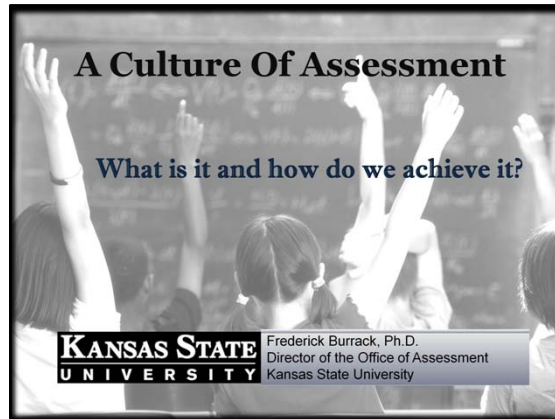


A Culture of Assessment: What is it and how do we achieve it?



As we all are fully aware, to document success of higher education are increasingly looking toward documentation of student learning. This is in contrast to former methods of relying on course grades or documenting the dissemination of content as identified on syllabi.

Many of us here are responsible for developing a culture that values student learning assessment as an essential element of what we do as educators in higher education. I am a bit curious, how many of you are in the role of overseeing student learning assessment at your university? (wait)

The first major challenge that we have in this responsibility is to develop across our campuses a culture of Assessment. Meaning:

- (1) An environment where assessment of student learning is valued) a mechanism to define academic success,
- (2) recognizes that course grades include factors sometimes unassociated with learning,
- (3) and that course content and skills taught does not automatically mean course content and skills learned.

I have one more question for you. How many feel that a 'culture of assessment', as I just described, is affirmed by programs, faculty, student-life, and administration and has been broadly achieved across your university? (wait) This session will focus on a few ideas on how to establish a culture that (1) embraces student learning assessment, (2) emphasizes program improvement in response to student learning assessment results, and (3) views the assessment process as an essential component of education.

If you ask me to identify the one, most important criteria that essential in developing a university-wide culture of assessment, I think I could answer that question.

Academic uniqueness Value each programs' mission

- Effective communication: written, verbal and non-verbal
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Multi-cultural and diversity literacy
- Numerical literacy
- Aesthetic sensitivity
- Etc.

It is recognition of the uniqueness of student learning that occurs in different academic programs. In other words, although there are common learning goals that define as an educated college graduate, such as: (*click*) effective communication, which includes written, verbal and non-verbal; critical thinking and problem solving; multi-cultural and diversity literacy; and I could we could go on with this list. The way that student learning and skill development is appropriately demonstrated by students will look very different between disciplines in process and outcome. A university-wide assessment system must value the uniqueness of programs' curriculum and mission.



As many presenters have emphasized, there is no such thing as a 'one-size-fits-all' assessment system. Trying to create one will inhibit a **culture of assessment**. When documenting student achievement of university-wide learning goals, it is important that assessments authentically represent how learning is uniquely applied.

