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The goal of *Research & Practice in Assessment* is to serve the assessment community as an online journal focusing on higher education assessment. It is dedicated to the advancement of scholarly discussion amongst researchers and practitioners in this evolving field. The journal originated from the Board of the Virginia Assessment Group, one of the oldest continuing professional higher education assessment organizations in the United States. *Research & Practice in Assessment* is a peer-reviewed publication that uses a double-blind review process. Approximately forty percent of submissions are accepted for issues that are published twice annually. *Research & Practice in Assessment* is listed in Cabell's Directory and indexed by EBSCO, ERIC, Gale, and ProQuest.

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"Rain"

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FROM THE EDITOR

Vantage Point

The examination of student learning and development can grow dull when assessment efforts become rote or the burdens of regulatory reporting become the polestar. Personal experience, institutional culture, and standard expectations can also contribute to a routine approach to assessment. Higher education professionals engaging in assessment work can preserve, or perhaps renew, the luster of their efforts by remaining focused on student learning, but occasionally changing their vantage point.

The contributions presented in this issue of *Research & Practice in Assessment* demonstrate an array of vantage points used to examine student learning and development. Each feature demonstrates a different approach, but all are focused on what students learn and how they develop as a result of their curricular and co-curricular experiences. This volume provides readers with the opportunity to view assessment from a particular methodological perspective, from a disciplinary approach, broadly across the curriculum, and from the perspective of selected student populations. Perhaps you already share one of these perspectives, but hopefully at least one of them provides you with a new vantage point.

The Summer 2015 issue includes four peer-reviewed articles that exemplify the various approaches of measuring student learning and development. Newhart encourages readers to examine deep questions about student learning and gain a richer insight into the student experience by using qualitative assessment methods that do not limit one's ability to conduct such an examination. Ozaki, Worley, and Cherry use multiple methods to identify the assessment processes used by fine and performing arts programs in the context of a disciplinary framework. Looking more broadly at assessment of general education, Hawthorne, Bol, Pribesh, and Suh examine the effect of different motivational prompts on student performance on low-stakes, general education assessments. Fauria and Fuller articulate their findings about the curricular and co-curricular activities that impact the success of transfer students.

In the reviews, Hawthorne comments on Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education, Second Edition, a text that provides a broad overview of assessment for both experienced and novice assessment professionals. Merrill reviews Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates, a look at the relationship between the college experience and the transition into adulthood of the class of 2009. This issue includes two Notes in Brief exemplifying different approaches to assessment practice. Newton, Maher, and Smith recount the assessment of a newly implemented student success program and the partnership with advanced graduate students who led the assessment efforts. Heinerichs, Bernotsky, and Rieser Danner describe an institution-level assessment improvement process and offer practical advice for undertaking such



an initiative. I also encourage you to consider approaches to your assessment efforts that may provide renewed excitement or new experiences, as you reflect upon the photograph showcased in Ruminate. I hope your engagement with the contributions of this issue provide you with vantage points that keep your assessment efforts from becoming dull.

Regards,

Katie Busby

Tulane University



······ RESEARCH & PRACTICE IN ASSESSMENT

Abstract

As we face increasing accountability in higher education, how we measure student learning should exceed the calls for an account of learning that places students at the center. Qualitative approaches to assessment and theoretical underpinnings gleaned from the qualitative research tradition may provide a way that we can support a more holistic view of the student college experience, and in some cases, provide a more comprehensive narrative than quantitative assessment methods alone. We argue that as student populations change rapidly, no longer will large, indirect measures of student learning stand on their own as a comprehensive explanation; instead, we turn to philosophical and epistemological foundations of qualitative inquiry as one way to think about capturing the complexity within student learning experiences. Qualitative approaches to assessment could provide new possibilities for our own knowledge in regards to assessment, and also provide a space in which we learn more-about learning.



AUTHORS

Daniel W. Newhart, Ph.D. Oregon State University

To Learn More about Learning: The Value-Added Role of Qualitative **Approaches to Assessment**

 ${m J}$ iven the repeated clarion calls for increased accountability within higher education (most recently, Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014), practitioners are under great pressure to report how and what students learn in college and the extent to which this learning will transfer outside of postsecondary contexts. An increasing number of interested parties ask those of us involved in higher education to make connections between student experiences inside and outside of the classroom, and how these experiences translate into student learning.

For example, the 2006 Spellings Report discussed the assessment of student learning as one of the most important priorities for higher education in the future (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007). Responding to these calls responsibly and holistically would require a variety of measures to catalogue an understanding of student learning. The overarching goal within this accountability context, then, is to measure student learning in higher education. Or, put a bit differently, to somehow learn about learning. The irony is that in attempting to better understand a complex interaction such as learning, we often turn to data collection procedures that seek to reduce and/or control for complexity. In an attempt to produce objective findings, for example, we rely on particular methods, procedures, and criteria that together seek to limit personal judgment, speculation, critique, and interpretation. Indeed, we have come to rely on particular methods in themselves (Schwandt, 1996) as a way to produce reliable knowledge about outcomes for student learning. In this sense, methods *Email* may serve as a filter of sorts and in so doing, limit our ability to ask deep questions about the daniel.newhart@oregonstate.edu complex nature of student learning.

> Yet, we know that quantitative measures alone do not capture a holistic view of student learning. Student learning is complex (Keeling, 2006; Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008) and as such, it rarely happens that one type of measure is able to account for

CORRESPONDENCE

learning in such a way as to create a coherent and comprehensive narrative. Moreover, the data alone do not tell us what to do or, as Dowd (2005) states, "The data don't drive." In the end, we are still confronted with the necessary tasks of interpretation and understanding and forwarding evidence-influenced recommendations, which is very important as well.

The challenge we undertake in this essay is one of opportunity. Increasing calls for accountability provide us great space to shape the way we think about and measure student learning in postsecondary contexts. Drawing from the philosophical and epistemological tradition of qualitative inquiry, we argue that qualitative methods have much to add to what we know—and can know—about student learning in higher education. Specifically, we consider the value-added nature of qualitative approaches to assessment and then turn to direct and indirect measures of student learning as examples of engaging this work. Instrumental to our argument are the foundational principles of qualitative research, as well as how these principles can transfer to the area of qualitative approaches to assessment.

Foundations of Qualitative Research

The arena of qualitative inquiry is diverse. A variety of intellectual and disciplinary approaches to the study of social phenomena fall under the umbrella of qualitative research, as do contested beliefs about the nature of reality. Yet, while the dynamics within the field make qualitative inquiry difficult to define, there exist shared characteristics or assumptions that we might consider foundational.

Qualitative research is not simply about interviews and focus groups, but about meaning. To examine the world qualitatively means to study and represent the meaning of a particular social interaction, such as learning in postsecondary contexts. Using explanation and description, qualitative researchers attempt to interpret social reality or understand the meaning of social action. They do so by studying things "...in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). In this sense, qualitatively grounded approaches to social science research involve interactive processes among the researchers, the participants, and their socio-political contexts. Because social life is complex and layered, qualitative researchers examine social phenomena within this context and seek to account for multiple influences upon the meaning of social behavior.

The goal of qualitative social science research, therefore, is not necessarily to arrive at a final answer about a particular social phenomenon, but instead to provide evidence towards a certain way of thinking about it. The assumption is that there is no one right answer that can be unearthed with the appropriate methods, but rather many credible answers that may provide insight into better understanding a particular issue. As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) argue, each qualitative project "makes the world visible in a different way" (p. 5) and in the context of understanding student learning, a collection of these approaches may provide a holistic picture of learning experiences in higher education.

Our assumptions about learning, including what it means to learn and how one should learn, stem from larger conventions that we hold about reality. Invariably, these assumptions guide our understandings of how best to measure the social world and can limit our ability to capture complexity. For example, how do we imagine the world in order to study it? Likewise, how do we imagine student learning so that it can be assessed? In attempting to assess student learning with certainty, the complexity can be reduced to easily identifiable variables. Because learning does not occur in a vacuum and failing to learn is quite different than refusing to learn (Kohl, 1994), it is important that our methods capture the complexity of learning rather than controlling for it. Turning to the field of qualitative inquiry is useful because qualitative researchers challenge desires for absolute certainty. Instead, by understanding that methods serve as a filter for what we can discover and learn, qualitative researchers try to work through these complexities, or what some refer as the mess of doing social science research (Lather, 2009; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000), by examining how these complexities function within a particular context.

To approach assessment qualitatively, then, is to seek complexity rather than suppress it. In the context of attempting to capture student learning, it means that we must begin by asking: What does it mean to learn? We can then, by extension, engage the most appropriate

The irony is that in attempting to better understand a complex interaction such as learning, we often turn to data collection procedures that seek to reduce and/or control for complexity. In an attempt to produce objective findings, for example, we rely on particular methods, procedures, and criteria that together seek to limit personal judgment, speculation, critique, and interpretation.



approaches to understanding and measuring that learning. It also means that we design qualitative approaches that allow us to capture unanticipated data (Becker, 1996) by opening up opportunities for thinking about and assessing student learning differently. Thus, qualitative approaches to assessment provide us an opportunity to reconsider what it means to learn by placing ourselves in a position to learn more about learning.

Accountability on Multiple Levels

As higher education becomes more diverse in the constituents that it serves and its increasing reach into various sectors, it is important to account for student learning in such a way that the experiences students have after they leave our institutions can be tied to their experiences within our contexts. In a sense, we must be accountable for showing that the time, money, and effort that students spend in our institutions can translate into outside of college arenas and that this investment is worth the economic and personal cost of attending college. Given the increased calls for accountability, our measures must become more complex as well. In fact, this may already be occurring. According to recently released research (Kuh et al., 2014), the number of rubrics used to assess student learning in higher education is increasing, indicating that surveys are perhaps being relied upon less in the measurement of learning—or perhaps that our narrative around student learning is becoming more complex.

Qualitative approaches to assessment, whether used alone or in tandem with quantitative approaches, can help provide a deeper understanding of student learning. Since qualitative assessment may allow for more depth than quantitative assessment, we can begin to answer the calls for more accountability for the work we are doing in more detail—as well as respect the diverse student experiences that occur at our institutions. Our measures, through qualitative approaches to assessment, be they direct or indirect, allow us a way to be accountable to the calls for proof that learning is occurring at the university. Qualitative approaches to assessment also highlight some of what we have learned from the qualitative research tradition, which would espouse that qualitative methods allow for a more full description than solely looking at phenomena through a quantitative lens.

The point here is not to disparage quantitative approaches to assessment, but rather reiterate that student learning is complex (Keeling, 2006; Keeling et al., 2008) and that, in some cases, multiple types of methods may be required to get the complete picture of student learning. To merely use quantitative methods may not be honoring the learning experiences of students, particularly if they are members of smaller groups who may not be able to be analyzed using more advanced statistical procedures that require larger sample sizes. As explored below, qualitative approaches to assessment may be better equipped to measure learning from those students who might not learn through the ways in which our measures, either direct or indirect, purport to measure their learning. As we seek to understand more about learning, we could engage this learning mismatch by using the teachings of the qualitative tradition, and avoid the possible pitfall of our methods acting as a filter that would not be able to measure this lack of learning. Our measures could help answer the call that asks us to show that students are learning in complex ways. But first, what does qualitative work have to add to the field of assessment?

The Value-Added Role of Qualitative Approaches to Assessment

First, in an effort to show the value-added role of qualitative assessment, one must look into the qualitative research literature. However, since assessment and research are sometimes considered separate processes (Schuh, 2009), one must engage this from a framework which considers assessment and research as possibly connected and symbiotic (Newhart, 2011). By connecting them in the modes of guidance, rather than the intended purpose of research or assessment (and keeping them as separate endeavors), one can learn from the rich qualitative research tradition, specifically in the areas of paradigms and methodology, as these may apply to both assessment and research. Considering research and assessment as linked can allow for a study to be conducted in such a way to not only research the phenomena of interest, but then upon implementation, assess it (Newhart, 2011).

For example, an assessment to determine the efficacy of a particular teaching style in students seeking information from the library on a topic of interest for a class might involve a direct qualitative assessment measure. This might be an observational assessment

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To approach assessment qualitatively, then, is to seek complexity rather than suppress it.

Qualitative approaches to assessment, whether used alone or in tandem with quantitative approaches, can help provide a deeper understanding of student learning.

As certain groups of students increase on campus from a population growth perspective, it is important to know how these emerging groups of students learn and how their learning may be different than the larger groups of students on campus. of students using the potentially learned strategies to find information in a database. However, we soon might find that one particular group of students is not responding to the teaching methods, due to some specific reason that we may not know about. This then emerges as a research question, as we might wish to investigate why this particular group of students is not responding to the teaching method—and how we might adapt our teaching style to include these students. We can then take the recommendations from the research and apply them, and assess whether those recommendations worked for this population, continuing the process of assessing and researching.

Second, using the framework provided to us from qualitative research also allows us to critically analyze and evaluate qualitative approaches to assessment which purport to measure student learning. According to Keeling et al. (2008), qualitative approaches to assessment must be founded upon theory and work from a "sound theoretical base" (p. 47). The authors divide qualitative assessment into five traditional areas, specifically: "Biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study" (pp. 47-48). These areas are referenced elsewhere when speaking of qualitative research as methodologies (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014), and are considered that which can guide our inquiry intentionally.

As a result of this, qualitative approaches to assessment are perhaps inaccurately thought of as taking more time to engage than quantitative modes of assessment. However, Harper and Kuh (2007) contend that depending on the type of qualitative assessment, more time might not be involved. According to the authors, good quantitative approaches to assessment may take just as much time, if not more time, than good qualitative approaches to assessment. They argue that projects which are done with more than just one person, such as stakeholders involved in the project, can provide more assistance to the endeavor. The added benefit, of course, is that the stakeholders play a large role in the project, which can insure that the data would be used during the implementation. It also means that the data analysis and interpretation could (and should) apply to multiple contexts.

Third, certain types of qualitative approaches to assessment also can ground quantitative types of assessments (Donmoyer, 2012). For example, in survey construction, qualitative modes of knowing may provide a way to help make sure that the questions we are asking on a survey are not constructed in such a way that they do not make sense to our potential audiences. Also, if we do not know much about a topic, qualitative modes of knowing provide the space for an exploration into the topic or phenomena, rather than assuming we have intimate knowledge in regards to a topic in which we may have little or no literature or knowledge basis (Dillman, Smith, & Christian, 2008; Fowler, 2009).

Finally, qualitative approaches to assessment can additionally provide a space for those populations who might not meet our minimum sample parameters in quantitative assessments to have a voice in co-constructing a narrative about student learning. As certain groups of students increase on campus from a population growth perspective, it is important to know how these emerging groups of students learn—and how their learning may be different than the larger groups of students on campus. Historically marginalized and emerging populations on college campuses might not show up in large numbers in our quantitative assessments. Qualitative research would teach us that this might be a time to utilize a purposive sample, seeking cases who are rich with information (Patton, 1990). Using a qualitative frame allows us to explore how these students learn on campus through more pointed and focused qualitative approaches to assessment, rather than quantitative modes of assessment which may exclude them from the analysis (such as survey data analysis depending on the statistical procedure).

Thinking about Direct and Indirect Measures of Student Learning Differently

In the narrative around assessment, there is often a distinction made between indirect and direct measures of student learning. Direct measures of student learning, according to Suskie (2009), purport to measure what students know and measure them in a fashion that allows for this demonstration of learning. Indirect measures seek to understand what students report they learned, as well as how and why the students gain knowledge in the areas being measured. While more and more institutions are reporting using direct measures, such as rubrics, to measure student learning, the use of surveys, particularly national surveys used for assessment purposes, still is the most prevalent form of assessment at colleges and universities across the United States (Kuh et al., 2014). This prevalence of indirect measures may be limiting what we know about student learning.

According to Suskie (2009), direct measures should seek to measure feedback in an objective fashion. However, qualitative approaches to assessment which honor the tradition of qualitative research may have difficulty with this statement, especially in certain forms of direct measures of student learning. In some direct measures of student learning, an objective approach could actually be limiting, as we might ignore a specific population's interpretation of how their learning is occurring if we do not allow room for subjective exploration. Some authors argue as well that objectivity is not possible in research (or expanded here to assessment—both quantitative and qualitative; Janesick, 2000) and instead, we should be upfront about how we interpreted the data, in order to be clear to readers about the framework used to approach the project. From the qualitative perspective specifically, Jones et al. (2014) argue that not being clear about how the data analyst approaches the project may actually make the results less trustworthy and therefore less valid. In this sense, a qualitative approach grounded in the form of thinking about validity differently.

Traditionally, qualitative approaches to assessment have been thought of in terms of focus groups and interviews, but it can be much more, such as "observations, document analyses, and reflective journaling" (Harper & Kuh, 2007, p. 11). These three examples might lend themselves more towards direct measures than the traditional indirect measure of learning of focus groups or interviews. Additionally, when we add the layer of a "sound theoretical base" (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 47), we can begin to add depth to our interpretation of the qualitative assessment data in responsible ways. As Creswell (2003) states, the interpretation of data should respect the theoretical underpinnings of the chosen methods. Using a qualitative approach to assessment could honor this by linking to the philosophical underpinnings of the qualitative inquiry tradition.

