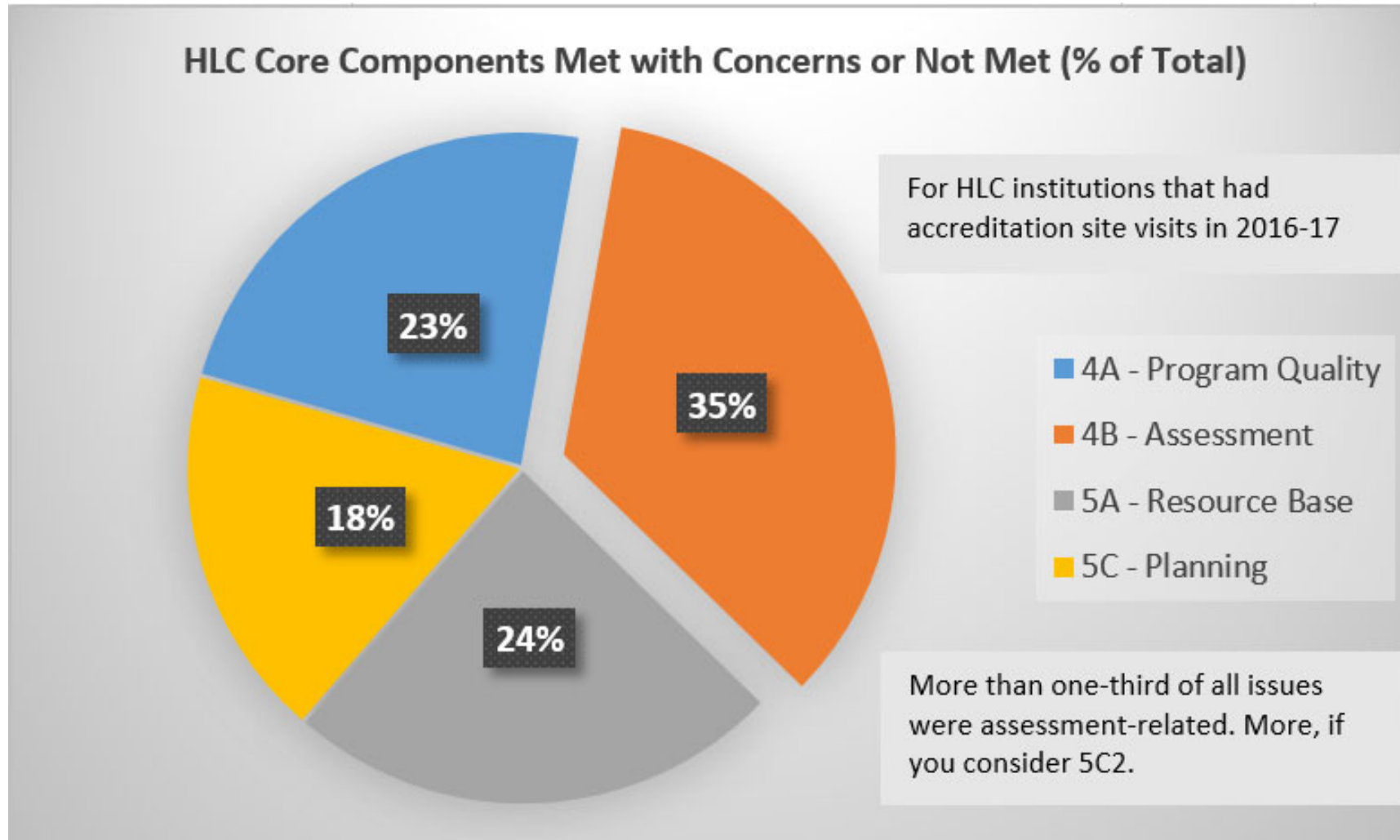