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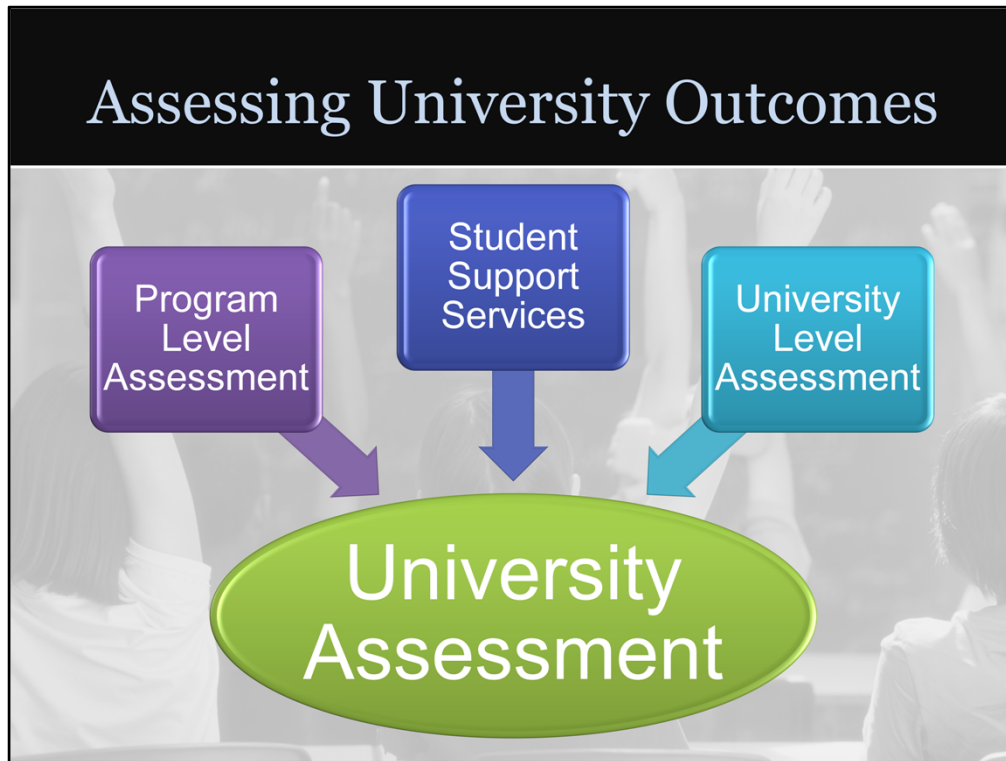
If not, you will find the faculty very uncomfortable trying to comply with as assessment program that doesn't authentically reflect the learning that occurs in their program.



One of K-State's five undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes (Knowledge, Critical Thinking, Communication, Diversity, and Academic/Professional Integrity) is Communication- Oral, non-verbal, and written. Demonstration of communication skills is, and should be, applied and demonstrated differently from one discipline to another.

For example, effective written communication for an elementary teacher will certainly be a different skill than scientific writing, or the skill of writing scholarly literature. But I'm quite certain that the oral communication developed for scientific research does not reflect the effective communication skills necessary for an elementary teacher.

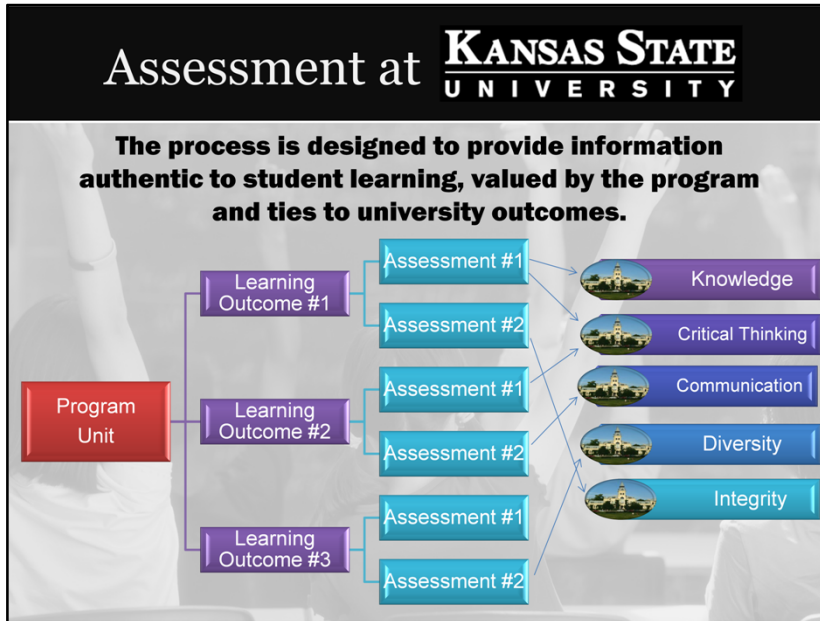
If this is true, which is very clearly is, any one form of assessment will not authentically represent learning in any of these learning categories. In using one assessment, we may end up assessing something very different than what students are learning and can apply.