In addition, using the framework of direct versus indirect measures might allow us to think about focus groups and interviews in different ways as well. What might a direct measure of student learning, held using an interview method (for example) of data collection for the purposes of qualitative assessment, look like? A learning measure of this nature might appear as the following. A student is asked to complete a training module about a specific type of content. The student could then be asked to illustrate their learning about the content through a response to a number of scenarios which would apply the learning, and their responses could be evaluated via a rubric that makes clear delineations among multiple categories representing integration of knowledge, as well as the display of this learning. As the student answers the questions, the evaluator can determine where they might fit into the rubric that would best represent their learning.

However, a qualitative approach to assessment adds an additional layer. Not only can we learn where the student might appear on the rubric, we are fortunate enough to receive an account as to why they are in that place on the rubric, depending on how this interview is conducted. We might say, "Tell me about how you would apply your learning to this situation, and tell me what you would do?" This is where qualitative approaches to assessment have a great deal of power, as we can learn more about the categories of our rubrics and how different types of students might arrive at our categories in very different ways. The "sound theoretical base" (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 47) underlying the interviews, can and should help guide our interpretation of the data, as well. In sum, qualitative approaches to assessment, again, allow us to learn more about how and what we are learning from the student perspective, and allows greater depth and explanatory power from our direct measure rubric alone. We can begin to learn more about learning. Qualitative approaches to assessment add a unique, and in some contexts, more in-depth way to answer the call for increased accountability in higher education today by adding a potential for deeper understanding that we may not be able to achieve through quantitative modes of assessment alone.

Conclusion

Qualitative approaches to assessment add a unique, and in some contexts, more in-depth way to answer the call for increased accountability in higher education today by adding a potential for deeper understanding that we may not be able to achieve through quantitative modes of assessment alone. By layering the frameworks that qualitative research provides us onto the indirect and direct measures of student learning that we seek to obtain from our students, we are learning from the tradition of qualitative research in such a way that respects this tradition by keeping the foundations of qualitative research in mind. By considering research and assessment as connected processes we begin to gain a way to assess the implementations that may come about through our engagement with research that is qualitative in higher education, be it in the literature or in our local contexts. We are also learning from those students who are participating in our institutions of higher education in more depth, and may be positioned to describe this learning in very rich ways as a result. Qualitative approaches to assessment allow us a way to learn in a more intimate way about the learning that is occurring at our institutions from the tremendously varied ways in which our students experience our universities.

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RESEARCH & PRACTICE IN ASSESSMENT ••••••

Abstract

The increased pressure in higher education to demonstrate evidence of student learning is prompting all sectors to develop clear assessment methods. This national conversation has also sparked the greater recognition and use of assessment as a process for the improvement of teaching and learning. Given the scant literature on assessment in the fine and performing arts, understanding the status of one sub-field provides insight into the status of assessment in musical theatre and how assessment is conducted in an arguably nebulous area of study. This exploratory mixed methods survey study of 20 BA/BFA programs was designed to examine how musical theatre programs assess student learning within and across their programs. The qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed using Gale and Bond's framework for the assessment of learning in the fine arts.



n 1990, Ernest Boyer re-conceptualized scholarship to include inquiry into teaching and learning. In the landmark piece Scholarship Reconsidered, Boyer asserts that the assessment of teaching effectiveness and student learning is a responsibility of the professoriate and postsecondary institutions more broadly. What began over twenty years ago as a reappraisal of scholarship, has since developed into a paradigm for teaching and learning in higher education (Maki, 2010). Driven by the call to transition from a focus on the teacher to students' learning and the products of their learning, instructors and program faculty are encouraged to assess how students learn, what promotes student learning, and how to create an environment that fosters desired learning and its outcomes. Litterst and Tompkins (2000) argue that integral to the scholarship of teaching is the assessment of teaching and learning. The process of systematically reflecting on teaching practices and student learning outcomes is critical for improvement. In other words, assessment facilitates the reflective aspect of teaching that contributes to its improvement. Programs are challenged to demonstrate student progress and learning cumulatively to their institutions, stakeholders, and accreditors (Bresciani, 2006). Therefore, necessary for the continued improvement of programmatic efficacy, institutions must assess student learning and development, collect their data across the curriculum and program, and improve student learning throughout the program, engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning through program assessment.

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Assessment of learning at the institutional and program levels has become widespread throughout higher education (Astin & antonio, 2012; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014; Maki, 2010). For this study, assessment for program review is defined as "a systematic process in which program faculty and/ or professionals articulate the intended results of the cumulative contribution of their program...The faculty and/or professionals then purposefully plan the program so that the intended results (i.e., outcomes) can be achieved; implement methods to systematically—over time—identify whether the end results *have* been achieved; and, finally, use the results to plan improvements or make recommendations for policy consideration, recruitment,



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retention, resource reallocation, or new resource requests" (Bresciani, 2006, p. 14). Promotion of assessment as a tool for good teaching and learning is now commonplace among institutions and programs (Astin & antonio, 2012; Kuh et al., 2014; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Maki, 2010). Kuh and Ikenberry (2009) found through their national survey of institutional assessment practices that most institutions have a set of common learning outcomes, use a combination of institutional-level and program-level assessment approaches, and are primarily driven by accreditation. In addition, more recently, Kuh et al. (2014) found in a national study that 84% of the sample institutions reported that they had common learning goals for all their students.

Assessment has also gained recognition as a condition of educational accountability, demonstrating quality learning experiences and education to state and federal agencies, accreditors, and other stakeholders (Astin & antonio, 2012; Bresciani, 2006; Kuh et al., 2014). Therefore, institutions and programs face increased scrutiny of quality in higher education with a push to demonstrate how data on student learning are collected, to provide evidence of individual student learning and development, and show how such data are used to inform decisions at all levels. While often motivated by external forces, assessment at the course- and program-levels across disciplines provide an opportunity for faculty to examine their teaching and programmatic practices, with the ultimate goal of improving student learning and success.

Assessment in the Arts

While assessment is generally expected across all disciplines, there are unique aspects to determining appropriate learning outcomes and corresponding measures that require assessment to also be situated within a disciplinary context. Creative and performance activities are often considered difficult to assess because of the challenge in identifying assessment criteria and indicators in traditionally affective and subjective domains (Belluigi, 2009; Gale & Bond, 2007; Mello, 2007; Orr, 2011; Parkes, 2010). Gale and Bond (2007) state that assessment of performance and creative arts is often conflated with public critique and commercial acclaim. Rather, the goals for assessment in each scenario are distinct and therefore draw upon differing criteria for judgment. They assert that in higher education we are concerned with how well students and faculty understand the processes for assessment of student work versus public, professional critique (Gale & Bond, 2007). Yet, the lack of clear delineation between the two reflects a tendency to slip into matters of personal preference rather than exercising aesthetic judgment based on matters of craft and creative ability. Assessment is not only about assigning grades or imposing conformity, but is intended to help students develop a critical perspective within their disciplinary craft.

The presence of literature attending to assessment of the performing arts in higher education is sporadic and sparse, a majority of which focuses on assessment of learning at the course-level. For example, Prendergast (2003) examined the use of soliloquy in reflective practice and qualitative assessment of a performance course; Orr (2011) examined the role of values and identity in the assessment practices of arts educators; and Parkes (2007, 2010b) tested and found that the use of criteria-specific rubrics in musical performance curriculum assisted in more learner-centered student learning. Belluigi's (2009) case study of a South African fine arts school's formative assessment and encouragement of creativity and critical thinking was the only empirical institutional study found. And only Mello's (2007) study of assessment in a theatre course is specific to the disciplinary focus of this reported study. Utilizing a conceptual approach, Parkes (2010a) conducted a literature review on performance assessment in music. In addition, Belluigi (2013) proposed a schema for the conditions of creativity in fine arts studio practice in which she presents concerns and evidence that assessment may adversely affect creativity, while still advocating for the necessity of assessment for student learning. Finally, of primary interest to this study is Gale and Bond's (2007) framework for the assessment of fine arts at the course-level and is discussed as part of the conceptual framework. Much of the literature reviewed grapples with the arts-based inquiry and the interplay and tension that may exist between assessment and creativity. Roberts' (1995) and Dorn and Orr's (2008) contributions are the lone items to attempt to examine and consider how assessment of theatre arts occurs at the program- or department-level. Roberts reports on the painful and productive aspects of departmental self-assessment, while Dorn and Orr's book advocates for measurable goals in arts education across all levels. Yet, both publications are conceptual, resulting in a lack of empirical literature on this topic specific to the program-level.

The process of systematically reflecting on teaching practices and student learning outcomes is critical for improvement. In other words, assessment facilitates the reflective aspect of teaching that contributes to its improvement. Given the affective and subjective nature of assessing student learning in the creative and performing arts, in addition to the range of disciplinary areas that encompass this type of work, understanding the literature and assessment processes of a particular discipline may provide some insight. Understanding how a disciplinary area whose forms of learning are extensively entrenched within and demonstrated through methods and means that are subjective, expressive, and affective can impart awareness and examples for other fields of study and the broader study of assessment. The study reported in this paper focuses on musical theatre programs.

Assessment in Musical Theatre

Specific to the disciplinary area of musical theatre under investigation in this study, there is little to no scholarly literature about the current assessment practices or frameworks in use to assess learning in higher education. Yet, given the increased focus on assessment in higher education and the presence of an accrediting organization for theatre arts programs, the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST), one can assume that assessment does exist to assess a student's standing and progress within the degree program and overall learning of the content and skills associated with the degree. Through NAST there are basic guiding principles that are common denominators in the field to guide student progress within a program. These basic principles are outlined in NAST's (2009) guide entitled *The Assessment of Undergraduate Programs of Theatre*.

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This guide is for any undergraduate degree in theatre and the core of the guide is applicable to the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), a primary degree category for theatre and musical theatre majors. The guide presents four categories of assessment for consideration. These four categories primarily ask departments or programs to question what is important when planning assessment, how feasible those goals are in relation to program's resources, how those goals connect with the larger institution, and then how to implement those goals with students. The guide helps programs prioritize and asks questions that would typically be considered subjective in a way that allows for faculty to objectively assess students' progress and specific intended outcomes. The overarching principle of the assessment guide is that a program and department need to have stated goals for the department and program that are agreed upon by the faculty and connect to the institution's goals. Then those goals need to be communicated with the students and aligned with curriculum. Though the guidelines proposed align with the broader assessment literature, it addressed assessment challenges specific to theatre and performance programs and uses language that is common in the field. However, there is less guidance for how to actually assess learning in the more muddy affective and performance areas common to performance arts. Nor does it provide empirical evidence for if and how theatre programs are currently assessing for learning across their curriculum and programs.

Developing a general picture of assessment methods for learning that are currently employed and understanding them within the context of an applicable and useful framework can provide guidance for faculty and program administrators in the arts and in other disciplines on this increasingly important matter. Yet, the current literature suggests limited potential frameworks for assessment of performance and creative arts and only provides some description for how individual instructors or courses assess these areas. The conceptual framework proposed by Gale and Bond (2007) suggests potential categories that may be useful to understand how assessment, particularly for affective and performance domains, in theatre arts may be conducted.

Conceptual Framework

Gale and Bond (2007) offered a four-part speculative framework for the assessment of learning in the creative arts. The framework consists of (a) *knowledge building*, (b) *creative production*, (c) *integrative contextualization*, and (d) *critical communication*. First, knowledge building refers to the fundamental knowledge necessary for a particular field of study and would be evident through the students' ability to aggregate and apply information from these fields of study. For example, a singer or student of voice would need to have knowledge about how to read music, chord progression and aural skills in order to be successful. Gale and Bond suggest that this first level of the framework should determine the extent to which students gain, understand, and use knowledge to create knowledge. Second, creative production is the assessment of creative work and is often considered to be the most difficult of the four given the personal nature of creative work and the view of creative production as a development of the person, not only the product. Gale and Bond emphasize the importance of clearly defined abilities that are not entangled with identity issues. Important for the assessment of creative production is the goal of assessing the extent to which a student executes the identified elements of the craft and the degree of alignment between exhibited abilities and the goals of the assignment and course. Third, integrative contextualization reflects the student's ability to understand creative production within its social and historical context and the broader intellectual discussion. This contextualization requires that students utilize knowledge building, in addition to developing the ability to frame creative production within historic, political, cultural, and artistic contexts. Finally, students must develop and demonstrate their ability to articulate the nature of a work within a context and framework through critical communication. Critical communication may take the form of speaking, publication and writing, or even film, as a sample of communication mediums. Gale and Bond's framework is the only proposed tool for student assessment specific to the art of craft. That said, it has yet to be applied or, if we must, tested for its relevance and applicability to the practice of assessment of student learning in these fields.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore current methods being employed and to develop a current picture of assessment of student learning used in musical theatre Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) programs throughout the United States. Furthermore, given the sparse nature of guiding frameworks for fine arts specific fields, we chose to explore the utility and relevance of Gale and Bond's (2007) framework for the assessment of individual student learning and programmatic assessment in one sub-field, musical theatre. We approached the study with the following research questions: What areas of student learning are identified as most common and important in musical theatre programs? What forms of programmatic assessment do musical theatre programs use to assess their students' learning? And, does Gale and Bond's framework for the assessment of student learning in the arts reflect the current practice?

Methods and Data Source

Method

This study was an exploratory, concurrent, mixed methods survey sent to musical theatre program faculty. A 31-item survey, the *Assessment in Theatre Arts Survey* (see Appendix A), was developed to gather information about the extent to which assessment plans and methods are currently in place for musical theatre programs and to explore how programs assess the learning of musical theatre majors throughout the program curriculum. Gale and Bond's (2007) framework was not used to structure the survey instrument. The survey instrument was divided into six sections: Program Logistics (7 questions), Student Learning (7 questions), Performance Requirements (4 questions), Student Expectations (5 questions), Review Process (4 questions), and Senior Project (4 questions). Survey questions ranged from asking participants to provide general program information to outlining current assessment practices. The survey also asked participants to evaluate their program's assessment policies. Some questions required single answers; others permitted multiple responses, and six questions allowed for open-ended responses.

Data Collection

There are 48 institutions of higher education that offer the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) and/or the Bachelor of Arts (BA) credential in musical theatre (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). We invited program directors and coordinators at all institutions to complete the survey. They were digitally sent a link to the survey and then prompted by instructions to guide them in providing information about their academic program and their approach to assessment. Prior to completing the survey they viewed a screen describing the study, including the risks and benefits. They were informed that the information collected will remain anonymous and

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Assessment is not only about assigning grades or imposing conformity, but is intended to help students develop a critical perspective within their disciplinary craft. unidentifiable. Furthermore, the survey introduction stated that individuals can stop or ask to be removed from the study at any time. Finally, subjects were informed that proceeding with the survey indicates informed consent. Twenty faculty members representing 20 different programs completed the survey, resulting in a 41.7% response rate. No academic program was represented more than once in this study.

Data Analysis

Given the affective and subjective nature of assessing student learning in the creative and performing arts, in addition to the range of disciplinary areas that encompass this type of work, understanding the literature and assessment processes of a particular discipline may provide some insight.

Descriptive analyses were conducted to address the first research question concerning how musical theatre programs assess individual students' learning. For single- and multipleresponse survey items (including program logistics), response percentages and frequency distributions were determined. In addition, means and standard deviations were recorded for surveys items related to student learning.

Exploration of the second research question (i.e., Does Gale and Bond's framework for the assessment of student learning in the arts reflect the current practice?) involved reading and reviewing the qualitative survey results for patterns and codes in line with constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analysis and theme building were guided by current research on assessment of learning, assessment and performing arts literature, and Gale and Bond's (2007) framework. One researcher served as the primary coder who used the four categories from Gale and Bond's framework to code the qualitative survey responses. The leading researcher then led a discussion with two additional research team members to review the coding patterns and develop themes. One team member is a musical theatre faculty member who provided expert review that established credibility and trustworthiness to the coding process. Researchers were in agreement that the following themes emerged:

- Knowledge Building: Report of the extent to which specific areas of learning are important for musical theatre students;
- Creative Production: Description of the review process of musical theatre students;
- Integrative Contextualization: Report of the extent to which musical theatre students must demonstrate mastery in performance areas; comparison of student expectations and department expectations concerning performance requirements;
- Critical Communication: Description of the senior project for musical theatre students.

The resulting themes aligned with Gale and Bond's categories and reflected an additional thematic category of career preparation and professionalism.

Findings

Respondents represented institutions from multiple regions of the United States, including the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, and the Pacific Coast. Almost half (48.3%) of the institutions offer only the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree in musical theatre, approximately 13.8% offer only the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in musical theatre, and two institutions offer the BA and the BFA in musical theatre. Almost half (48.3%) of all programs, regardless of degree type, are accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST).

