture of assessment from accountability to improvement.
- The Year 1 and Year 2 activities are outlined in Table 1. Faculty Assessment Fellows developed and taught seven workshops based on the assessment cycle.
- Key components of the Institute are in Table 2.
- The model was created following best practices for professional development, including teams, long-term engagement, and embedded within faculty work.
- 25 programs and 70 faculty have completed the Assessment Leadership Institute.

Table 1. Description of ALI Activities.

Year	Participant Activities
Year 1	Participants attend the following 2-hour workshops: • Workshop 1: Introduction to Assessment and Institute • Workshop 2: Program Mission Statement • Workshop 3: Program Student Learning Outcomes • Workshop 4: Curriculum Mapping • Workshop 5: Assessment Methods and Performance Criteria • Workshop 6: Data Collection • Workshop 7: Data Analysis and Using Results
Year 2	Participants complete three tasks: • Revise/create program-level assessment plan and curriculum map • Complete program-level assessment project • Present assessment project at annual institutional Assessment Fair

Table 2. Description of Key ALI Components.

Component	Component Description
Developed by faculty for faculty	Faculty Assessment Fellows created the program, taught the workshops, and mentored the participants.
Assessment for improvement	The importance of understanding student learning as a way to improve teaching and the program was emphasized at each workshop.
Faculty teams	Participating academic programs assigned at least two faculty members as a team to attend all workshops and follow-up activities.
Homework and projects	Each workshop had required homework that faculty teams completed by collaborating with other faculty members and students in their program. Each faculty team also created/revised an assessment plan and conducted an assessment project.
Financial support	Each participating program received a stipend of $2,500.
Faculty mentoring	Each faculty team was assigned a Faculty Assessment Fellow as a faculty mentor. The Faculty Assessment Fellows worked with the team during the workshops and consulted with the team outside of the workshops.

Was the Institute Effective?

Study Questions: The goal of ALI was to improve faculty knowledge, skills, and attitudes and help transform the current culture of assessment from accountability to improvement. We conducted a study to determine if the ALI improved faculty knowledge, skills, and attitudes. We also conducted the study to determine if our efforts can serve as a model for other universities. Study questions are in Table 3.

Table 3. Study focus areas and questions.

Focus	Study Question
Attitude	Is there a difference in faculty participants' attitudes before and after participation in the Assessment Leadership Institute?
Skill	What is the quality of faculty participants' assessment plans before and after participation in the Assessment Leadership Institute?
Knowledge	How do faculty participants describe the characteristics of effective student learning and assessment plans before and after participation in the Assessment Leadership Institute?

Data Collection and Analysis: We collected quantitative and qualitative data from program and faculty participants in the Assessment Leadership Institute. Data collection and analysis methods are described in Table 4.

Study Participants: 25 programs and 70 faculty members participated in the Assessment Leadership Institute. However, the specific sample size for each study question varied.

Table 4. Data collection and analysis methods.

Data Collection Method	Data Analysis Method
Likert-scale pre and post attitude survey	Descriptive statistics
Likert-scale program evaluation survey	Descriptive statistics
Open-ended questions on questionnaire	Modified version of constant comparative analysis
Pre and post program-level assessment plan	Numerical scoring using a rubric and descriptive statistics

Yes, the Institute Was Effective!

Results presented as a summary and then in detail organized by study question.

Table 5. Summary of Results

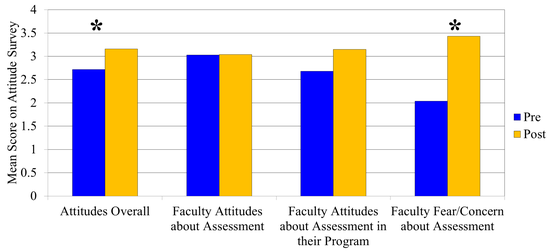
Indicators of Effectiveness	
Attitude	• 97% of participants reported increased confidence to conduct assessment. • Participants reported a significant decrease in fear/concern about conducting assessment.
Skills	• 81% of participants reported increased ability to lead assessment in programs. • 59% of participants reported that their program improved how it assessed student learning after participation in the Institute. • 100% of programs improved assessment plans.
Knowledge	• 97% of participants reported increased understanding of assessment overall. • 33% increase in the number of participants describing relevant characteristics of effective assessment plans. • 138% increase in number of participants describing correct characteristics of effective student learning outcomes.

How Attitudes Changed

Faculty members have more positive attitudes toward assessment after participation in ALI.