So it is important in developing a culture of assessment that we center our attention on the assessment opportunities that exist within programs and are authentic to how students are expected to demonstrate achievement.

In encouraging a culture that values assessment: Faculty and support staff are more likely to embrace an assessment process that represents a clear connection to the educational purpose that is valued in their program or area.

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I will share with you how we have and continue to develop a culture of assessment across Kansas State University. We are continually working on striving for higher levels of quality assessment. The primary focus for assessment of student learning at K-State occurs within academic and non-academic programs, student life and support units.

Each program/unit (1) identifies appropriate student learning outcomes, (2) develops direct/indirect assessments for each outcome, and (3) establishes minimum competency that defines expected achievement levels requisite for all students.

Assessments that document student achievement in any of the five university undergraduate outcomes are identified and documented as such. The process is designed to provide information authentic to student learning that is valued by the program and at the university level. This is the **one, most important element** that leads

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to developing a culture of assessment within an educational
system.

Documenting, analyzing, and reporting learning outcomes

Programs/Units have own

- Learning outcomes
- Collection of data
- Analysis of data
- Discussions leading toward improvement

It is essential that assessments fit within the educative process so student and faculty see relevance.

What we are working toward is a culture of assessment that is developed through ownership of the process. If a student learning assessment process is to lead toward program improvement, then assessments that exist within programs will be the most relevant, especially because those involved with instruction are directly involved with the collection and analysis of assessment data.

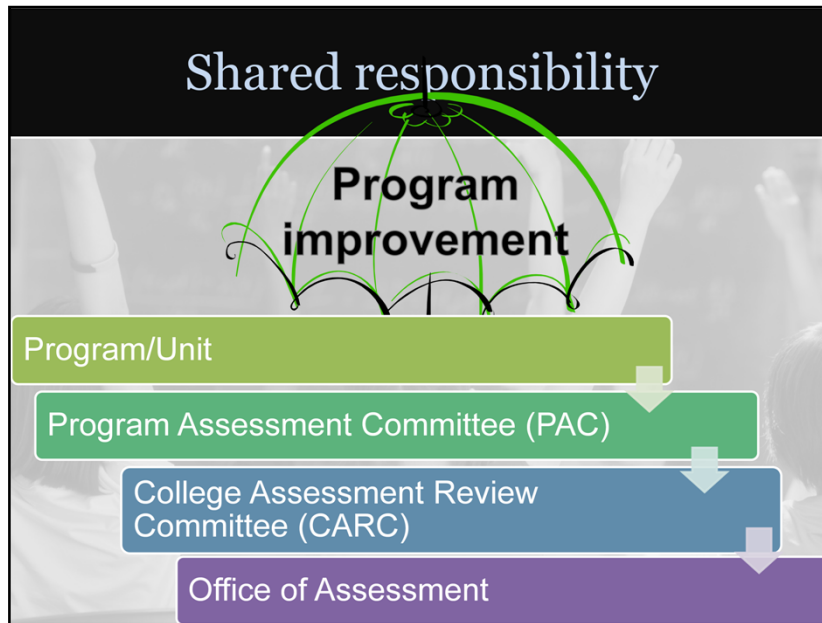
It might be important to note that each program/unit designs their own assessment process to collect, analyze, and discuss student learning data. This is so assessments fit into the learning sequence, faculty are involved in analysis and discussion of student learning data, and the students recognize the relevance of the assessments. This supports the message from the morning keynote: “Assessment anchored in the curriculum and focused on student work is the most effective form of assessment.

It is essential that assessments fit within the educative process so student and faculty see relevance. Otherwise we are testing attitudes

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towards taking tests instead of applied learning.