Nearly all respondents (90.5%) felt that assessment is very important (66.7%) or somewhat important (23.8%) to their musical theatre programs. The majority (85.7%) indicated that they have a formal assessment plan fully (61.9%) or partially (23.8%) in place for their programs. Those with plans indicated that their plans follow program-specific guidelines (55.2%), NAST accreditation guidelines (48.3%), or institution-specific guidelines (20.7%). A chi-square test was performed to examine the relation between the type of degree offered (BA or BFA) and how important assessment is for musical theatre programs. The relation between these variables was significant, X^2 (4, N=20) = 15.91, p < 0.05. Programs offering the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree were more likely to express that assessment was very important to their musical theatre program than those offering the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree. A chi-square test was also performed to examine the relation between NAST accreditation status

and how important assessment is for musical theatre programs. The relation between these variables was not significant, X^2 (4, N=21) = 2.74, p < 0.05. As previously mentioned, Gale and Bond's (2007) framework was not used to structure the survey instrument. However, the four categories of the framework were used to guide analysis of the results.

Knowledge Building

Survey participants were asked to indicate the extent to which eight areas of learning were important for students in their musical theatre programs, using a scale of 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*). In general, respondents indicated that all eight areas of learning were at least very important for students in musical theatre programs, but there was some variation in the mean values of importance (see Table 1). While not ranked as most important, outcomes and skills assessed for knowledge building were solidly present. For example, understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette (M = 4.50, SD = 0.89); mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application (M = 4.45, SD = 0.69); and understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the cannon (M = 4.60, SD = 0.50) were all identified as very important.

Table 1

Areas of Student Learning: Level of Importance to Degree Program

Area of Student Learning	Mean	SD
Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance	4.75	0.72
Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance	4.70	0.92
Ability to apply coursework to production work	4.70	0.57
Understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the canon	4.60	0.50
Understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette	4.50	0.89
Mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application	4.45	0.69
Ability to work independently in production	4.40	0.82
Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory	4.05	0.92

Survey participants also responded to two open-ended questions, asking them to (a) list other areas of learning that were important for students in their musical theatre programs, and (b) specify the learning outcomes for their musical theatre programs. Qualitative responses indicated that understanding of technical aspects of theatre, musical theory and sight-reading, and knowledge of theatre history and repertoire were areas of programmatic focus. Across institutions, program faculty reported that students in their programs will "demonstrate their knowledge of musical theatre literature including scores. They will also demonstrate their knowledge of the development and history of musical theatre." An aspect of knowledge building regularly mentioned by participants, but not explicitly included in this category by Gale and Bond (2007), was the importance of knowing about and understanding the profession. This would include the mastery of audition/interview skills, understanding the business and marketing aspects of the field, understanding the limited opportunities available in the field, and understanding current trends and styles within the field. The importance of preparing students to take their craft into the professional world became evident through such comments and is more fully addressed in additional categories.

Methods used to assess students' knowledge were not reported in great detail, though the senior project was widely discussed as a capstone form of assessment that included foundational knowledge and skills from coursework. Application of skills and knowledge from coursework within production participation was also rated highly (Table 2). Therefore, assessment of learning in this area in both experiences would be logical. That said, given that the survey focused on programmatic forms of assessment, it is not surprising that detail about methods is missing. One can assume that most foundational knowledge and skills are introduced and assessed at the course-level, which was not the focus of this study. Responses indicated that program faculty recognize a sense of responsibility not only to prepare students to be knowledgeable and critical performers and participants in their craft, but also to hone students' professional and career enhancing skills.

Creative Production

This suggests that despite the lack of literature on assessment within the creative and performing arts, faculty and instructors in musical theatre are actively engaging in the assessment of their students, individually and throughout their bachelor's programs. As suggested by Gale and Bond (2007), each part of the framework is closely related and integrated with one another. This is certainly evident in the relationship between knowledge building and creative production. Creative production outcomes were generally considered to be the most important and were very common (85.7%) in programs represented. Production-oriented items in Table 1 ("Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance," "Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance," and "Ability to apply coursework to production work") were consistently rated among the most important. Participants' openended responses support this finding with comments about the importance of "demonstrated ability to create characters convincingly and perform vocally in various musical theatre styles... (and) demonstrated ability in various musical theatre (and)...exploit all appropriate tools in creating integrated production elements."

Most programs (91.7%) required students to audition for all on-campus productions. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which auditioning for roles and/or serving in crew positions were considered when evaluating musical theatre students, using a scale of 1 (*not at all considered*) to 5 (*always considered*). Results indicated that most programs expect students to serve on at least one crew position in an on-campus theatre arts production (M = 4.43, SD = 1.09) and to audition for on-campus theatre art productions (M = 4.00, SD = 1.41). The expectation for students to audition for or to serve in crew positions in off-campus productions was less pervasive (see Table 2).

Table 2

Student Expectations: Level	of Consideration When Evaluating	g Musical Theatre Students
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Student Expectations	Mean	SD
Complete the curriculum outlined for the musical theatre degree	5.00	0.00
Complete the essential studies or core requirements for the institution in which the student is enrolled	4.86	0.53
Serve on at least one crew position in an on-campus theatre arts production	4.43	1.09
Prepare and pass all yearly performance reviews	4.29	1.49
Audition for on-campus theatre art productions	4.00	1.41
Complete a senior capstone experience	3.93	1.69
Audition for professional/summer stock theatre arts productions	2.43	1.60
Serve on at least one crew position in an off-campus arts production	1.29	0.61

The assessment techniques most often mentioned in this study were closely aligned with the category of creative production. For example, most programs considered two student expectations, "Prepare and pass all yearly performance reviews" (M = 4.29, SD = 1.49) and "Complete a senior capstone experience" (M = 3.93, SD = 1.69) to be important elements of assessing students. When asked to describe the yearly review process, respondents indicated the use of faculty panels or reviews to assess student performance and growth on a regular basis. As one respondent wrote, "Musical theatre students must undergo an acting and a vocal jury [review] each semester, and a dance jury once a year. The juries [reviews] consist of monologues and scenes, vocal selections both from classical and musical theatre literature, and requisite dance combinations within abbreviated routines." The emphasis on and importance of creative production as an outcome and an assessment area suggests that this aspect of the framework is among the most critical. Although the study did not ask specifically if the reviews used rubrics, the opportunity for evaluation is apparent. It is unclear how students receive feedback after these reviews and if the feedback is built upon a previous review. This is the most specific area for feedback and the greatest potential for specific assessment.



Integrative Contextualization

Integrative contextualization was present, but not pervasive among respondents. In fact, "Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory" was among those outcomes ranked lowest in importance (M = 4.05, SD = 0.83) relative to other goals that respondents had for students in musical theatre programs. Qualitative survey responses related to student goals such as "Growth and developing in all aspects of theatre production and study," "Growth and development in the concepts and application of musicianship," and "Integrating musical theatre studies with other academic studies" highlight programmatic efforts to place knowledge building and creative production within a broader intellectual context for their students. Not surprisingly, all respondents indicated that completing the curriculum outlined for the musical theatre degree program was always considered when evaluating students (M = 5.0, SD = 0.0). Completing essential studies or core requirements were also strongly considered (M = 4.86, SD = 0.53; see Table 2).

As mentioned in discussion of creative production, the senior project was a somewhat common assessment tool that, outside of specific coursework, was most likely used to assess integrative contextualization. Approximately 64.0% of institutions require musical theatre students to complete a senior project. These projects serve to demonstrate student growth in acting (89.0%), vocal performance (89.0%), and dance (78.0%). Additional purposes of the senior project included demonstration of research analytical skills; demonstration of an overall command of production, direction, and choreography; and demonstration of the ability to share self through cabaret. Often required items were more likely to focus on integrative characterization included character biographies, scene-by-scene analysis, and project reviews with scholarly components. In light of the sparse representation of this category among participants, a question is raised about the relevance of this skill to an undergraduate degree in musical theatre; rather, perhaps it is more evident in related graduate degrees.

Critical Communication

Critical communication could be considered the culmination of the integration of the other three elements to the framework (i.e., knowledge building, creative production, and integrative contextualization). As reflected in the creative production area, students are required to "Communicate verbally and physically a dramatic idea, situation, scene or character" and "Communicate verbally with collaborators using the vocabulary common in theatre."

In addition, research, analytical, and scholarly writing skills are often assessed programmatically through senior projects, providing the critical element to this communication category. Previously mentioned, approximately 64.0% of institutions require musical theatre students to complete senior projects. For these projects, the student submits a variety of materials. Slightly more than half of participating institutions require resumes (22.0%) or headshots (11.0%). These items are in addition to other institution-specific senior project components, such as character biographies, scene-by-scene analyses, and project reviews. Students must demonstrate and communicate mastery of their acting, vocal performance, and dance skills to reviewers, who are most often musical theatre faculty members (78.0%). Few institutions reported using reviewers from other academic departments (22.0%) and no institution indicated that community members serve on review panels for senior projects.

Although the communication or performance element is strong, the critical aspect of critical communication is less evident in participant responses. While students were asked to communicate by their programs, as was reflected in the discussion on integrative contextualization, critical analysis was less present and not clearly linked to communication beyond writing.

Professionalism and Career Preparation

A final theme that emerged from the qualitative survey responses to questions about the identification of learning outcomes and student expectations represents an additional category not included in Gale and Bond's (2007) original framework. This category reflects the skills and abilities that students require in preparation for a career in theatre. Responses indicated that program faculty recognize a sense of responsibility not only to prepare students While limited to one area of the creative arts, this study is a step toward developing an empirical assessment of student learning in the creative and performing arts in higher education.

The described criteria, including professionalism and career development, demonstrate assessment of learning and program outcomes in theatre arts that align with the broad goals of higher education, often reflected in general education requirements. to be knowledgeable and critical performers and participants in their craft, but also to hone students' professional and career enhancing skills. This category was evident through two subthemes: (a) professionalism and skills specific to working as a performer (e.g., auditioning, interviewing, marketing, etc.), and (b) the development of soft skills necessary in professional job and career opportunities. For the purposes of this paper, soft skills is defined as the interpersonal and personal attributes and skills desirable for employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge such as common sense, problem solving, working well with others and flexibility.

The crystalization of assessment criteria of learning within creative arts programs also reflects the proximity of the learning in these disciplines to the core learning outcomes of higher education. In regard to the first subtheme, program faculty were aware that their students needed to be knowledgeable about and prepared to exit higher education and enter a career in theatre arts. A significant part of this preparation includes knowing how to conduct oneself in a professional manner specific to this career field and understanding the expectations of searching for and working in this field. One faculty member described the need to assess for professionalism, "We assess 'professional disposition' as a component of the evaluation process. Musical theatre students are expected to comport themselves at all times in a professional manner consistent with the demands and expectations of the professional field." Other programs describe understanding the audition package and interview, auditioning for roles, business and marketing aspects of the field, limited opportunities available in the field, and current trends and styles within the field as important to student growth and development in their programs.

Second, the development of soft skills necessary for professionalism and career success were also consistently described. One area of emphasis within this sub-theme included the importance of working well with others. Faculty stated that teamwork, working with professionals, "Functioning as a responsible member of the creative team," and "Going out into the work world to be excellent artistic collaborators" were critical elements to student learning.

While program faculty consistently described this area as an important area of learning, they did not explicitly report how or if it is assessed across a program. That said, students are introduced to the professional norms and expectations in theatre through the program's production process and activities (i.e., auditions, rehearsals, and performances). Assessment would, at the least, informally occur through auditions and feedback embedded in the production process, but there is no indication that assessment of professionalism and career preparation is formalized. While these elements could be included in the knowledge building or even creative production categories, the focus on the preparation of professional skills versus skills and abilities required for creative production in theatre arts results in a poor fit. The professionalism and career preparation category reflect separate skills and abilities necessary for college theatre arts majors intending to pursue this work as a career.

Discussion

To claim that assessment is becoming more common and increasingly required is an understatement; rather, it has become widespread and an embedded expectation throughout higher education and accreditation (Astin & antonio, 2012; Kuh et al., 2014; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Maki, 2010). The descriptive data in this study supports this assertion. A majority of the program coordinators of bachelor's programs surveyed in this study both believed in the importance of assessment of student learning for their programs and also had some form of assessment plan in place. This suggests that despite the lack of literature on assessment within the creative and performing arts, faculty and instructors in musical theatre are actively engaging in the assessment of their students, individually and throughout their bachelor's programs.

Gale and Bond's (2007) four-part framework for assessing student learning for the creative arts is indicative of the broader status of literature on assessment in the arts as the majority of research and literature is focused on course-level assessment (Belluigi, 2009, 2013; Fryer, 2010; Mello, 2007; Orr, 2011; Parkes, 2010a, 2010b; Prendergast, 2003), with only two scholarly publications that discuss program or department-level assessment in theatre (Dorn & Orr, 2008; Mello, 2010). While limited to one area of the creative arts, this study is a step toward developing an empirical assessment of student learning in the creative and performing arts in higher education.



Although Gale and Bond's (2007) framework, by the creators' admission, was designed to be used as criteria for course-level assessment, as the sole conceptual frame for understanding how assessment in the creative arts could be conceptualized we sought to examine its applicability and utility in program-level assessment for theatre arts bachelor's degrees. Demonstrated in the findings, all four of Gale and Bond's categories were useful in making sense of the program responses, though why the latter two outcomes and areas of assessment, integrative contextualization and critical communication, were less common is unclear, though one might conjecture that such skills and areas of learning assessment may be more common within advanced degrees. Analysis of the qualitative responses also yielded a fifth category—professionalism and career preparation—extending Gale and Bond's framework. This fifth area concentrates on the ability of students to secure employment and develop a career in theatre arts--an arena to enact "the art of craft" (Gale & Bond, 2007, p. 26). While the fifth category is different from the previous four in that it is not an ability or competency in the art of craft, it was consistently described across the data as an important area of assessment and for competency development. Furthermore, within the context of the postsecondary educational outcomes expected by student and stakeholder alike, the ability to graduate college well-prepared for one's chosen career field with secure employment is paramount (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011). Therefore, this fifth criterion reflects an active area of learning outcomes and assessment that requires representation.

Gale and Bond (2007) state that "assessment of the creative, fine, and performing arts, especially at the undergraduate level, should determine to what extent students have been able to acquire the 'art of craft,' namely, those abilities and capacities required for artistic understanding, production, interpretation, analysis, and, above all, literate engagement...," claiming this goal to be "...as vital to liberal education as more traditional areas of evaluation and it is just as deserving of attention" (p. 126). The described criteria, including professionalism and career development, demonstrate assessment of learning and program outcomes in theatre arts that align with the broad goals of higher education, often reflected in general education requirements. As broad skills that college graduates should emerge with, skills and abilities such as logical and quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, effective communication, understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives, and knowledge building across a range of disciplines are identified as essential to becoming a knowledgeable, literate human (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Though the arts are often pigeonholed into representing the creative aspect of knowing, the application and extension of Gale and Bond's framework demonstrates the learning in the creative arts as critical to the overall development of the college student. The crystalization of assessment criteria of learning within creative arts programs also reflects the proximity of the learning in these disciplines to the core learning outcomes of higher education.

Implications for Practice & Research

Given the high stakes of assessment of student learning and program effectiveness for all academic programs in the current educational climate, there is a lack of literature discussing disciplinary-specific examples and models for assessment of learning in the creative and performing arts despite the practices and prevalent assessment activity evident in this study. While information and best practices for course and program level assessment are widely available and discussed generally, if and how they apply to assessment of learning in the theatre arts, and the broad disciplinary area of the arts, is understudied. The dearth of disciplinary-specific resources on this topic for the arts is problematic if such programs are to meet institutional assessment expectations, but as a field remain new to the assessment discussion. Furthermore, the lack of public information and discussion of assessment in the arts is a detriment to the study of assessment in general. These findings indicate that the assessment of subjective, affective, and expressive learning outcomes is active and well developed. In this case, musical theatre arts provides an opportunity for other disciplines to learn from their example. The creative and performing arts has an opportunity to contribute to the broader field and literature on assessment. This study aimed to develop a broad understanding of how learning is assessed in musical theatre and what the implications are for identifying areas for improvement and demonstrating program effectiveness. Most compelling is the opportunity to explore and develop best practices for assessment of student learning at the course and While information and best practices for course and program level assessment are widely available and discussed generally, if and how they apply to assessment of learning in the theatre arts, and the broad disciplinary area of the arts, is understudied. program levels among musical theatre programs and the potential to inform assessment of learning for other sub-disciplines within the arts as well.

The evidence from this study shows the useful application of Gale and Bond's (2007) framework within musical theatre programs. Although no institution cited their framework specifically, most programs' assessment practices included the four categories outlined: knowledge building, creative production, integrative contextualization, critical communication, and the added career and professionalism preparation category. Suggesting a potential frame for the development of best practices created for the discipline or adapted by more performance based programs.