- 97% of faculty participants (36 out of 37) reported an increase in their confidence to assess program-level student learning as a result of their participation in the ALI.
- Figure 1 shows mean scores on an attitude survey. Overall, faculty had more positive attitudes about assessment after participation ALI.
- Of particular note, faculty were less fearful or concerned that assessment 1) limits academic freedom, 2) distracts from other more important work, and 3) will be used punitively against them.

Figure 1. Pre and Post Mean Scores. N = 17. * indicates statistically significant differences between pre and post means. Four-point scale. Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, Strongly Agree = 4. Higher mean scores indicate more positive attitudes. Faculty Fear/Concern about Assessment is reverse coded; higher mean scores for this concept indicates faculty have less fear/concern about assessment.



How Skills Changed

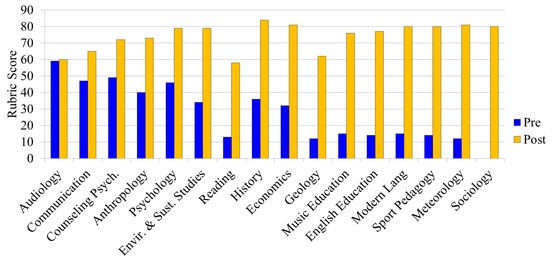
Program assessment plans improved and faculty skills in conducting assessment increased.

- 81% of faculty reported that they gained skills in leading their program's assessment activities (Table 6).
- 59% of faculty reported that their participation in the ALI lead to an improvement in how their programs assessed student learning (Table 6).
- 100% programs (16 out of 16) had improved assessment plans (Figure 2).

Table 6. Faculty responses on Institute evaluation survey. Five-point scale. In the table, Strongly Agree and Agree responses are summed. Strongly Disagree and Disagree responses are summed. N = 37.

	Strongly Agree & Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Strongly Disagree & Disagree
The ALI prepared me to lead my program's assessment activities.	81%	19%	0%
My program's participation in the ALI has improved how my program assesses student learning.	59%	38%	3%

Figure 2. Pre and post scores on rubric measuring quality of program-level assessment plans. The rubric evaluated mission, student learning outcomes, curriculum map, methods, criteria, data collection and analysis plans, and feedback loop plan. The highest rubric score possible is 84. Sociology had a score of 0 on the pre.



How Knowledge Changed

Faculty knowledge about creating and implementing assessment plans increased.

- 97% of participants (36 out of 37) reported that the content taught in the ALI increased their understanding of program-level assessment.
- 33% increase in the number of participants describing relevant characteristics of effective assessment plans (Figure 3). In a pretest, 48% of participants described relevant characteristics. In a posttest, 64% of participants described relevant characteristics.
- 138% increase in the number of participants describing correct characteristics of effective student learning outcomes (Figure 4). In a pretest, 32% of participants described correct characteristics. In a posttest, 76% of participants described correct characteristics.

Figure 3. Percentage of participants in rubric categories. Rubric scored participants' responses on a pretest and posttest to the question: "What are the characteristics of an effective assessment plan." N = 25.

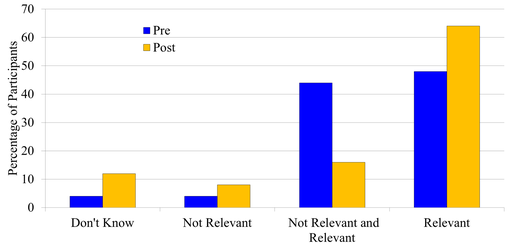
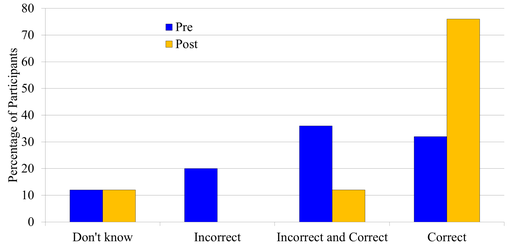


Figure 4. Percentage of participants in rubric categories. Rubric scored participants' responses on a pretest and posttest to the question: "What are the characteristics of an effective student learning outcome." N = 25.



Recommendation

The Assessment Leadership Institute serves as a model for other institutions aiming to improve faculty attitudes, skills, and knowledge about program-level assessment. Aspects of the Institute that other institutions may consider adopting:

- Enlist faculty to develop and teach assessment workshops
- Encourage faculty to participate in teams from the same program
- Provide recognition or reward for participation
- Avoid stand-alone workshops in favor of a cohesive curriculum delivered over time
- Incorporate homework and other applied learning opportunities that encourage collaboration of faculty within programs.

Acknowledgements and More Information

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