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Similar to many models of university assessment, all programs at Kansas State University: majors, minors, certificate; and student life units are involved in assessment of student learning under the umbrella of program/unit improvement. Each program/unit reports annually on student learning. The format for the Annual Report is designed to lead programs to consider options for program improvement and enhancements that can be made in the assessment process. The sequence is as follows:

- The analysis of student learning assessment data is discussed among faculty/staff and department heads.
- Each program/unit has an Program Assessment Committee that organizes and oversees the assessment efforts. These committees annually report the assessment findings to
- a college assessment review committee. These committees assess the annual reports, provide feedback to the program/unit, and summarize the college/division assessment activities
- for the university Office of Assessment.

The entire sequence includes feedback and involvement of a large number of stakeholder. How does this tie into assessment of university learning goals?

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The student learning data in each program/unit report (PAC) and college/division report (CARC) is reviewed annually by the Office of Assessment who provides additional feedback in a written form and through face-to-face meetings with programs and college administration to enhance the assessment process and the campus culture.


The assessment data, all reflecting the university outcomes, are combined to provide a summary of university-wide student learning achievement for each university outcome. In our assessment system, the relevance of assessment data is directly tied to the learning activities with which the students are engaged. So responsibility and ownership of student learning assessment are accepted by those directly involved with instruction.

Again I want to stress that without ownership and shared responsibility, I don't believe a culture of assessment is possible.

Assessing University Outcomes

- Multiple assessments
- Nationally normed dis
- Indirect assessment
- Campus-wide assessments
 - NSSI
 - CAAP
 - Diversity assessment

A mistake often made is using only one mechanism for assessing student learning or one way of representing a learning outcome.

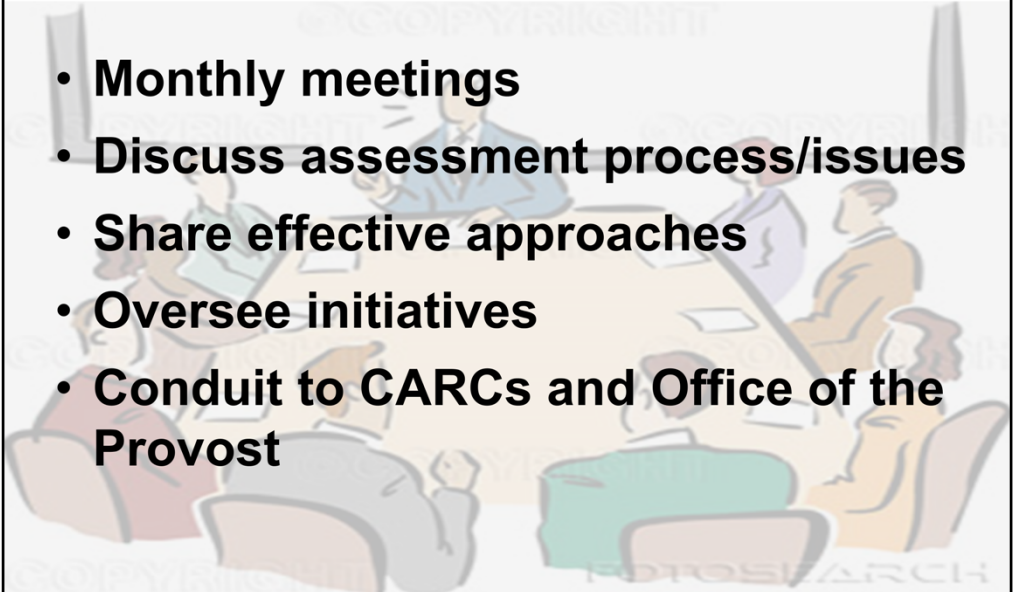
A cartoon character with a large orange nose, wearing glasses, a brown suit, and a red tie, is pointing with a thin stick towards the text in the speech bubble.

Another element that impacts the campus assessment culture is the value of the variety of ways learning occurs and how learning is applied and represented in each disciplinary area. This is why multiple assessments are requested of programs/units, and how nationally normed tests can be used to support data from program assessments.