It appears that knowledge building and creative production are present in a program's curricula and production season. Integrative contextualization and critical communication although less pervasive in the survey results could perhaps connect to understanding of the profession and performance standards. Understanding of the profession appeared to be a value in most programs. Integrating classroom learning and professional standards contextualize a production at the university or professional level. Critical communication often connects to written or oral communication. For performance programs, communication also includes nonverbal communication. This form of critical communication perhaps needs specificity when applied to specific disciplines for the most beneficial results. Because Gale and Bond's (2007) framework is valued, although mostly unknown, by performance programs one could argue that a program could place value on the categories within the framework and those categories can be given hierarchical order.

Most compelling is the opportunity to explore and develop best practices for assessment of student learning at the course and program levels among musical theatre programs and the potential to inform assessment of learning for other sub-disciplines within the arts as well.

History proves that most performance degree programs do not look toward traditional assessment methods, or perhaps are not labeled as such. In fact, most performance degree programs look toward industry standards, which can lead to subjective assessment. One could also argue that some performance programs are not based on industry standards, but the desires of the current faculty. Although Gale and Bond's (2007) framework was used as a tool to guide the survey the methods within the framework were not ranked or prioritized in any way in the survey. Gale and Bond's framework might not be the most clearly defined guide for assessment in performance programs, however it appears to be the best aligned with programmatic values as surveyed and provides a workable framework.

The majority of musical theatre programs required a review of students' progress either on a semester or yearly basis. The review appeared to be the most documented form of assessment of Gale and Bond's four areas as well as the fifth area of professionalism mentioned earlier in this article. Perhaps a more direct application of these five areas during the review would provide an entree into the creation of a measurable assessment tool for faculty and students. The study did not ask for specifics regarding a program's review process and what rubrics if any were used, however upon further research, using the five areas discussed in this paper as a common rubric for musical theatre program reviews might create less subjectivity and clarity of assessment or might be used to structure and organize assessment approaches used throughout programs. Additionally the accreditation agency could also supply examples for professional programs to use in a review process. The standardization of evaluation has never been attempted in the arts. Industry standard has been the norm for performing arts programs. This can lead to variance in outcomes; however consistency is not always beneficial in the arts. Whatever method was developed must include room for a student's unique talents and approach to the work.

A second way that this framework could be useful for programs, particularly in accountability efforts, would be for programs to track or conduct a curriculum mapping of the assessments conducted at the course- and program-levels using the framework's dimensions as an organizing agent. The benefit of this approach would be the (a) ability to use a uniform and consistent way to organize and interpret the data and (b) use of an assessment tool that is aligned with the values and language of the performing arts.

This study, drawing on descriptive quantitative and qualitative data, was exploratory in nature and purpose. Given the scant empirical and scholarly literature on assessment of learning in the creative and performing arts, this study began to fill this gap and build its knowledge base. Further research would benefit from a deeper and more specific exploration of assessment practices in both the classroom and program levels. Creating a fuller picture of



current practices would contribute to the development of applicable and practical descriptions, case studies, and tools that might be used to further develop and support clear assessment plans and practices in the creative arts. Finally, a limitation of this study was its narrow focus on one area, musical theatre, within the creative arts. Continued research would expand knowledge and understanding of assessment practices to other disciplinary areas (e.g., music, dance, visual arts, etc.), extending the utility of such literature and practical tools.

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Appendix A

Assessment in Theatre Arts Survey

Section 1: Program Logistics

- 1. What is the name of your institution?
- 2. What is the name of your academic program?
- 3. What type of degree in Musical Theatre do you offer?
 - a. Bachelor of Arts (BA)
 - b. Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)
 - c. Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)
- 4. Is your program NAST accredited?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure
- 5. Does your program have a formal assessment plan in place?
 - a. Yes, a formal assessment plan is fully in place.
 - b. A formal assessment plan is partially in place.
 - c. No, there is no formal assessment plan in place.
 - d. I am not sure
- 6. What guidelines do you use for your assessment plan, if any?
 - a. NAST
 - b. Institution-specific
 - c. Program-specific
 - d. Other, please specify:
- 7. How important is assessment to your Musical Theatre program?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Not at all important



Section 2: Student Learning

8. Indicate the extent to which the following areas of learning are important for students in your program:

Item Number	Areas of Student Learning	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
a.	Understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette	0	0	0	0	0
b.	Mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application	0	0	0	0	0
с.	Understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the cannon	0	0	0	0	0
d.	Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance	0	0	0	0	0
e.	Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory	0	0	0	0	0
f.	Ability to apply course work to production work	0	0	0	0	0
g.	Ability to work independently in production	0	0	0	0	0
h.	Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance	0	0	0	0	0
. List	here other areas of learning that are important for student	s in you	r progra	m.	-	

10. Do you have specific, stated learning outcomes for your program?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. not sure
- 11. If you answered "yes" to #10, what are the learning outcomes for your program?
- 12. Do you plan to change the learning outcomes for your program?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. not sure
- 13. If you answered "yes" to #12, what changes do you plan to make?
- 14. If you answered "no" or "not sure" to #10, do you plan to write specific learning outcomes within the next 12 months?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
 - c. not sure

Section 3: Performance Requirements

15. Do you have performance requirements for students in your Musical Theatre program?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. not sure

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- 16. If you answered "yes" to #15, for how many on-campus productions must Musical Theatre students audition?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. All
- 17. If you answered "yes" to #15, for how many professional/summer stock productions must Musical Theatre students audition?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. All
- 18. What, if any, consequences do Musical Theatre students face if they do not audition for on-campus or professional/summer stock productions? Mark all that apply.
 - a. There are no consequences
 - b. Negative yearly performance review
 - c. Non-renewal of scholarship(s)
 - d. Other, please specify:

Section 4: Student Expectations

19. Indicate the extent to which each of the following performance areas are important for students to demonstrate mastery as Musical Theatre students:

Item Number	Performance Area	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
a.	Acting	0	0	0	0	0
b.	Vocal Performance	0	0	0	0	0
с.	Dance	0	0	0	0	0



Item Number	Areas of Student Learning	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
a.	Understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette	0	0	0	0	0
b.	Mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application	0	0	\circ	0	0
С.	Understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the cannon	0	0	0	0	0
d.	Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance	0	0	0	0	0
e.	Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory	0	0	0	0	0
f.	Ability to apply course work to production work	0	0	0	0	\circ
g.	Ability to work independently in production	0	0	0	0	0
h.	Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance	0	0	0	0	0

20. Indicate the extent to which the following student expectations are considered when evaluating Musical Theatre students:

- 21. What grade point average (GPA) do you require students to maintain in all major-related courses?
 - a. No GPA requirement
 - b. 2.0-2.5 on a 4.0 scale
 - c. 2.6-3.0 on a 4.0 scale
 - d. 3.1-3.5 on a 4.0 scale
 - e. 3.6 or above on a 4.0 scale
- 22. What grade point average (GPA) do you require students to maintain overall?
 - a. No GPA requirement
 - b. 2.0-2.5 on a 4.0 scale
 - c. 2.6-3.0 on a 4.0 scale
 - d. 3.1-3.5 on a 4.0 scale
 - e. 3.6 or above on a 4.0 scale
- 23. List other student expectations that are considered when evaluating students in your Musical Theatre program.



Section 5: Review Process

- 24. How often do you review the progress of students in your Musical Theatre Program?
 - a. Never
 - b. Once a semester
 - c. Once a year
 - d. Once every two years
 - e. Upon completion of the program
 - c. Department or program chair review
 - d. Community member review
 - e. Other, please specify:
- 25. How are Musical Theatre students reviewed at your institution? Mark all that apply.
 - a. Self-evaluation
 - b. Faculty review
- 26. Please describe the review process.
- 27. How is student success determined in your review process of Musical Theatre students?

Section 6: Senior Project

- 28. Does your program require Musical Theatre students to complete a senior project?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure
- 29. If you answered "yes" to #28, what is the purpose of the senior project? Select all that apply.
 - a. Demonstrate student growth in acting
 - b. Demonstrate student growth in vocal performance
 - c. Demonstrate student growth in dance
 - d. Other, please specify:
- 30. What materials must a student submit for the senior project? Select all that apply.
 - a. Self-evaluation
 - b. Resume
 - c. Headshot
 - d. List of repertory completed while in program
 - e. Other, please specify:
- 31. Who evaluates the senior project? Select all that apply.
 - a. Musical Theatre faculty members
 - b. Faculty members from other departments
 - c. Community partners
 - d. Other, please specify:



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Increased demands for accountability have placed an emphasis on assessment of student learning outcomes. At the post-secondary level, many of the assessments are considered low-stakes, as student performance is linked to few, if any, individual consequences. Given the prevalence of low-stakes assessment of student learning, research that investigates the relationship between student motivation, effort, and performance on low-stakes tests is warranted as these tests are increasingly being used to make judgments about the quality of student learning. This quasi-experimental study was conducted at a public mid-sized university with 87 undergraduate students enrolled in four 100-level general education courses. The researchers examined the effects of motivational prompts on student motivation, effort, and performance on a low-stakes test. Results indicated that motivational condition had a significant effect on students' performance as measured by total mean scores on a low-stakes standardized test. Students in the personal motivational condition outperformed students in the other conditions. However, motivational prompts were not found to affect students' critical thinking subscores or self-reported effort and importance scores.

Abstract

Effects of Motivational Prompts on Motivation, Effort, and Performance on a Low-Stakes **Standardized Test**

ncreased demands for accountability affect education at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels and have placed an emphasis on assessment of student learning outcomes (Wise & DeMars, 2005), often via standardized tests. Notable shifts from changing student demographics to new delivery formats (e.g., distance learning and massive open online courses) are also occurring throughout higher education in the United States. Accountability in higher education has "received unprecedented attention" as a result of these and other shifts, which have called into question the ambiguous accountability and assessment methods of colleges and universities (Liu, 2011, p. 21). In addition, a number of recent reports (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Baer, Cook, & Baldi, 2006) have led policymakers and stakeholders to question student learning in higher education. Institutions generally respond to questions about quality and accountability by providing evidence of graduation rates, licensure pass rates, and graduate and professional school admissions rates; however, these data fail to provide even an overview of what students are actually learning (Millett, Payne, Dwyer, Stickler, & Alexiou, 2008).

In accordance with K-12 accountability efforts, conclusions about the quality of higher education are increasingly being based on learning outcomes assessment data. At CORRESPONDENCE the post-secondary level, many of the assessments used are considered low-stakes. Tests that have minimal or no consequences for the individual test taker are generally considered *Email* non-consequential or low-stakes, while tests that affect grades, admissions, or graduation are khawt002@odu.edu often referred to as consequential or high-stakes (Waskiewicz, 2011).

> Previous research has examined K-12 student performance on national and international standardized assessments (O'Neil, Sugrue, & Baker, 1996), but much of the research in higher education relies on graded versus ungraded instructor developed pre- and post-tests (Boyas, Bryan, & Lee, 2012; Sundre & Kitsantas, 2004). In addition, much of the



research on performance differences between motivated and unmotivated test takers examines motivation through the use of incentives, including monetary compensation and extra credit points (O'Neil et al., 1996; Wise & DeMars, 2005). Without consequences or incentives, it is assumed that students will not perform to the best of their ability on low-stakes tests; thus, the results are not valid indicators of their knowledge and abilities (Wise & DeMars, 2005). The research on university students' motivation and performance on low-stakes tests suggests that students who are motivated and invest effort score higher than those who do not (Cole, Bergin, & Whitaker, 2008). The use of locally developed instruments raises questions about whether the findings linking motivation and student performance can be extended to include the use of standardized tests in low-stakes contexts in the college classroom (Liu, Bridgeman, & Adler, 2012). Few studies (e.g., Liu et al., 2012; Waskiewicz, 2011) have examined university students' motivation using standardized outcomes assessment instruments.

Standardized tests of general academic competencies (i.e., writing and critical thinking) are increasingly being used in higher education as evidence of student learning (Hoyt, 2001; Liu, 2011). According to a report by ETS[®], nearly 1,400 institutions of higher education have used at least one standardized outcomes assessment test (Liu, 2011). The results from these tests are reported with the "implicit assumption that the scores represent the best effort the student[s] could put forth" (Wolf & Smith, 1995, p. 227). Yet despite widespread use of standardized outcomes assessment tests and the low stakes connected to student performance, there is little empirical evidence on the interpretation of these assessment results (Liu, 2011). A primary concern regarding the implementation and interpretation of standardized outcomes measures is the low-stakes nature of the task and the resultant lack of motivation and effort on the part of students to perform to the best of their ability (Hoyt, 2001; Liu, 2011; Wise & DeMars, 2005).

Accountability and Low-Stakes Assessment

Outcomes assessment is now required by all regional higher education accrediting associations (Hoyt, 2001) and by many discipline-specific associations (Boyas et al., 2012; Waskiewicz, 2011). Publicly funded institutions of higher education, which have traditionally relied on enrollment-driven funding (Hoyt, 2001), are increasingly being asked to demonstrate student learning and to justify expenditures of taxpayer dollars based upon the results from low-stakes assessments (Wise & DeMars, 2005; Wise & Kong, 2005). The use of standardized low-stakes assessments is growing despite widespread concern that low-stakes assessments may underestimate student learning (Baumert & Demmrich, 2001). These assessments may have significant implications for institutions, yet many students may fail to see the individual consequences as the tests do not directly affect course grades or their standing at the university. Thus, research that examines the conditions that affect motivation and effort on student performance on low-stakes tests is warranted as these tests are increasingly being used to make judgments about the quality of student learning.

Expectancy-Value Theory

Motivation is a dynamic, multifaceted phenomenon that is situated, contextual, and domain-specific (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Pintrich, 1989). Expectancy-value theory offers an important view of the nature of achievement motivation (Wigfield, 1994). The expectancy-value theory of achievement developed initially by Eccles in 1983 and later refined by Wigfield and Eccles (2000) serves as the framework for this study and much of the research on student motivation and performance on low-stakes tests (e.g., Swerdzewski, Harmes, & Finney, 2009; Waskiewicz, 2011). In expectancy-value models of achievement motivation, *expectancy* is defined as a student's belief that he or she can complete a task successfully, and *value* is defined as a student's perceptions about why he or she should complete a task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Task value beliefs are defined in terms of intrinsic value (i.e., interest), utility, importance, and cost (Wigfield, 1994).

Expectancy-value theorists argue that "student choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their expectations about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity" (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 68). Expectancies and values are assumed to influence performance, effort, persistence, and achievement choices (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In the context of low-stakes assessment, expectancy-value models

These assessments may have significant implications for institutions, yet many students may fail to see the individual consequences as the tests do not directly affect course grades or their standing at the university. are expanded to include not only a student's perception of success and value (or importance), but also the perceived level of effort he or she must expend and the intrinsic value or enjoyment gained from completing the task (Wise & DeMars, 2005).

generic motivational (Cole et al., 2008). prompts. Students in both of the personalized conditions (personal and combined) reported higher importance and effort scores than students in the other conditions.

According to Wolf, Smith, and Birnbaum (1995), the expectancy component of the It was hypothesized expectancy value model can be extended in testing situations to include students' perceptions that personalized of the mental effort necessary to complete the task. Thus, test-taking motivation, which is motivational prompts linked to a specific task (i.e., motivation to perform well on a given test), can be considered would elicit different a form of achievement motivation (Eklöf, 2010). Studies on test-taking motivation have levels of motivation than consistently found motivation to be correlated with test performance and test consequence

Motivational Interventions

Nevo (1995) contended that the manipulation of variables related to nonpsychometric properties of the test, such as the testing conditions, the face validity of the test, the clarity of test instructions, and the behavior of proctors, can result in improvement of scores among examinees. Much of the research on performance differences between motivated and unmotivated examinees attempts to alter motivation through the use of incentives, specifically monetary compensation and graded versus ungraded assignments (Boyas et al., 2012; O'Neil et al., 1996; Wise & DeMars, 2005). Waskiewicz (2011) examined pharmacy students' test taking motivation on a low-stakes standardized test by randomly assigning students to two groups and providing them with letters from the dean of the school of pharmacy. The letters of the students in the experimental group were personalized and highlighted the need for students to put forth their best effort as the results would help improve curriculum. In contrast, the letters of the students in the control group were not personalized and briefly described how the test would identify limitations in students' knowledge. The experimental group reported putting forth more effort than the control group (Waskiewicz, 2011). Without consequences or incentives, it is assumed that students will not perform to the best of their ability on low-stakes tests and therefore, the results are not valid indicators of their knowledge and abilities (Wise & DeMars, 2005).

In the present study, we used a quasi-experimental design to investigate whether motivational prompts affected student motivation and effort on a standardized low-stakes test. One proctor administered the test ETS® Proficiency Profile (ETS® PP) and the Student Opinion Scale (SOS) in four 100-level general education courses. Additionally, this research addressed whether students' performance was affected by receiving motivational prompts.

