



Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses

(select pages from system 3 & 4)
Shifting the Focus
from Teaching to Learning

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ASSESSMENT AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

In its report, *Making Quality Count in Undergraduate Education*, the Education Commission of the States proposed twelve quality attributes of good practice in delivering an undergraduate education (1995). "Extensive research on American college students reveals. . . that when colleges and universities systematically engage in these good practices, student performance and satisfaction will improve" (Education Commission of the States, 1996, p. 5). Shown in Figure 1-6, these attributes address aspects of an institution's organizational culture and values, its curriculum, and the type of instruction that takes place within it (Education Commission of the States, 1996).

One of the attributes is "assessment and prompt feedback," and it is included in the list as an intrinsic element of quality instruction. However, we believe that learner-centered assessment, as discussed in this hook, promotes or enhances all the attributes of quality that are listed in Figure 1-6. Assess-

Quality begins with an organizational culture that values:

1. High expectations
2. Respect for diverse talents and learning styles
3. Emphasis on the early years of study

A quality curriculum requires:

4. Coherence in learning
5. Synthesizing experiences
6. Ongoing practice of learned skills
7. Integrating education and experience

Quality instruction builds in:

8. Active learning
 9. Assessment and prompt feedback
 10. Collaboration
 11. Adequate time on task
 12. Out-of-class contact with faculty
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(Education Commission of the States, 1995,1996)

FIGURE 1-6 Attributes of Quality Undergraduate Education: What the Research Says

Making Connections Continued

- What changes would you like to make in your teaching and assessing?
- How might these changes best be made?

What else do you know about learner-centered teaching and assessment?

What questions do you have about learner-centered teaching and assessment?

In this chapter, we will examine eight hallmarks of learner-centered teaching that derive from the field of continuous improvement and from the research of cognitive psychologists and educational researchers. We will see how they are related to some of the propositions for learning developed by the Joint Task Force on Student Learning appointed by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (Joint Task Force, 1998a, 1998b).

For each hallmark, we will review one or more examples, as well as some questions you can use to reflect on your own teaching. In the remainder of the book, the principles presented here will be translated into specific techniques to help make teaching more learner-centered.

Figure 2-1 summarizes the hallmarks of learner-centered teaching. Several hallmarks focus on learners, describing how they spend their time in ways that promote learning in a learner-centered environment. Other hallmarks focus on the professor, pointing out the viewpoints and activities that professors can employ in order to maximize student learning. The final hallmark indicates that, in learner-centered teaching, learning is viewed as an interpersonal activity. As theorists would put it, learning is "socially constructed." In learner-centered environments, all learners—students and professors—are respected and valued.

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- Learners are actively involved and receive feedback.
 - Learners apply knowledge to enduring and emerging issues and problems.
 - Learners integrate discipline-based knowledge and general skills.
 - Learners understand the characteristics of excellent work.
 - Learners become increasingly sophisticated learners and knowers.
 - Professors coach and facilitate, intertwining teaching and assessing.
 - Professors reveal that they are learners, too.
 - Learning is interpersonal, and all learners—students and professors—are respected and valued.
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FIGURE 2-1 Hallmarks of Learner-Centered Teaching

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Applying Principles of Good Practice in Learner-Centered Assessment

Assessment is a process in which rich, usable, credible *feedback* from an act—of teaching or **curriculum—comes** to be *reflected* upon by an academic community, and then is *acted* on by that community—a department or college—within its commitment to get smarter and better at what it does. . . . Assessment. . . is a community effort or nothing, driven by a faculty's own commitment to reflect, judge, and improve (Marchese, 1997, p. 93).

A college must satisfy five conditions, at least, to validly claim that it has been transformed into a Learning **Paradigm**-governed college. First it must

have identified its intended learning outcomes in detail. Second, it must have developed a system for measuring the achievement of these outcomes at both the individual student level and the aggregate class, program, and institutional levels. Third, its curriculum must have been built backward from the intended outcomes and must be developmental. Fourth, it must provide a wide range of powerful options for achieving required learning outcomes. Fifth and finally, it must continually and systematically investigate alternative methods for empowering students to learn (Barr, 1998, pp. 19–20).

Making Connections

As you begin to read the chapter, think about the ideas and experiences you've already had that are related to principles of good practice in assessment . . .

- How would you characterize the attitudes of faculty at your institution regarding assessment?
- How have you been involved in assessment efforts at your institution? What have you learned?

- What do you know about effective assessment?
- How do administrators at your institution support effective assessment?

What else do you know about applying principles of good practice in assessment?

What other questions do you have about applying principles of good practice in assessment?

Chapter 1, we discussed the concept of assessment and the powerful role can play in helping us shift to a learner-centered perspective. In Chapter 2, we examined a learner-centered environment, noting the many ways it is supported and nourished by assessment. In this chapter, we will discuss assessment from the point of view of good practice, asking ourselves how we can carry out assessment so that it will make a difference in student learning.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

Professional associations and accreditation agencies have developed lists of assessment principles or characteristics of successful assessment programs. Two are included in Figures 3-1 and 3-2. Figure 3-1 lists Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning developed by the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) Assessment Forum (1992). Figure 3-2 lists hallmarks of Successful Programs to Assess Student Academic Achievement included in the 1994-1996 Handbook of Accreditation of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association (NCA).

The two lists have several characteristics in common. For example, both focus on the importance of assessing for improvement and on the need to involve constituents across the institution in assessment. However, each list also provides unique insights into the assessment process. The AAHE Principles of Good Practice highlight the fact that assessment is most effective when it is part of a larger set of conditions promoting change, whereas the

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning; multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions people really care about.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

(American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) Assessment Forum, 1992)

FIGURE 3-1 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

NCA's Hallmarks of Successful Programs remind us of the need to assess the assessment process itself.

The remainder of the chapter has been organized around questions that derive from the principles in Figures 3-1 and 3-2. In the questions, the principles have been combined and reordered to enhance the flow of ideas.

Successful assessment:

1. Flows from the institution's mission.
2. Has a conceptual framework.
3. Has faculty ownership/responsibility.
4. Has institution-wide support.
5. Uses multiple measures.
6. Provides feedback to students and the institution.
7. Is cost-effective.
8. Does not restrict or inhibit goals of access, equity, and diversity established by the institution.
9. Leads to improvement.
10. Includes a process for evaluating the assessment program.

(North Central Association—Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, 1994)

FIGURE 3-2 Hallmarks of Successful Programs to Assess Student Academic Achievement