# Does Your Assessment System Need a Tune-up?

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WHAT I LOOK FOR	WHAT I OFTEN FIND	SOLUTIONS TO CONSIDER
<p><b>ASSESSMENT MODEL</b></p> <p>Documented assessment model (homegrown or adopted/adapted from elsewhere)?</p> <p>Model is consistently and effectively used.</p>	<p>a. No model, weak model, undocumented/poorly documented.</p> <p>b. Course assessment only, with intention to “roll up” to program assessment at some point in the future.</p> <p>c. Sparse or sporadic assessment activity, with some programs not participating or some years skipped.</p>	<p>a. Implement a model based on good practice. The tips on this sheet will help you identify what a model based on good practice looks like.</p> <p>b. Course-level learning outcomes don’t “roll up” to program outcomes. Map program outcomes to course-level outcomes, ensure alignment.</p> <p>c. Ensure that model is used consistently in all programs every year. Be sure that programs with specialized accreditation also participate in the institution’s assessment processes, but do so in a way that doesn’t create unnecessary duplication of effort.</p>
<p><b>OUTCOMES</b></p> <p>Learning outcomes for each distinct program (graduate/undergraduate major, minor, certificate)</p> <p>Learning outcomes clearly describe what program graduates should be able to do. Internally developed, adopted/adapted from elsewhere, or DQP are OK.</p>	<p>a. Learning outcomes for some, but not all programs.</p> <p>b. Evidence of intention to develop outcomes at some future time.</p> <p>a. Generic set of outcomes for a department or “program” that includes multiple majors, minors, certificates.</p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>A set of outcomes for “the English program” at a school that offers B.A. degrees for English Literature, American Literature, Creative Writing, Technical Writing, Rhetoric, etc. and also offers certificates and minors for some or all of those.</p> <p>b. Learning outcomes describe an input (students will be taught to ..., be exposed to ...) process (students will gain knowledge, increase awareness, develop proficiency); an affective state (students will appreciate, respect, etc.); or understanding (students will understand).</p>	<p>a. Identify program-level learning outcomes for all programs.</p> <p>b. Make this a high priority. Don’t put it off any longer.</p> <p>a. Identify specific program-level learning outcomes for each program. Some outcomes may be appropriate for more than one of your programs, but consider whether they should be clearly differentiated.</p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>“Graduates of the English program will be effective writers.”</p> <p>Could be ...</p> <p>“Graduates of the B.A. in English literature program will be able to compare the legal and cultural norms in a Shakespeare play to those that apply to a current social issue.”</p> <p>“Graduates of the Technical Writing Certificate program will be able to analyze and summarize complex information for communication to diverse audiences.”</p> <p>b. Identify observable and measureable descriptions of what graduates will be able to <b>DO</b> as a result of what you (thought) you taught, the knowledge or proficiency they hopefully gained, and what they understand. Affective outcomes may be important and appropriate for your program, so definitely study those through surveys, etc., but they are not the same as <i>learning</i> outcomes.</p>
<p><b>MEASURES</b></p> <p>Multiple specific measures (direct and indirect) where students demonstrate their learning on each outcome. (e.g., final project in specific course, senior thesis, presentation in specific course).</p>	<p>a. Measures have not been identified or are vague (e.g., “various homework assignments and exams”).</p>	<p>a. Identify multiple measures, clearly stated, determined in advance.</p>

Measures are near end of program to show what program graduates can do. Measures are determined in advance so instructors know to collect/save student data and/or artifacts for assessment purposes. No course grades or completion of course or course sequence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. More reliance on indirect than direct measures.</li> <li>c. Measures from early in program rather than near the end.</li> <li>d. Course grades or completion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Use direct and indirect measures. I usually recommend two direct and one indirect for each outcome.</li> <li>c. Focus measures on near the end of the program. Formative assessment from earlier courses is valuable, but does not replace summative assessment near end of program (what program <i>graduates</i> know and can do).</li> <li>d. NEVER use course grades or completion. Focus on the specific portion of exam, assignment, project, etc. that is related to the outcome. That is not usually the entire project or exam.</li> </ul>
<b>PERFORMANCE TARGETS</b>		
How good is good enough? Determined in advance. Ambitious but attainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No targets</li> <li>b. Determined after the fact (e.g., “Faculty reviewed student papers and believe they show that students are meeting the outcome.”)</li> <li>c. Stepping over the bar or impossibly high targets</li> <li>d. Adjusting target for next cycle to ensure you meet it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Identify targets for each measure.</li> <li>b. Set targets in advance.</li> <li>c. Set ambitious but attainable targets</li> <li>d. Adjust target in subsequent cycles to move the needle, then move it.</li> </ul>
<b>SAMPLING</b>		
Collect data on all majors or reasonably representative sample of students or course sections. Determined in advance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Including non-majors in data collection</li> <li>b. Convenience sample, such as hand-picked classes taught by instructors who volunteer, not including adjuncts, distanced ed, multiple campuses/sites, or evening/weekend/accelerates sections.</li> <li>c. No sampling plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Include program majors only, to focus on what program graduates know and can do.</li> <li>b. OK not to include all majors if select reasonably representative sample of students or course sections.</li> <li>c. Sampling plan, determined in advance.</li> </ul>