Method

Participants

The participants were 87 undergraduate students enrolled in four 100-level general education courses. An email, detailing the study's purpose, was sent to faculty teaching 100and 200-level general education courses. Four faculty members agreed to have the test and survey administered in their 100-level general education courses. The courses sampled were BIO 100: Introduction to Biological Science, IUL 100: Introduction to University Life, PED 100: Fundamentals of Fitness for Life, and SCI 101: Introduction to Physical Science. The four courses sampled are all 100-level courses included in tiers one and two of the university's three-tiered general education curriculum. The sample consisted of 34 male students (39.1%) and 53 female students (60.9%). Nearly 84% of students were lower-division students (freshmen and sophomores). There was no significant difference in students' ability as measured by SAT critical reading and mathematics scores.

Instruments

The participants completed both the abbreviated ETS[®] Proficiency Profile (ETS[®] PP) and the Student Opinion Scale (SOS) between May 2013 and August 2013. The four courses were assigned to one of four conditions: (a) a control condition, (b) a university condition, (c) a personal condition, and (d) a combined university/personal condition. Students were administered the abbreviated version of the ETS® PP and completed the SOS immediately after.

The abbreviated paper-pencil form of the ETS[®] PP assesses four core area skills (critical thinking, reading, writing, and mathematics) in the context of the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences (Young, 2007). The ETS[®] PP is a 36-item, 40-minute timed multiple-choice test. The critical thinking subscore was used as critical thinking questions generally require more cognitive effort than other items. The internal consistency reliability for the ETS[®] PP ranges from .80 to .89 (Liu, 2008). ETS[®] PP total scores range from 400 to 500, while subscores range from 100 to 130.

The SOS is a 10-item, Likert-type instrument that measures examinee motivation (Sundre, 2007). The SOS consists of two subscales, importance and effort, and the items are measured on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Internal reliability for use in general education programs was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and consistent scores were obtained for the importance subscale, .82, and the effort subscale, .86. Possible scores for both the importance and effort subscales range from 5 to 25 (Sundre, 2007).

Procedures

This study was modeled after a study conducted by Liu et al. (2012), which used the online abbreviated version of the ETS[®] PP and the SOS. However, unlike Liu et al., the test and survey were administered in intact classrooms and included an additional condition, referred to as the combined university/personal condition. Students were told that their test performance would not be linked to their course grade or affect their standing at the university, but they were asked to include their university student identification number on the ETS[®] PP and the SOS. The four classrooms were assigned to one of four conditions, and students received motivational prompts verbally from the proctor and in writing. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether students' reported effort and importance on the SOS as well as students' performance on the ETS[®] PP differed based on the receipt of motivational prompts. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was also conducted to help control for the effect of prior student ability on test performance. Since this study randomly assigned intact groups to one of the four conditions, the use of ANCOVA is appropriate as it reduces bias associated with initial chance differences between the groups (Huitema, 2007).

Results

The first research question addressed was, "Is there a difference in performance for students who received test instructions with motivational prompts compared to students who did not receive test instructions with motivational prompts?" As indicated in Table 1, students in the personal condition received higher total mean scores and higher critical thinking subscores on the ETS[®] PP than students in the other conditions. The total mean score for all students tested nationally is 441.6, and the critical thinking subscore is 111.2. Therefore, while the mean score is higher for students in the personal condition, nationally, these scores place students in the 44th percentile and the 41st percentile, respectively.

 Table 1

 Total Mean Score and Mean Critical Thinking Subscore by Condition

Total mean beore and mean Critical Ininking Subscore by Condition							
Condition	п	Total M (SD)	Critical Thinking M (SD)				
Control	20	429.30 (14.254)	107.50 (3.763)				
University	23	426.04 (13.907)	106.70 (5.040)				
Personal	20	437.40 (14.412)	109.40 (5.529)				
Combined	24	425.88 (13.829)	107.25 (5.542)				

An ANOVA was conducted to investigate the effect of the motivational conditions on test performance. It was hypothesized that the motivation of students who received personalized motivational prompts would be different from the motivation of students who did not receive personalized motivational prompts. Results from the one-way ANOVA indicated that the motivational prompts, and as a consequence, condition had a significant effect on the total mean ETS[®] PP score, F(3, 83) = 3.035, p < .05, $\eta^2 = .099$. The mean difference between the personal condition and the combined condition was 11.42.

This finding suggests that altering instructions to include personalized motivational prompts may positively impact students' performance on standardized tests.

ANOVA Table for Total Mean Score							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.		
Between Groups	1805.352	3	601.784	3.035	.034		
Within Groups	16459.982	83	198.313				
Total	18265.333	86					

To determine if there were differences in student ability between the four groups, an ANCOVA was conducted. In the absence of a pre-test, SAT critical reading and math scores were used to determine if students' performance was due to ability. SAT scores were not available for the entire sample; however, the results of 69 students with SAT scores, ETS[®] PP scores, and SOS scores suggest that students' prior ability was unrelated to student performance on the ETS[®] PP, F(3,61) = .364, p > .05, $R^2 = .335$.

The results failed to support the main effect of condition on students' critical thinking subscores, F(3, 83) = 1.131, p > .05, $\eta^2 = .039$. While students in the personal condition outperformed students in the other three conditions, students in the combined condition received the lowest total mean score and the second lowest critical thinking subscore.

To determine if there were differences in student ability between the four groups, an ANCOVA was conducted. SAT critical reading and math scores were used to determine if students' critical thinking subscores were due to ability. SAT scores were not available for the entire sample; however, the results of 69 students with SAT scores and ETS[®] PP scores suggest that students' prior ability was unrelated to students' critical thinking performance on the ETS[®] PP, F(3,61) = .323, p > .05, $R^2 = .223$.

The second research question addressed was "Is there a difference in motivation for students who received test instructions with motivational prompts compared to students who did not receive test instructions with motivational prompts?" Descriptive statistics of students' motivation by condition as measured by the importance and effort scales of the SOS are presented in Table 3.

SOS Importance and Effort Mean Scores by Condition							
Condition	п	Importance M (SD)	Effort M (SD)				
Control	20	15.90 (2.972)	15.80 (4.112)				
University	23	15.96 (3.561)	15.00 (2.876)				
Personal	20	17.25 (4.141)	17.30 (2.638)				
Combined	24	16.08 (3.309)	15.88 (3.069)				

 Table 3

 SOS Importance and Effort Mean Scores by Condition

Average raw SOS importance and effort scores for first-year students in a low-stakes general education assessment context were 14.94 and 17.62, respectively (Sundre, 2007). In this study students in the personal condition reported higher mean importance and effort scores; however, when compared to the normed scores of freshmen, their scores place them in the 70th and the 42^{nd} percentile.

It was hypothesized that personalized motivational prompts would elicit different levels of motivation than generic motivational prompts. Students in both of the personalized conditions (personal and combined) reported higher importance and effort scores than students in the other conditions. However, while students in the personal condition indicated higher mean importance scores than students in the other conditions, the results from the one-way ANOVA indicated that motivational condition had no significant effect on students' importance scores, F(3, 83) = .676, p > .05, $\eta^2 = .023$. Students in the personal condition also indicated higher mean effort scores than students in the other conditions; however, the difference did not reach statistical significance, F(3, 83) = 1.877, p > .05, $\eta^2 = .064$.

To determine if students' motivation was related to differences in student ability, an ANCOVA was conducted. SAT scores were not available for the entire sample; however, the results of 69 students with SAT scores, ETS[®] PP scores, and SOS scores suggest that students' prior ability was unrelated to effort, F(3,61) = .810, p > .05, $R^2 = .167$, or importance, F(3,61) = .810, p > .05, $R^2 = .167$, or importance, F(3,61) = .810, P =

For institutions and assessment professionals, this study provides evidence that motivational prompts may impact student performance on low-stakes tests, as students in the personal condition received significantly higher mean ETS© PP scores than students in the other conditions. $.107, p > .05, R^2 = .045$. Thus, the relationship between motivation and performance was not due to students' prior ability.

Discussion

The university has used the ETS[®] PP since 2009 to assess its general education learning outcomes. General education course instructors have been encouraged to use the results to identify student strengths and weaknesses and to evaluate and inform teaching and learning. However, the low-stakes nature of the test had raised questions regarding the validity of the test results, and concomitantly the soundness of altering instruction or curriculum based on such results.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the use of motivational prompts to motivate and communicate to students the usefulness of low-stakes assessment. The varying instructions were designed to manipulate student motivation by appeals to their "academic citizenship" (i.e., the values and behaviors expected of university students; Macfarlane, 2007). The expectation was that personalized motivational prompts would impact students' motivation to perform well on the ETS® PP despite the test's low-stakes nature. Previous research (Baumert & Demmrich, 2001; Liu et al., 2012; O'Neil et al., 1995; Waskiewicz, 2011) suggests that altering test instructions in low-stakes testing contexts might appeal to students' varying goal orientations. In addition, studies that examine the use of practical strategies to motivate students are needed as they have the potential to allow researchers to better isolate the variables that affect motivation and to develop testing models that best demonstrate student learning in low-stakes contexts.

This study, while modeled after Liu et al. (2012), included notable differences that may explain the mixed results. Unlike participants in the Liu et al. study, students in this study did not receive a monetary incentive to participate, and the test was embedded in the course. As a result, while the instructors volunteered to have the test embedded in the course, students did not self-select to participate. Although the test was not connected to the course grade, students were obligated to participate.

Monetary incentives, particularly performance contingent financial rewards, are often used in studies on student motivation and low-stakes tests (Baumert & Demmrich, 2001; O'Neil et al., 1995). Liu et al. (2012) administered the test and survey to over 750 students at three institutions, and students received \$50 for their participation. However, interventions that include changes to motivating instructions are often considered more desirable as they are easier to implement (Liu et al., 2012; O'Neil et al., 1995). Such interventions also advance notions about learning that are not clouded by monetary incentives.

In addition, a fourth condition, which included a combined personal and institutional prompt, was added to this study in an attempt to parse out any differences among conditions. Significant differences in performance were found by Liu et al. (2012) for students in the two treatment conditions (i.e., institutional and personal) when compared to the control condition; however, there were no statistically significant performance differences between the two treatment conditions. Waskiewicz (2011) found that students who received a personalized incentive in the form of individualized letters reported putting forth more effort on a low-stakes test than students in the control group who received generic letters. In this study, motivational condition had a significant impact on the total mean ETS® PP scores. Similar to Liu et al. and Waskiewicz, students in the personal condition performed significantly better than those in the other groups. This finding suggests that altering instructions to include personalized motivational prompts may positively impact students' performance on standardized tests.

Limitations

One potential limitation of this study is the sample. This study was limited to students enrolled in four 100-level general education courses at one institution. Although the courses were randomly assigned group membership, additional implementation and testing of the treatment in other courses and at other universities is needed before the results can be generalized. Moreover, the small sample size prevents firm conclusions from being drawn. Nevertheless, the study's design may be easily replicated. The extent to which test scores can be trusted to reflect students' actual abilities, the more valid inferences about student learning are and the more useful the evidence derived from these tests becomes.



The use of personalized motivational prompts provides low-stakes testing programs with a practical, sustainable, and low-cost strategy to enhance student performance. An additional limitation may have been the homogeneity of the treatment conditions. An attempt to parse out differences in the treatments by adding a combined condition may have led to a lack of distinctiveness in the motivational prompts. Therefore, it is likely that the combined condition was too similar in nature to the other conditions to have a significant effect on student performance or motivation. In addition, it is difficult to determine if students attended to the motivational prompts. The prompt in the combined condition was longer than the other prompts, which may have led to student fatigue. To ascertain if students ingested the prompt, it might be necessary to have students sign the motivational prompt, indicating that they have read it. It might also be necessary to survey students after the administration of the survey to determine if they can identify the instructional prompt they received.

Finally, the SOS is a self-report measure of motivation; thus, its usefulness depends on the sincerity of students' responses. Students may have indicated that they expended high or low effort or that the test was of high or low importance when the opposite was true. Eklöf (2010) maintains that students who lack motivation to perform on an assessment may also lack motivation to accurately answer questions regarding their motivation. Just as multiple measures should be used to measure students' learning outcomes, multiple measures should also be used to measure motivation (Eklöf, 2010; Wise & Kong, 2005).

Implications

While test consequence and various incentives have been used as proxies for student motivation, the most appropriate source of information about a student's motivation is the student, yet minimal research has been conducted on student motivation and their perceptions of low-stakes tests (Nevo, 1995). Research on instruments that examine test-taker motivation on low-stakes tests is growing, but more is needed to fill the existing gap in the literature regarding examinee reactions to tests and the test conditions that affect performance and motivation.

For institutions and assessment professionals, this study provides evidence that motivational prompts may impact student performance on low-stakes tests, as students in the personal condition received significantly higher mean ETS^{\oplus} PP scores than students in the other conditions. This university uses low-stakes tests to measure student learning across the general education program and to make corresponding improvements in curriculum and instruction. Low student motivation prompts questions about whether the data collected are valid measures of student achievement (Abdelfattah, 2010). The extent to which test scores can be trusted to reflect students' actual abilities, the more valid inferences about student learning are and the more useful the evidence derived from these tests becomes.

The students in this study reported above average importance scores, yet their test performance was well below the mean. This suggests a paradox that requires additional investigation as it relates to similar populations of students. This inconsistency is relevant as it relates to expectancy-value theory in that previous research suggests that students' expectancy and efficacy perceptions are influenced by the difficulty level of the task and students' familiarity with the material (Pintrich, 1989). If some students lack clarity about their ability, as Aronson and Inzlicht (2004) suggest, then the cognitive-motivational component of expectancy-value theory should be explored in greater detail to determine the link between cognitive strategies and motivational components.

Furthermore, these results suggest that assessment does not have to be high-stakes to motivate students to perform. The use of personalized motivational prompts provides lowstakes testing programs with a practical, sustainable, and low-cost strategy to enhance student performance. In addition, motivating students to perform to the best of their ability on lowstakes tests may acculturate students to assessment for learning instead of assessment for grades. Future research could extend this line of inquiry by using students' names to enhance motivation as well as accountability.



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······ RESEARCH & PRACTICE IN ASSESSMENT

Abstract

Researchers evaluated the effects of Educationally Purposeful Activities (EPAs) on transfer and nontransfer students' cumulative GPAs. Hierarchical, linear, and multiple regression models yielded seven statistically significant educationally purposeful items that influenced undergraduate student GPAs. Statistically significant positive EPAs for transfer students were: (a) receiving prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on academic performance, (b) tutoring or teaching other students (paid or voluntary), (c) asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions, and (d) working harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations. A negative statistically significant activity of transfer students was having serious conversations with students of a race different from their own. Overall, the effects of EPAs on undergraduate GPAs are somewhat more robust for transfer students. A recommendation to incorporate specific EPAs in transfer students' curriculum followed.



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Transfer Student Success: Educationally Purposeful Activities Predictive of Undergraduate GPA

Ludents attending more than one postsecondary institute in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree have been on the rise since the end of the 20th century (NCES, 2005, 2007). During the 21st century almost 60% of students attended multiple institutes, transferred, and/or co-enrolled prior to graduating. These mobility patterns referred to as *student swirling* are today more the norm than the exception in higher education (Borden, 2004; Marling, 2013; Wang, 2009). Several reasons are responsible for the change. First, affordable tuition is attracting students to take core courses at community colleges before transferring to 4-year institutions (Ashmore, 2011; Marling, 2013). Second, students are finding community colleges a convenient buffer between high school and a best-fit institution. Third, states are encouraging enrollment in community colleges to help limit 4-year public institutional expenditures (Bautsch, 2013; Marling, 2013).

President Obama's challenge that every American complete at least one year of college education is contributing to the transfer boom, as are other initiatives (Lumina Foundation, 2009; U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012; White House, 2014). Increasing the overall number of undergraduate degree completions to 60% by 2015 is a national goal of the current administration (Ebersole, 2010). Consequently, higher enrollments of nontraditional (i.e., over age 25), low-income, minority students have resulted in 67% of community college students desiring a transfer to 4-year institutions for their baccalaureate degrees (Young & Litzer, 2013).

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Traditional 2-year community college transfers to 4-year institutions are not the only transfers occurring (Ashmore, 2011; Marling, 2013). Student mobility patterns include reverse transfers, double dipping, and stepping out or stopping out (de los Santos & Wright, 1990). Reverse transfers are transfers from 4-year institutions to 2-year institutions, double dipping is enrollment in more than one institution, and stepping/stopping out refers to hiatuses taken by students of higher education, either temporary or permanent. Changes in



demographics and transfer mobility patterns have higher education administrators grappling to accommodate a new population of students (de los Santos, Jr. & Sutton, 2012). Subsequently, transfer student success is an increasingly worthwhile enterprise and variables that can improve transfer student success are desirable to administrators (Wang, 2009). However, some researchers (Fauria & Slate, 2014; NCES, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter, 2011) revealed a negative association between transfer persistence and completion.