A mistake often made is choosing only one mechanism for assessment or one way of representing a learning outcome. When this is done, especially when relying on standardized methods, student learning will most certainly be misrepresented by the assessments.

In creating a culture of assessment, we've discussed using a variety of assessments, authentic learning experiences, centering processes in programs, and involving as many stakeholders as possible. Let me share with you another mechanism that ties all these things together and enhances the culture of assessment at our campus. This is the University Assessment Facilitators committee.

University Assessment Facilitators Committee

- **Monthly meetings**
 - **Discuss assessment process/issues**
 - **Share effective approaches**
 - **Oversee initiatives**
 - **Conduit to CARCs and Office of the Provost**
- 
- A faint, stylized illustration of a group of people sitting around a large table in a meeting room. The people are depicted in various colors (blue, green, orange, grey) and are engaged in discussion, with some looking at papers or laptops. The background is light and the overall style is simple and professional.

Representatives from each college/division discuss assessment issues and share effective approaches to assessment at monthly meetings. This committee plans and oversees initiatives to enhance the culture of assessment across the university and works as a conduit between college/division assessment committees.



The University Assessment Facilitators Committee and the Office of Assessment hosts an annual assessment showcase each fall through which programs share examples of best-practice with their colleagues. The showcase recognizes effective assessment efforts with a framed certificate presented to programs by the Provost and Senior Vice President. It's like a mini-assessment conference with awards for effective practice.

In addition, to further establish a culture of shared assessment, faculty and unit representatives are intentionally asked to attend conferences on assessment of student learning and effective learning. In other words, we try to value the ownership they have in the assessment process.

The paradigm we are hoping to develop is that assessment of student learning is an organized mechanism for **self-review** and **program improvement**. University assessment is implemented for the purpose of enhancing student learning and **not** as requirement to fulfill a university initiative.

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Evaluating assessment efforts				
Total 0	1 Beginning	2 Developing	3 At Standard	4 Above Standard
Professional Standards related to Student Learning Outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/> It is not clear if the SLOs reflect current educational standards in the field.	<input type="checkbox"/> Current educational standards are clearly defined in the SLOs.	<input type="checkbox"/> SLOs are based on current educational standards and clearly tied to the assessments.	<input type="checkbox"/> SLOs are based on current educational standards with faculty and professional community engaged in continuous improvement through systemic involvement.
Assessment Alignment	<input type="checkbox"/> Alignment between SLOs and assessments is not clear.	<input type="checkbox"/> Alignment is weak/unclear with some SLOs and assessments.	<input type="checkbox"/> Alignment between SLOs and assessments is complete and clear.	<input type="checkbox"/> Alignment between SLOs and assessments are clear and aligned with curriculum.
Assessment Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment plan has one assessment per outcome.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment plan has two assessments for most outcomes used in a continuous cycle.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment plan has two assessments for ALL SLOs used in a continuous cycle.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment plan has thoughtful and systematic direct and indirect assessments for each SLO embedded in the program (versus "added-on").
Faculty Involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Minimal faculty involvement is evidenced in the assessment activities.	<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty involvement consists of one or two individuals who work on program assessment activities. Little or no communication is established with other faculty.	<input type="checkbox"/> A select group of faculty oversees the assessment process and provides feedback to faculty or professionals associated with the department.	<input type="checkbox"/> All faculty within the program contribute to the ongoing assessment process and program improvement.
Data Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Minimal evidence of analysis exists.	<input type="checkbox"/> Data analysis is present in the current report without comparison to former achievement levels.	<input type="checkbox"/> Data analysis describes student performance over time.	<input type="checkbox"/> A data analysis describes student performance over time and provides evidence of reflection.
Data Collection Points	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment data are not collected across multiple points and the relationship of assessments to predict student success is not clear.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment data are collected at multiple points but a rationale regarding a relationship to predicting student success is unclear.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment data are systematically collected at multiple points and the relationship to predicting student success is clear.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment data are systematically collected at multiple points and demonstrate a strong relationship (e.g., research, best practice) between assessments and student success.
Program Improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Data are only generated for external accountability reports (e.g. APR, accreditation) and not used for program improvement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Some generated data are used for program improvement but communication within program is not clear.	<input type="checkbox"/> An ongoing, systematic process is in place to report and use data to make decisions and improve program SLOs.	<input type="checkbox"/> An ongoing, systematic process is in place to report and use data to make decisions and improve program and university SLOs.
Scoring Measures	<input type="checkbox"/> The assessment plan lacks out-off criteria and achievement divisions for acceptable and high	<input type="checkbox"/> The assessment plan includes out-off criteria, but lacks achievement divisions for acceptable	<input type="checkbox"/> The assessment plan includes out-off criteria and achievement divisions for acceptable and high	<input type="checkbox"/> The assessment plan includes out-off criteria, achievement divisions for acceptable and high achieving, and examines validity and utility.