<b>DATA COLLECTION</b>		
Just do it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Assessment plans complete, but no data collection or sparse collection</li> <li>b. Some instructors (usually adjuncts) not notified that their classes/assignments included, that they needed to give a specific assignment or score with a specific rubric, or that they needed to save artifacts and data for assessment analysis/reporting.</li> <li>c. Some instructors unwilling to participate, use specific assignments or rubrics, or provide artifacts or data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ensure institution-wide participation every cycle. Set system of reminders for instructors whose classes include assessment data collection.</li> <li>b. (and c) Create policies that clarify assessment expectations for full-time and adjunct instructors. Provide assessment training for adjuncts. Include them in planning, analysis, interpretation to increase engagement.</li> </ul>
<b>ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION</b>		
Faculty analyze assessment data to identify strengths/weaknesses in student learning and why those occurred.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Raw data only, with no summary or analysis</li> <li>b. Summary or analysis, but no reflection by faculty and no information about factors that likely contributed to results (positive or negative)</li> <li>c. Blaming the students or other environmental factors (“This is the best we can expect of them and there’s nothing we can do.” “Our budgets were cut, so we don’t have the time or resources to ...”)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Provide at least a basic summary of data. Frequency/percent distribution table can begin to suggest patterns for further consideration. May consider additional analysis by online vs. on-ground, full-time vs. adjunct instructors, day vs. evening/weekend/accelerated sections. May consider analysis by student characteristics (gender, age, first generation, other risk factors).</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Review relative patterns of performance. Where did students perform well (or not)? Rather than reviewing overall scores (rubric, exam, etc.) review exam performance by item or section, and review assignments scored with rubric by rows to see areas of strength or weakness. Why did these strengths or weaknesses occur? Also review curriculum maps – where did students have opportunities to acquire knowledge/skill and where did they have opportunities to demonstrate learning? Was there insufficient reinforcement or opportunity to try out their new knowledge earlier in the curriculum? Formative assessment will alert to these issues.</li> <li>c. Don't cast blame. At-risk students and economically-challenged schools may require creative problem solving, but there are proven approaches for helping all students, and they don't always have to be expensive.</li> </ul>
<b>FOLLOW-UP</b>		
<p>Clear action plans that flow from the assessment data and are aimed at improvement of student learning.</p> <p>Tracking action plans in subsequent cycles to determine whether improvement occurred, and additional follow-up as needed.</p> <p>Assessment results and action plan resource requests feed into planning and budget decisions at the program, department, institution levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Lack of action planning or poorly defined action planning</li> <li>b. No tracking of action plans in subsequent cycles.</li> <li>c. Assessment results do not inform planning and budget decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Establish clearly defined action plans to improve student learning whenever targets are not met (encouraged, but not required, for when they are met)</li> <li>b. Track action plans in at least the next cycle to measure effectiveness (multiple cycles for initiatives that take longer to implement or that impact freshmen and won't show effectiveness until later)</li> <li>c. Use assessment results to inform instructional and curricular planning decisions, and use resource requests from action plans in budget decisions at program, department, institution levels.</li> </ul>
<b>CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT</b>		
<p>Focus on improvement of student learning</p> <p>Faculty can identify examples of what they've learned about their students' learning and what they've done as a result.</p> <p>Weaknesses in assessment practice are identified and addressed.</p> <p>Integration of co-curricular learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Focus on compliance and paper shuffling</li> <li>b. Faculty don't see connections among assessment processes, student learning, and their teaching practice.</li> <li>c. Weaknesses in assessment practice go unnoticed or are met with excuses and not addressed.</li> <li>d. No integration of co-curricular learning or reliance on surveys only.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Get back to the basics. Review assessment outcomes, measures, etc. to be sure you're collecting meaningful information.</li> <li>b. Be sure to collect data for all programs every year. Take time to study results and consider what they reveal about student learning and possible factors that contributed to results. Identify, implement, and track action plans to further study student learning and any improvement.</li> <li>c. Review assessment model periodically to ensure it represents good practice. If so, review the actual implementation of the model to ensure it is being followed.</li> <li>d. Study co-curricular learning in relation to program outcomes, if relevant.</li> </ul>

**“Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection.” (Mark Twain)**