The numbers of transfer students to institutions of higher education keeps proliferating. However, transfer student persistence and completion rates towards baccalaureate degree obtainment continue to be lower than nontransfer student persistence and completion rates. Although transfer student completion rates are difficult to monitor, a trend of noncompletion is apparent. Transfer students are less apt to attain their baccalaureate degree in a given 6-year period than nontransfer students (NCES, 2005). Fauria and Slate (2014) determined that of 38 institutions in Texas, across 11 years, transfer students were four times less likely to persist after one year than nontransfer students. Furthermore, the majority of students who start at community colleges intending to transfer to 4-year institutions never do (Handel & Williams, 2012). Community colleges enroll over 40% of the United States' undergraduates (Cochrane & Shireman, 2008; College Board, 2014), but only 11% of those students starting at community colleges actually obtain baccalaureate status (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Swirling behaviors by students who transfer to multiple institutions of higher education can negatively influence degree completion (Adelman, 2006). Concurrent enrollment is part of the changing mobility patterns and has a statistically significant negative effect on persistence (Johnson & Muse, 2012). Transfer student adjustment, known in the literature as transfer shock, was widely studied as it relates to lowered GPAs (Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965; Laanan, 2001). Adelman (2006), in a national longitudinal study, concluded that students earning grades in the top 40% of their class have advanced academic momentum that ultimately leads to degree completion. The Transfer Student Questionnaire (Laanan, 2004, 2007) was an instrument developed to measure transfer adjustment. In particular, student involvement or engagement, integration, satisfaction, and effort are known to impact student academic success positively for transfer and nontransfer students alike (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1980; Pace, 1990; Tinto, 1975).

Student engagement is considered important for college success. Chickering and Gamson (1987) described seven principles of good practice for academic success in college. Several of these principles included (a) prompt feedback from instructors, (b) high expectations, and (c) a respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. In essence, the higher the number of engagement activities, the more students learn and the higher the probability of students reaching completion (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is an 84-item self-report survey (NSSE, 2014b) divided into five benchmarks as follows: (a) Level of Academic Challenge (LAC), (b) Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL), (c) Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI), (d) Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE), and (e) Supportive Campus Environment (SCE; Kuh, 2003). The NSSE is a popular instrument for measuring educational experiences valuable for successful student outcomes (NSSE, 2014b). For over a decade, undergraduate freshman and senior students have been administered the NSSE (NSSE, 2014a). Many institutions rely on the NSSE to provide valuable information that can lead the institution to guide student success (Doherty, 2007). Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, and Gonyea (2006) extracted 19 NSSE items for an overall measure of educationally purposeful engagement. The benefit of a composite score was that it might easily assess a student's potential for completion. These 19 items or Educationally Purposeful Activities (EPAs) were the best single predictor of learning (Atkins, 1993; Pace, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). EPAs described by the NSSE might be predictive of higher GPAs and greater degree completions.

Statement of the Problem

The numbers of transfer students to institutions of higher education keeps proliferating. However, transfer student persistence and completion rates towards baccalaureate degree obtainment continue to be lower than nontransfer student persistence and completion rates. Student engagement can improve GPAs and lead to greater completion rates. Yet, transfer students' EPAs leading to academic success have not been explored as systematically as nontransfer students' EPAs. Furthermore, existing studies conflict with one another as to whether EPAs are relevant to undergraduate GPAs of transfer students. Therefore, a gap exists in the literature identifying EPAs of transfer students that could lead to academic success. Hence, this study probed EPAs that might improve transfer students' probability of completion.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale for this study was twofold: (a) to broaden the base of knowledge for baccalaureate completion of transfer students and advance institutional as well as national objectives of undergraduates, and (b) to determine EPAs of transfer students that positively influence student GPAs towards completion. This article will seek to understand educational purposeful activities of transfer students that may or may not be distinct from traditional students and thereby close a gap in the literature regarding specific EPAs of transfer students as they relate to high cumulative GPA.

Definition of Terms

Engagement is defined as "the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in these activities" (Kuh, 2003, p. 25). Student swirling refers to patterns of student mobility different from the traditional 2-year transfers from community colleges to 4-year institutions or from a onetime transfer from a 4-year institution to another 4-year institution (de los Santos & Wright, 1990). Transfer student refers to any undergraduate student who leaves their initial institution of higher learning for another institution of learning (Cuseo, 1998). Nontransfer student refers to any undergraduate student who remains at the same institution of higher education from first year until degree completion.

Literature Review

The authors reviewed articles related to transfer student success and transfer student engagement variables. Bach et al. (2000) determined differences in transfer rates of community college students having Articulation Agreement of Transfers (AAOT) from those that did not. Transfers to 4-year institutions increased substantially with AAOTs.

Lester, Leonard, and Mathias (2013) explored the relationship between student engagement in college activities and persistence. Transfer students viewed academic engagement, different from social engagement, as activities that involved meaningful connections with faculty, academic content, and learning challenges. The probability of student persistence increased slightly with social engagement activities; however, this relationship was not linear. Furthermore, a negative relationship between increased academic engagement and persistence was determined; this contradicts the value of EPAs in degree completion.

By contrast, Pike, Kuh, and McCormick (2010) examined learning community involvement and EPAs. A positive relationship between student engagement and learning communities was determined using the NSSE data. Involvement in a learning community did not directly impact student learning but it did increase engagement, which positively influenced academic outcomes.

A review of senior transfer data by Kuh (2003) determined that transfer students were less engaged on four out of the five NSSE benchmarks. The benchmarks in ascending order from least engaged to most engaged were (a) enriching educational experiences, (b) student-faculty interaction, (c) supportive campus environment, and (d) active and collaborative learning. Enriching educational experiences had the largest effect size differentiating transfer students from nontransfer students. Kuh offered two explanations as to why transfer students' engagement lagged behind nontransfers. Transfer students are older "(63 percent are at least 24, compared to 13 percent of nontransfer students) and commuters; thus they are more likely to spend more hours a week working and caring for dependents" (Kuh, 2003, pp. 29-30).

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is similar to the NSSE and is usually administered to returning students at community colleges (CCSSE, 2015). The CCSSE (2005) determined that high-risk students who were academically underprepared, first-generation, nontraditional learners, and students of color tended to be more engaged than traditional students, though they were less likely to persist. In other words, high-risk students engaged in numerous EPAs (e.g., coming prepared to class, interacting with faculty outside of class and using campus services) were not graduating. An executive summary of the report

The purpose of this study was to compare the influences of educationally purposeful activities on cumulative undergraduate GPA between transfer and nontransfer student populations.



offered that perhaps even the most engaging of educational experiences might not be enough to ward off financial, academic, work related, or personal challenges of such students.

Astin (1993) determined that the single most influencing variable to academic achievement was involvement with other students. Student interactions with one another had strong positive effects on leadership capability, academics, self-reported growth in solving problems, and in critical thinking skills. Faculty interactions were second to student interactions. No distinction of engagement activities from transfer versus nontransfer students was attempted.

Steele and Fullagar (2009) studied a psychological construct of engagement referred to as *flow* in a college setting. Flow is an optimum balance between doing worthwhile tasks and a state of total absorption. A positive relationship between academic work and flow supports student engagement as necessary for success.

Focus groups revealed successful transfer transition experiences of 2-year community college goers to 4-year state institutions in the state of Texas (Ellis, 2013). Academically prepared, motivated, persistent, and successful students were also highly engaged. Faculty-student interactions were encouraged by both community colleges and universities. However, students claimed faculty interactions were more difficult in the university setting (Ellis, 2013).

Contrary to Ellis (2013), Miller (2013) determined a lack of engagement from many community college transfer students in the state of Texas created barriers to completion. The nontraditional group of transfer students studied, worked, and cared for family members, leaving little time for interactions outside the classroom. In addition, transfer students claimed bonding that typically occurs in the first year was absent due to transferring, and that social cliques were already established. The assumption is that without an attachment to the institution many transfer students slip through the cracks and do not complete.

Wang (2009) claimed that few studies had evaluated community college transfer students and factors predictive of their baccalaureate completion. Gender, socioeconomic status, high school curriculum, college GPA, successful math remediation, educational expectation prior to entering college, and college involvement were all variables influencing positive outcomes. Wang considered how exploring involvement on college transfer student outcomes might be beneficial especially since engagement has had a positive influence on traditional students.

Finally, Webber, Laird, and BrckaLarenz (2013) studied the effects of student-faculty involvement in undergraduate research. Student responses analyzed from over 450 institutions administering the NSSE revealed that student and faculty engagement in research activities was important for student success (Webber et al., 2013). However, differences between transfer and nontransfer students were not explored in the study.

Research Question(s)

The following questions guided this study's analysis: (a) What are the influences of educationally purposeful activities on transfer students' cumulative undergraduate GPA?, and (b) What are the influences of educationally purposeful activities on nontransfer students' cumulative undergraduate GPAs? The purpose of this study was to compare the influences of educationally purposeful activities on cumulative undergraduate GPA between transfer and nontransfer students populations. Delineation of educationally purposeful activities that could improve transfer students probability of completion was a major objective.

Method

Instrumentation and Data Source

The NSSE has been a significant source of data and evidence for higher education institutions since its inception in 1999 (Kuh, 2001). Administration of the NSSE is hosted each year by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and is given to both American and Canadian freshmen and senior undergraduates. The NSSE is an 84-item questionnaire "specifically designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experience" (Kuh, 2001, p.

Transfer students reported statistically significant mean differences with means that were higher than their nontransfer counterparts for four of these EPA variables.



2). Paper and web versions of the survey are available; however, participants in the present study completed the web version 2011 survey.

A multitude of studies call upon NSSE data, and several are of interest in the present study. At least three data reduction models are widely recognized as effective and reliable means of gaining a broad sense of NSSE data: (a) the Indiana University- Bloomington's NSSE Benchmark Scores (Kuh, 2001); (b) Pike's (2006) Scalets; and (c) Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce et al.'s (2006) Educationally Purposeful Activities. The existence of strong positive correlations between NSSE Benchmark Scores and GPAs has been well documented (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Gordon, Ludlum, & Hoey, 2008; Kuh, 2001). Although a positive relation between NSSE items and GPA has been established, a growing body of research has addressed the limitations of using NSSE data as a predictor of collegiate outcomes or GPA (Ewell, 2002; Fuller, Wilson & Tobin, 2011; Gordon et al., 2008; Olivas, 2011; Porter, 2011). In spite of researchers being divided on the worth of NSSE as a predictive instrument, NSSE continues to enjoy strong participation, surveying nearly 484,919 students from 716 institutions in 2014 (NSSE, 2014a).

The NSSE data for this project were collected from freshmen and senior students at a large public American institution of higher education in Texas during the 2010-2011 academic year. Like many institutions, the university included undergraduate GPA as one indicator of student success among many on which it focuses. Given the importance of undergraduate GPA in regards to student learning, administrative procedures, and student personal goals, the use of GPA as a criterion variable in the present analysis is warranted. Moreover, this study explores the influence of student input characteristics as critical indicators of student abilities. By including SAT-Math and SAT-Verbal test scores as indicators of students' precollege abilities in the model, this study more directly addressed the influences of student engagement on individual students by allowing the researchers to control for the effects of student intellect prior to college. By comparing transfer student to nontransfer student GPAs, the researchers can gain a sense of the influences of EPAs on this important outcome variable (i.e., cumulative GPA).

Procedure

The current study employed repeated hierarchical regression to explore the relationship between students' NSSE variables for EPAs and cumulative undergraduate GPA. NSSE data were obtained from the study institution's institutional research staff that cleaned the data to include only those students who completed every question on the survey. For any student who had graduated by the time this study was conducted, their final undergraduate, cumulative GPA was used (i.e., Fall 2013). Roughly half of the students (365) had graduated by the point this study was initiated. Fifty-four percent of participants were senior students, while the remaining students were in the first year of college. Nineteen of the 377 freshmen students were no longer enrolled at the study institution college without earning a degree since the survey's completion. Cumulative undergraduate GPA at the point of the study's initiation was included.

Nineteen NSSE variables comprising the EPA scales were included in the regression models. Descriptive statistics for all variables and both populations are reported in Table 1. To verify that the assumptions for the hierarchical regression analyses were met, all causal variables were plotted against their respective predictor variables to determine linearity and Q-Q plots to check for normality of data (Lomax, 2001). All plots demonstrated the possibility of linear relationships and normal distributions for both causal and predictor variables suggesting the regression analyses could proceed. Next, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted on all causal, control, and dependent variables to determine mean differences between the two groups (see Table 1). Significance levels of $p \le 0.05$ were used throughout these analyses.

Following the guidelines offered by Lomax (2001), we conducted hierarchical linear regression to explore the relationship between sets of two continuous variables. These analyses were conducted first for students who began their undergraduate career at the study institution (i.e., nontransfer students) and then were repeated for students who did not begin their undergraduate career at the study institution (i.e., transfer students). Comparing the

In other words, while EPAs have some slight influences on undergraduate GPA, they may be more important for transfer students as the net effect is more influential on transfer student GPAs than nontransfer student GPAs.



resulting statistics for both groups of students highlights areas of difference and similarity and allows recommendations regarding student experiences to emerge.

Institutions may find it effective to design tutoring or peer-leadership programs that pair experienced students with less experienced students in specific academic areas. For both populations a hierarchical linear regression model was developed that included in its first block the students' SAT-Math and SAT-Verbal test scores. This allowed the researchers to control for the variance explained by the influence of precollege indicators on student GPA, the dependent variable under exploration in this study. Subsequent blocks entered a total of 19 EPA variables into the model, similar to the Kuh's (2001) treatment of these variables in prior studies. Variables were entered into specific blocks based upon confirmatory factor analysis with varimax rotation. This factor analysis confirmed that a factor structure similar to Kuh (2001) was noted and could be used for this study.

Results

Concerning mean differences between transfer (n = 346) and non-transfer students (n = 377), transfer students did not exhibit a statistically significant mean difference in the dependent variable, cumulative undergraduate GPA (see Table 1). However, the means for transfer students' SAT-Math and SAT-Verbal test scores were lower than for nontransfer students (see Table 1), a statistically significant difference that may have been a result of the participants' attendance at other institutions prior to attendance at the study institution. Six of the 19 EPAs exhibited statistically positive mean differences between transfer and nontransfer students (see Table 1). Transfer students reported statistically significant mean differences with means that were higher than their nontransfer counterparts for four of these EPA variables. This suggests that in many ways transfer students were more engaged than their nontransfer counterparts but that nontransfer students may possess higher measures of academic abilities (SAT-Math and SAT-Verbal scores).

Nontransfer Student Results

When the control variables (SAT-Math and SAT-Verbal), the predictor variables (EPAs), and dependent variables (GPA) were entered into a hierarchical linear regression model for nontransfer students, tutoring other students [$\beta = 0.156$, t(367) = 2.69, p = 0.008], participating in a community based project as a part of a course [$\beta = -0.160$, t(367) = -2.58, p = 0.010], students' perception of working harder than they thought they could to exceed an instructor's expectations [$\beta = 0.138$, t(367) = 2.12, p = 0.035], and making a class presentation [$\beta = 0.199$, t(367) = 3.12, p = 0.002] were retained to the final block of the model as statistically significant predictors of undergraduate cumulative GPA. The full model for nontransfer students explained a respectable portion of the variance for nontransfer students, $R^2 = 0.263$, F(1, 367) = 4.808, $p \le 0.05$. The control variables, SAT-Math and SAT-Verbal, explained 12.2% of the variance, leaving a modest 14.1% of the variance to be explained by the predictor variables. Several other variables (i.e., asking questions in class, coming to class unprepared), originally entered into their respective blocks were initially significant predictors, but were not retained as significant predictors of the dependent variable in later blocks.

Transfer Student Results

Significant predictors of transfer student undergraduate cumulative GPA included receiving prompt written or oral feedback from a faculty member on performance [β = -0.255, t(326) = -2.22, p = 0.029], tutoring other students [$\beta = 0.238$, t(326) = 3.80, p = 0.001], asking questions in class [$\beta = 0.166$, t(326) = 2.68, p = 0.008], perceptions of working harder than they thought they could to exceed an instructor's expectations [$\beta = 0.288$, t(326) = 2.375, p = 0.020], and having serious conversations with students of a different race [$\beta = -0.126$, t(326) = -5.57, p = 0.047]. Compared to nontransfer students, more variance was explained in the model predicting transfer student GPAs [$R^2 = 0.299$, F(1, 326) = 1.170, $p \le 0.05$], which explained 23.4% of the variance. Control variables only accounted for 6.5% of the variance for transfer students, allowing the independent variables of interest to explain a modest 16.9% of the variance.