In addition, K-State's Office of Assessment assesses the assessment process by maintaining annual records of student learning assessment for each program/unit/college/division.

A rubric is used to identify the level of student learning assessment achieved by each program/unit in the following areas:

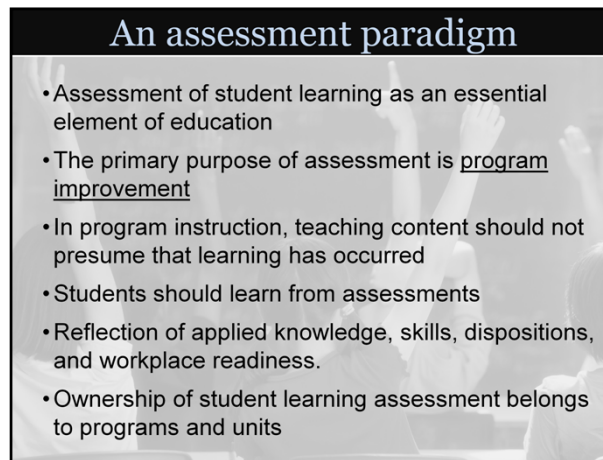
1. the quality and alignment of student learning outcomes
2. variety and appropriateness of direct/indirect assessments
3. faculty involvement
4. documentation and analysis of annual assessment results
5. program initiatives resulting from the assessment findings

We strive through annual feedback and discussions with assessment facilitators to continually move the university toward stronger rigor

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in and value of student learning assessment.

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What is a culture of assessment? With student learning as the focus, programs/units are encouraged to evolve their assessment paradigm. The paradigm to which I am referring to includes:

- An overall belief that assessment of student learning is an essential element of education and that
- The primary purpose of assessment is program improvement, not to comply with a university requirement.
- In reference to teaching, it should not be presumed that learning has occurred because content has been taught, and
- Assessments should be a part of instruction, not a response to instruction
- Assessment must extend beyond recall. Student learning assessment must reflect application of knowledge, development of cognitive skills, dispositions, and workplace readiness.
- Ownership of student learning assessment belongs to programs and units, but is necessary for university and program accreditation

The ownership of the assessment process remains with programs and units, although suggestion and guidance from the Office of Assessment provide direction and focus. Most importantly, when the focus remains on student learning instead of the mechanisms of assessment, the educational environment, curriculum, and instruction will be seen as the means toward that end. A culture of assessment develops through

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faculty ownership.



The culture of assessment desired for higher education must be centered on providing evidence to document learning authentic for the discipline, and not from generalities obtained from assessments unrelated to what students actually learn in their disciplinary area and how the learning is authentically represented and applied.

Faculty must be central in ownership of the process and students' actual work authentic in assessment.

When the purpose of assessment is clear to all stake-holders and respectful of the student learning that occurs, a culture of assessment will develop and flourish.