Establishing positive, constructive dialogue between faculty, staff, and students to help students celebrate their successes and their ability to exceed the expectations of college may prove useful. Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Educationally Purposeful Activity for Transfer and Nontransfer Students

	Tran	sfer	Nontra	insfer	Sig.
Educationally purposeful activity ^a	М	σ	M	σ	<i>p</i> ≤ 0.05
a. Final, Cumulative GPA	3.08	.471	3.13	.599	
b. SAT-Math Score	489.91	86.92	515.77	74.79	***
c. SAT-Verbal Score	479.31	91.32	516.25	81.75	***
d. Asked questions in class or contributed to class	3.012	.828	2.860	.862	***
discussions	0 (14	005	0.001	022	ماد ماد ماد
e. Made a class presentation	2.614	.905	2.321	.932	<u>ጥ ጥ ጥ</u>
f. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or	2.635	.974	2.601	.988	
assignment before turning it in					
g. Come to class without completing readings of	2.015	.727	2.074	.789	
assignments					
n. worked with other students on projects DURING	2.632	.919	2.404	.875	
i. Worked with classmates OUTSIDE OF CLASS to	0 505		0.500	000	
prepare class assignment	2.737	.932	2.529	.906	
j. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	1.827	.961	1.866	.945	***
k. Participated in a community-based project (e.g.,	1 611	819	1 752	909	***
service learning) as part of a regular course	11011	.017	1.702	., 0,	
l. Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group,	• • • •	1.0.64	• • •	1 0 1 1	
Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or	2.787	1.064	2.760	1.014	
complete an assignment	2 4 (0	700	2 4 4 1	700	
n. Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	3.409 2.000	.122	5.441 2.702	./00	
n. Discussed grades of assignments with an instructor	2.898	.890	2.192	.884	
advisor	2.416	.990	2.344	.918	
p. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with	• • • •				
faculty members outside of class	2.083	.971	1.963	.950	
q. Received prompt written feedback or oral feedback	2 022	016	2 0 1 2	055	***
from faculty on your academic performance	2.922	.810	2.843	.833	
r. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet	2 925	829	2 812	844	***
an instructor's standards or expectations	2.720	.02)	2.012	.011	
s. Worked with faculty members on activities other					
than coursework (committees, orientation, student life	1.765	.954	1.906	.973	
activities, etc.)					
t. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with	• • • •	0.5.6	• • • •	004	
others outside of class (students, family members, co-	2.938	.856	2.817	.894	
workers, etc.)					
u. Had serious conversations with students of a	2.765	.964	2.874	.959	***
different race or ethnicity than your own					
v. Had serious conversations with students who are	2 (07	002	2 071	072	
beliefs political opinions or personal values	2.097	.992	2.8/1	.912	

Note: n = 324 for transfer students and n = 351 for nontransfer students. *** = $p \le 0.05$. ^a Educationally Purposeful Activity items were taken from the 2011 NSSE version. Items from The College Student Report, National Survey of Student Engagement, Copyright 2001-15 The Trustees of Indiana University.

Discussion

The hierarchical linear regression model for transfer students explained slightly more of the variance in the equation. This is due in part to the fact that SAT-Math and SAT-Verbal test scores of precollege ability explained less of the variance in transfer student undergraduate GPAs. Student engagement in EPAs explained considerably more of the variance in cumulative GPAs for undergraduate transfer students than for undergraduate nontransfer students. In other words, while EPAs have some slight influences on undergraduate GPA, they may be more important for transfer students as the net effect is more influential on transfer student GPAs than nontransfer student GPAs. An independent samples t-test conducted in the current study determined that nontransfers had higher precollege academic abilities (SAT-Math and SAT-Verbal scores) than transfers. The phenomenon of transfer shock is well researched (Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965; Laanan, 2001) and a relationship between transfers and lowered GPAs has been established. Perhaps a reasonable explanation for why the EPAs influenced transfer students' GPAs more than nontransfer students' GPAs is in part due to transfer shock. Or maybe a precollege use of EPAs by nontransfers to achieve higher GPAs had already been developed. Indeed, because of transfer swirling behaviors EPAs might not be utilized as often by transfer students. Thus, EPAs, such as those in this study and in Kuh's (2001) study, might prove useful to improving transfer student GPAs, and could precipitate other advantageous effects in the retention of transfer students

Two variables were significant predictors of GPA for both transfer and nontransfer students. Tutoring other students appears to be a high impact practice that could support both transfer and nontransfer students' attainment of personal GPA goals. The influence of this practice seems slightly more pronounced for transfer students. Students are often required to obtain a specific high GPA or demonstration of strong grades in classes they hope to teach. Thus, the effect of this variable may be due to institutional policies that could be creating an artificial effect. However, peer teaching and tutoring may also precipitate the kinds of engagement and connection with an institution that influence students' academic abilities. Institutions may find it effective to design tutoring or peer-leadership programs that pair experienced students with less experienced students in specific academic areas. Similarly, students' perceptions of themselves as working harder than they thought they could to exceed a faculty member's expectations was a significant predictor of GPA for both groups. Such self-regulated motivation to work hard is similar to influences noted in the literature on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Zimmerman, 1990). Establishing positive, constructive dialogue between faculty, staff, and students to help students celebrate their successes and their ability to exceed the expectations of college may prove useful. The student-academic advisor relationship is key to the development of a student's self-image that notices his or her ability to exceed expectations (Pargett, 2011; Pietras, 2010).

Two significant predictors had negative influences on undergraduate cumulative GPA: (a) nontransfer students' participation in a community-based project as a part of a regular class and (b) transfer students' engagement in serious conversations with someone of a different race. Nontransfer students represent half of the sample population with the majority of these students being first year students. The slight negative influence on GPA of nontransfer students' involvement in community-based projects might be due to collegiate adjustment, time management, or priority setting in this new first-year experience. Mandatory involvement in a community-based project in addition to an already stressful student community might be too much too soon. Moreover, the negative influence on GPA of transfer students having serious conversation with someone of a different race might be due to tension such conversation might have on students. Observational studies of first-year student seating patterns in college cafeterias at high volume times by Corwin and Cintrón (2011) revealed cliquing behaviors; many first year co-eds sat next to peers they knew (e.g., from the same high school, state, or church organization). Similar behaviors of transfer students could explain the negative effect of having a serious conversation with students of a different race because new transfers would naturally gravitate towards students comparable to themselves.

Several predictors of undergraduate cumulative GPA emerged differentiating engagement experiences of transfer students from nontransfer students. Transfer students who engaged in the EPAs of asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions, and who received prompt feedback (i.e., oral or written) from faculty on their academic performance

Of interest is that many of the above tried and true engagement variables were not predictive of GPA. These results suggest that many EPAs might be less important than previously thought.



had increased chances of persisting to degree completion. Having a serious conversation with a student of a different race or ethnicity other than their own negatively influenced transfer students' successes but had no impact on nontransfer students. Making a class presentation had a positive influence on nontransfer students but no impact for transfer students. Participation in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a course had a negative influence on nontransfer students.

Finally, a majority of the EPAs did not emerge as predictive of cumulative undergraduate GPA. Transfer student activities that had no significant effect were (a) making a classroom presentation, (b) preparing two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in, (c) coming to class without completing readings or assignments, (d) working with other students on projects during class, (e) working with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments, (f) participating in a community-based project as part of a regular course, (g) using an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment, (h) using e-mail to communicate with an instructor, (i) discussing grades or assignments with an instructor, (j) discussing ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class, (k) talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor, (l) working with faculty members on activities other than coursework, (m) discussing ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class, and (n) having serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values. Of interest is that many of the above tried and true engagement variables were not predictive of GPA. These results suggest that many EPAs might be less important than previously thought.

Nontransfer student activities that had no significant effect were (a) asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions, (b) preparing two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in, (c) coming to class without completing readings or assignments, (d) working with other students on projects during class, (e) working with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments, (f) using an electronic medium to discuss or complete an assignment, (g) using e-mail to communicate with an instructor, (h) discussing grades or assignments with an instructor, (i) talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor, (j) discussing ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class, (k) receiving prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance, (l) working with faculty members on activities other than coursework, (m) discussing ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class, and (n) having serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values. Again, given that so many EPAs were not statistically significant or predictive of GPA could indicate that certain engagement activities might be less important than previously believed.

Of interest to note was that for transfer students and nontransfer students alike, 11 of the nonsignificant EPAs involved interactions with others (see Table 1 items h, j, l, m, n, o, p, q, s, t, and v) whereas only two nonsignificant EPAs involved self (see Table 1 items f, and g). The majority of engagement activities involving other students, faculty, and community members had no statistically significant effect on cumulative GPA. Inversely, only two of the self-engaging activities (i.e., preparing two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before it is due, and coming to class without completing readings or assignments) had no statistically significant effect on cumulative GPA. These results suggest the need for continued dialogue about the value of self-regulatory versus peer-interactional EPAs in higher education practice.

Finally, and perhaps the most meaningful finding from this study relates to the limitations of GPA as a sole indicator of success as acknowledged by other researchers (Astin, 1993; Fuller et al., 2011; Porter, 2011; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Though it has been a trusted metric of student academic performance for many decades, GPA may be ill suited to measure aspects of race interactions, student talent development, or attitudinal aspects of the collegiate experience. These results suggest a need for caution when designing systems to measure or track student success and, at least, GPA should not be the sole measure to guide institutional policy and program development. Though easily calculated and readily available for many students, GPA is not without its limits in measuring student success. As Porter (2011) noted, "...studies use grade point average as a measure of student learning, but GPA is flawed in many respects" (p. 66). Inconsistencies in grading approaches, difficulty in quantifying differing content across disciplines, and the inclusion of non-academic "bonus points" (i.e., attendance

The majority of engagement activities involving other students, faculty, and community members had no statistically significant effect on cumulative GPA.

Transfer students and their patterns of mobility are changing higher education. Traditional models to evaluate success are inappropriate for contemporary transfer students. points) are just a few limitations noted in GPA (Astin, 1993). For other researchers, (Bacon, 2006; Clark, 1964; Gore, 2006), the reliability and validity of GPA have long been established as meaningful indicators of human success. Our findings suggest a moderated position on GPA that advocates its use as one of many indicators of success in future studies. Any institutional approach that seeks to use GPA as a measure of success should do so accordingly; using it as one measure among many aimed at supporting student success and growth.

Conclusion

Predicting college student success is complicated. However, knowing the likelihood of a student's participation in specific EPAs that improve GPA could be an additional indicator of college success and better than GPA alone. Transfer students and their patterns of mobility are changing higher education. Traditional models to evaluate success are inappropriate for contemporary transfer students. The results of this study indicate specific EPAs that could enhance transfer student GPAs. Requiring faculty to provide prompt written or oral feedback and encouraging questions in class is most desirable to enhance a transfer student's GPA. Administrators could provide faculty-training sessions to address transfer students' needs and to involve faculty in transfer orientations. In addition, notifying faculty of transfer students who are enrolled in their classes would be helpful. Faculty must challenge their students to strive for high expectations and to work harder than they ever thought they could. In addition, faculty should respond quickly to all student requests and be particularly sensitive to transfer students' feedback needs. Transfer students anxious in their new environment worry about capability, and swift feedback could assuage that anxiety. Additionally, professors can offer classroom opportunities for students to tutor other students. The benefits of tutoring with or without pay are valuable to all students.

In a broader context, an overdependence on test criteria causes colleges to admit finite numbers of students who possess the highest standardized scores and GPAs. This practice leaves little room for the increasing numbers of students who may have less optimal scores but want to attend college. Informed use of NSSE data might counterbalance this dependence on GPA and admission tests (i.e., SAT and ACT). Predicting college student success is complicated. However, knowing the likelihood of a student's participation in specific EPAs that improve GPA could be an additional indicator of college success and better than GPA alone. If college administrators were aware of EPAs that benefit student GPAs then those EPAs could be incorporated in higher education curriculum.

Finally, the researchers of this study were particularly interested in a transfer student population that is typically diverse and nontraditional. Previous research (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008) demonstrated that nontraditional students derived increased academic benefits from EPAs more so than traditional students did. Similarly, the current study confirmed that transfer students were more affected by EPAs than were nontransfer students. Further research to explore whether specific EPAs embedded into transfer student curriculum are effective in increasing transfer completion rates is recommended. In addition, grouping together EPAs (e.g., self-regulatory versus peer-interactional) might provide fodder for future research.



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Book Review

Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education (2nd ed.). Trudy W. Banta & Catherine A. Palomba. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015. 368 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1118903322. Hardcover, \$48.00.

> *REVIEWED BY:* Joan Hawthorne, Ph.D. *University* of North Dakota

The newly updated edition of Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education, the classic text by Trudy Banta and Catherine Palomba, made it to the top of a short list of reading recommendations compiled online recently in response to a query on an assessment listsery. And that should be no surprise, given that there are a number of reasons why this book and these authors might come readily to mind for such readers: The first edition of the authors' text served as an introduction to and overview of the assessment field for many current practitioners. Assessment Update (a well-read publication providing an overview of trends in higher education assessment) continues to be edited by Banta, and the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis-under the leadership of Banta-is among the best-known and bestattended of all conferences in the assessment field. The authors are among the leaders in the field of assessment, and a new edition of Assessment Essentials was certain to garner attention.

The book does not disappoint. The authors describe themselves as having produced a "practical guide to assessment practice" (p. xix) with their first edition, providing information about and examples of institutional practice that could inform the work of practitioners, both novice and experienced. That basic structure remains intact in the second edition, as does their commitment to providing numerous examples of institutional practice that demonstrate various approaches to every topic addressed in the book. New in this edition are updated examples, additional discussion of how technology supports assessment practice, the inclusion of capstone courses as primary assessment venues, a chapter on assessment in student affairs, and greater emphasis on linkages between assessment findings and other institutional processes.

The more basic chapters cover—as they should—all the assessment topics that a novice practitioner (or a typical member of the faculty) should know something about. The opening chapter sets the stage by defining assessment and articulating its purposes, noting that the primary aim of assessment should be to understand how (and how well) our educational programs are working in terms of helping students achieve the necessary learning. In this era of evergrowing demands for accountability, however, the need for reporting, both internally and externally, cannot be ignored and Banta and Palomba acknowledge that. The second chapter provides an overview of "assessment essentials," including stakeholder engagement, developing assessment plans, providing leadership for assessment work, selecting methods, sharing findings, and using the information that's collected. Subsequent chapters (3-6) explore those topics in more detail.

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For the experienced assessment practitioner, it is the second half of the book, beginning with chapter 7, that is likely to be of most interest. Chapter 7, on assessing learning outcomes in the major, includes substantial focus on capstones as plausible venues for generating student work products, assessment of experiential learning such as service learning and internships, and assessment of what are often termed "soft skills" (e.g., group work, team-building), many of which are especially valued by employers. As the authors explain, this kind of assessment can and perhaps should include employers in the process.

The chapter on assessing general education addresses the choice commonly made between purchasing from a growing array of commercially available instruments and relying on home-grown strategies for assessment. The authors' criticisms of "standardized tests of generic skills" are clearly noted. They cite "the inability of these measures to test more than a 'tiny slice of what a student knows and can do' (Banta, 2012, p.4)" (p. 176), the charge that much of what such tests measure is skills and knowledge accrued prior to college attendance, and the concern that differences in sampling processes across institutions can undermine what should be the primary benefit of such assessments, i.e., the ability to compare across institutions. While the authors seem to favor the use of locally-developed assessment strategies that rely on faculty judgment, they are also quick to note that there are real costs in terms of institutional resources (especially faculty time) for developing homegrown tools as well. Chapter 7 also includes a discussion of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), developed with the support of the Lumina Foundation, and now serving as a framework for many discussions of both assessment and the college curriculum itself. The chapter concludes with comments about the potential for alignment of general education assessment with both the DQP and assessment in the major.

Other chapters in the second half of the book address assessment in student affairs programs, the challenges of ensuring assessment findings are analyzed



and used appropriately (including serving as the basis for both program improvement and institutional reporting), and situating assessment within a comprehensive institutional effectiveness program. The concluding chapter looks forward, citing challenges and issues likely to drive discussions of assessment in future years. Included in that chapter are brief discussions of the controversy surrounding accreditation and accrediting agencies as "stewards of federal financial aid" (p. 264), trends in preferred methods and approaches, the challenge of broadening engagement and participation among both faculty and student affairs staff, and a reference to the ways in which technology can be harmful—as well as helpful—to assessment practice. Among the future challenges noted are the need to pay more attention to wavs assessment can serve individual students while remaining focused on providing information needed for program oversight and improvement, competency-based education and the assessment challenges that result, demands for greater transparency regarding assessment results, and the need (in this belt-tightening era) to ensure that costs of assessment yield sufficient and measurable benefits.

As the breadth of coverage indicates, Banta and Palomba more than fulfill their aim of providing practitioners, novice or experienced, with a summary of "assessment essentials." The coverage is comprehensive and the discussions are readable, even for those not versed in field-specific jargon. The authors also deliver, as promised, a multitude of examples that are quite current and could be used by an interested reader to find and scan various institutional websites providing more detail on actual practice related to any topic of specific interest. Of course, that multitude means that a significant percentage of each chapter is devoted to summarizing the practices of various institutions, a potential disadvantage for readers seeking a briefer overview and with no desire for extensive examples. In the chapter on indirect assessments, for example, a reader finds references to the University of Utah's use of questionnaire cover letters, Washington State University's process for managing anonymity in online surveys, University of Maryland Baltimore County's use of prizes to increase survey response rates, and Oregon State University's practice of involving faculty in the recruitment of student survey participants. And all of those examples come from two pages of the chapter (pp. 127-128).

If there is a criticism to be made of this book, it might be that the writers—very occasionally—allow their own perspectives to overshadow the dispassionately informative tone that generally dominates. Readers might perceive a bias against standardized assessments of "generic skills," for example, when reading the chapter on assessment of general education (chapter 7). Another case in point is the extensive discussion of institutional practices at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) in the chapter focused on assessing institutional practices (chapter 11), which may seem surprising given the great breadth of institutional examples cited in other chapters. However, most readers are likely to be aware of Banta's own work at IUPUI in institutional effectiveness, resulting in practices there that are especially good examples of the approach that Banta and Palomba recommend. Furthermore, part of the value in reading a book by noted experts in the assessment field is the expertise they bring. Many readers may pick up this book precisely because they hope to find some of the wisdom about the field, both regarding current practice and future trends, that Banta and Palomba are uniquely wellsituated to impart. Such readers likely will not be surprised by the perspectives that occasionally surface, and, in fact, may particularly appreciate seeing the authors' "take" on a thorny question—and might even wish for more of that "situating themselves" by the authors.

The updated edition of Assessment Essentials seems destined to end up on the bookshelves of practitioners across the country. Assessment experts will find themselves dipping into it when searching for more effective strategies for collecting survey data, incorporating assessment into capstone classes, or carrying out assessment of general education programs. The plethora of institutional examples alone will make the book invaluable for the practitioner seeking inspiration or ideas from "how assessment gets done" at other institutions, making it possible to go directly from the book to the website of an institution where a particular practice is in use.

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In many ways, though, this is a text meant for use by faculty at large. It could be a loaner book for passing along to a colleague who wants to learn more about a particular aspect of assessment, a shared reading for a group of faculty in a learning community on the subject, or a primary text in a class on assessment in higher education taken by wouldbe faculty. When used in such a class, an ideal supplemental reading would perhaps be a book of case studies or examples of practice-something that delves more deeply into individual institutional examples and provides students with opportunities for hands-on experience developing assessment plans or proposing strategies for improvements in practice. Assessment Essentials would also be appropriately used as "the assessment book" for participants in a future faculty training program or for students in a class on classroom practices or issues and trends in higher education.

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Book Review

Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College. Richard Arum & Josipa Roksa. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014. 264 pp. ISBN: 9780226197289. Paperback, \$18.00.

> REVIEWED BY: Tim W. Merrill, Ph.D. Randolph-Macon College

In Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates (2014), a follow-up to Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses (2011), Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa take a close look at the class of 2009 as they graduate from college. The book's primary purpose is to highlight collegiate experiences from student perspectives, while examining relationships between their college experiences and transitions into postcollegiate adulthood. Although not receiving similar levels of attention and critique as their first work, Aspiring Adults Adrift (Arum & Roksa, 2014) provides useful information to higher education practitioners as we refine our efforts to collect valid and reliable data on post-college outcomes. As the national discussion about higher education outcomes and value continues, this study provides a few tools to improve the measurement of learning outcomes. The book provides a solid examination of student perspectives on transitions from college while re-emphasizing calls for greater academic rigor and attention to data collection from new graduates.

In the first chapter, the authors present current criticisms of higher education similar to those in Academically Adrift (Arum & Roksa, 2011). These critiques include their observations on a general lack of rigor in student academic work and increased administrator hiring as a function of the continued growth of the "personnel perspective" (p. 9) model of higher education that emphasizes customer support and student services rather than academic achievement. The authors note that the economic landscape plays a significant factor in the transitions from college to emerging adulthood because the recent recession was well underway when the population in this study was graduating and seeking employment. The authors restate their opinion that the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) remains one of the only functional measurements of critical thinking skills currently in broad use. Those familiar with Academically Adrift will find some repeated themes in the opening chapter. For others, presented is a solid foundation of the authors' perspectives of higher education while laving out their intentions for this study. Reading their first study is not a pre-requisite to engaging with this material.

In the second chapter, qualitative interview data support the ongoing analysis of CLA results. Arum and Roksa quote students throughout the study to portray typical undergraduate experiences, job search challenges,

and overwhelming optimism for the next stages in life. Interview data support the authors' claims of the power of social networks, life balance, and getting along with others during the undergraduate experience. The qualitative data also suggest that academic experiences are of secondary importance, after socializing, for most students. The second chapter re-states many conclusions from Academically Adrift regarding limited learning gains as measured by the CLA, before presenting new information on how those academic limitations affect transition into graduate school. Graduates who scored highly on the CLA were more likely to enroll full-time in post-graduate programs than peers with lower CLA scores, after controlling for other factors that might affect this outcome. Institutions that participate in the CLA have a model to use in testing these results and perhaps a method to integrate national test outcomes into campus learning assessment conversations.

Chapter three presents student transitions into the labor market and opens with a brief review of three contemporary reasons why college matters: developing cognitive capabilities (human capital), the receipt of the degree (credentialism), and the establishment of relationship networks (social capital). The authors suggest that students in their study are "struggling" two years after their 2009 graduation, categorized as either unemployed (7%) or underemployed (4%), with an additional 13% of the class employed in "occupations requiring only minimal education" (p. 54). The authors report on how CLA scores may predict some labor market outcomes, stating that "CLA performance is significantly associated with the likelihood of experiencing unemployment" (p. 61) though the practical difference is small; moving from five to seven percent unemployment for lower CLA scorers. However,

For assessment practitioners this chapter provides some potentially useful guidelines on how to pair CLA results with graduates' outcomes to supplement student academic experiences and inform campus discussions on outcome measurement.

neither CLA scores nor selectivity of institutions are associated with income of full-time employed graduates. The authors emphasize the importance of using on campus career services, internships, formal and informal personal connections, and formal job advertisements and search services to identify a first job after graduation. The third chapter provides evidence that students who demonstrate greater capacity for critical thinking, as measured by the CLA, fare better in the labor market than those who do not. For assessment practitioners this chapter provides some potentially useful guidelines on how to pair CLA results with graduates' outcomes to supplement student academic experiences and inform campus discussions on outcome measurement. As small private colleges debate

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their purposes of education for its own sake versus career preparation, this section provides evidence that academic rigor, particularly with developing critical thinking abilities, may lead to success in outcomes.

Graduates' lives after college are examined via qualitative data in the fourth chapter as the authors present findings on living arrangements, romantic relationships, and limited world engagement encased by overwhelming optimism about their individual futures. Unsurprisingly, higher unemployment is strongly related to higher rates of living at home with parents. Most graduates who had romantic partners after two years met as students (40%). The authors note the continuing decline in community engagement and reading current events reported by recent graduates. College selectivity matters more than CLA scores in reported civic and political awareness. Demonstrating unbridled optimism, despite the bleak economic situation as students entered the labor market in 2009, most report that their lives were better, or they expect improved outcomes compared to their parents when the same age. Using the evidence presented in this chapter including delayed attainment of financial independence and limited civic engagement, the authors claim that new college graduates are aimlessly drifting into adulthood, carrying their collegiate attitudes "characteristic more of meandering than of purposeful discovery" (p. 112) into life after college. Projects such as the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (http://activecitizen. tufts.edu/research/nslve/) are attempting to provide more evidence to support or refute some of the conclusions in this chapter. Arum and Roksa seemed to be bothered more by the "drifting" than the students themselves, who maintained hope and positive outlooks for their futures.

The final chapter, using more qualitative data, focuses on new graduate challenges and experiences in searching for employment and graduate school outcomes. The authors reiterate their criticism that contemporary colleges have permitted themselves to be defined by the preferences of their undergraduates, rather than promote a rigorous intellectual and social development atmosphere for students. Regardless of the validity of that claim, assessment professionals will appreciate the conclusions that attempt to clearly define learning outcomes and call for better tools to measure student learning, ultimately leading to improved performance for colleges and universities. The authors conclude the study with three recommended institutional strategies that might lead to improved early labor market outcomes for graduates. First is an admittedly cynical approach to simply increase the proportion of students who major in particular fields with high early career payoffs. The second approach, slightly less cynical, is to expand career readiness programs on campus while increasing internships and relationships with potential employers. Lastly, and probably most genuinely, the authors propose that institutions enhance academic rigor and improve student learning in both subject-specific content and "generic competencies such as critical thinking, complex reasoning and written communication" (p. 134).

This final conclusion aligns with the ongoing efforts by many assessment professionals on myriad campuses across the country to clearly articulate, carefully measure, and succinctly improve student learning.

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Aspiring Adults Adrift concludes with notes on the methodology, detailed tables of results from their analyses of the survey, and interview data and examples of the instruments used to collect both the qualitative and quantitative data from the students. The authors' intent to highlight student experiences in transitions to adults benefitted from their mixed method approach. Student words help to emphasize struggles facing graduates while linking those experiences to college settings. New graduate optimism seems odd to Arum and Roksa in light of the myriad challenges in finding jobs, living arrangements, social engagement, and romantic partners. Assessment professionals can use studies such as Aspiring Adults Adrift to continue arguing for better measures of post-collegiate outcomes for more than simple reporting to external agencies, but to support ongoing efforts

Assessment professionals can use studies such as Aspiring Adults Adrift to continue arguing for better measures of post-collegiate outcomes for more than simple reporting to external agencies, but to support ongoing efforts on campuses to measure and improve learning.

on campuses to measure and improve learning. The cohort of students Arum and Roksa examine is rather small and not representative of the variety of institutions that produce postsecondary graduates each year; however, their conclusions to focus academic experiences on learning and engagement with the community are worthy of any young adult. Though much less controversial than *Academically Adrift*, perhaps due to the focus more on post-collegiate outcomes than on undergraduate experiences, *Aspiring Adults Adrift* is certainly worth adding to the reading list of higher education professionals who are involved in measuring and improving student outcomes.

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······ RESEARCH & PRACTICE IN ASSESSMENT

Notes in Brief

Assessment has assumed an increasingly prominent place in academic and student affairs practice. Yet, in smaller student affairs departments with limited staffing and resources, how might a department identify the resources or time to thoroughly assess student learning outcomes? This Notes in Brief details the partnership between the University of South Carolina's Higher Education and Student Affairs Master's Program course EDHE 839: Assessment in Higher Education and the Gamecock Gateway program, a residential bridge pathway and access program for first time college students between the University of South Carolina and Midlands Technical College. Authors present the rationale for the partnership, its essential components, the impact the learning outcomes assessment made on the program's success rates, and the takeaways both the graduate instructor and graduate students gained from the hands-on assessment practice. Such work is a model for efficient, effective assessment practice with impacts on undergraduate and graduate student learning.



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Practical Collaborations for Positive Impact

Administrators demand data to enact programmatic growth or change (Banta & Blaich, 2010; Maki, 2010). Yet, institutional resources to provide these data continue to shrink. How can a small student affairs department find the resources required to gather meaningful programmatic data that can support and guide effective practice? The answer in our case was found just across the Horseshoe—our campus commons.

Thanks to a partnership between practicing and emerging student affairs professionals, the University of South Carolina's Gamecock Gateway residential bridge program gained data that spurred an array of program enhancements. Ultimately, these enhancements boosted fall-to-spring semester student continuation rates from 86% to 95% in a single academic year. Further, the partnership utilized existing university resources to develop a "win-win" situation in which undergraduate students' experiences were enhanced while graduate students developed knowledge and skills supporting the application of assessment techniques.

About Gamecock Gateway

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Gamecock Gateway, jointly initiated by the presidents of the University of South Carolina (USC) and Midlands Technical College (MTC), launched in the 2012-2013 academic year. The program's focus was squarely fixed on enhancing access to a USC degree and innovating pipelines between community colleges and senior institutions. Students who initially applied for freshman admission into the university but fell just below acceptance thresholds are considered for invitation into the program. After one academic year in the program, students may seamlessly transfer into the university if they complete three requirements: (1) achieve at least 30 transferrable credit hours through MTC; (2) achieve a 2.25 transferable GPA or higher (recognizing that some USC academic programs may require a higher GPA); and (3) remain in good conduct and financial standing at both institutions.



The outcome of this unique assessment partnership between practicing and emerging student affairs practitioners had significant implications for all involved. Gamecock Gateway students benefit from both the smaller academic environment at MTC and the large resources and opportunities found at South Carolina's flagship research university. Through the program, students commit to full-time enrollment at MTC and oncampus residency at USC. As a MTC student, Gamecock Gateway students have comprehensive access to MTC resources, including those that support academic, personal, and professional success. At USC, students reside in one centralized, on-campus living and learning community, and ride the USC-to-MTC shuttle designed specifically for their daily journey to the two MTC campuses that house Gateway cohorts. As with MTC resources, students receive access to USC resources that support academic, personal, and professional success.

Foundations of the Collaboration

As the 2012-2013 inaugural year of the Gamecock Gateway program drew to a close, the Gamecock Gateway leadership team realized their need for a deeper understanding of the inaugural cohort's perspectives on the program and the nature of their connection with the university. Further, this understanding was required for program modifications and anticipated by senior administration at both institutions. The Gamecock Gateway leadership team included one program staff member at the university and two at the community college. None of the three could take time from already over-crowded schedules to spearhead a programmatic assessment. In addition, their close connection to the Gamecock Gateway students throughout the year created strong rapport, but significantly lessened the likelihood of gathering honest, unbiased student feedback. Gamecock Gateway needed external support to better explore the student experience and to collect valid data.

USC faculty, who were redeveloping a graduate-level course in higher education assessment, had a complementary goal. The time had come to move emerging student affairs professionals from undertaking smaller, in-class assessment projects to immersed participation in a real world program assessment. In this approach, all students would attempt various assessment strategies under a common pedagogical umbrella. Thus, a collaboration was born. The Gamecock Gateway leadership team agreed to partner with the faculty members and students of the graduate assessment class to identify Gamecock Gateway student learning outcomes. Utilizing an authentic and holistic program assessment strategy, the students then investigated the program's effectiveness in meeting these outcomes.

The Path to Programmatic Assessment

In January 2013, the Gamecock Gateway leadership team members provided an introductory presentation of the program to students and faculty associated with the assessment class. The assessment undertaking began with a consideration of student learning outcomes from comparable residential bridge programs at other universities. Surprisingly, few comparable programs publicized their student learning outcomes. In fact, very little was found on the history, processes, or outcomes of comparable programs. Thus, the program vision and mission served as the springboard for the graduate students' creation of three Gamecock Gateway student learning outcomes: (a) adjust to academic transitions by effectively using USC and MTC support services; (b) develop a sense of community with fellow Gamecock Gateway and USC students, faculty, and personnel and develop a sense of identity as both a MTC student and incoming USC student; and (c) identify relevant USC resources, processes, and procedures related to campus involvement.

With learning outcomes in hand, the graduate students then systematically developed and implemented quantitative and qualitative tools to assess the extent to which Gamecock Gateway students achieved these outcomes at academic year's end. Students divided into four groups, each with a unique focus: (a) a student focus group team, (b) a student survey team, (c) a Resident Mentor interview team, and (d) a Gamecock Gateway tutoring interview team. A fifth team was dedicated to the creation of an assessment designed to track student engagement in on- and off-campus communities. The graduate assessment students then presented their findings and recommendations at The First Annual Gamecock Gateway Assessment Conference held in April 2013.

The mixed method data collected by the graduate students, when analyzed and interpreted, revealed insights that both affirmed and advanced the Gamecock Gateway leadership team's understanding of the Gamecock Gateway student experience.



Assessment Partnership Outcomes

The outcome of this unique assessment partnership between practicing and emerging student affairs practitioners had significant implications for all involved. Highlighted below are implications for the Gamecock Gateway students and for the graduate students who honed their assessment skills through their engagement with the Gamecock Gateway program.

Gamecock Gateway students. The mixed method data collected by the graduate students, when analyzed and interpreted, revealed insights that both affirmed and advanced the Gamecock Gateway leadership team's understanding of the Gamecock Gateway student experience. Some findings were anticipated (e.g., "Mandatory 8 am classes at MTC are a bad idea!"), while others were not (e.g., "I feel awkward when my new USC friends see that my student identification card doesn't look like theirs"). All contributed to an understanding of not only quantifiable programmatic outcomes, such as number of credits earned, but also to a deep understanding of the lived experiences of the Gamecock Gateway students who represented a type of transfer student never before seen on the USC campus. Additionally, data analyses provided the external justification necessary to implement several program enhancements. A few key enhancements include the addition of a summer orientation program that integrated USC and MTC new student orientations for Gamecock Gateway students, and using former Gamecock Gateway students (now fully admitted USC students) as Gamecock Gateway resident mentors.

Graduate students. Students enrolled in the graduate-level assessment course achieved two key professional outcomes. First, they gained hands-on practice in grappling with the real world of assessment processes. Their efforts resulted in their need to make decisions about how to gather trustworthy data, and how to interpret these data knowing that their explanations held short- and long-term consequences for all involved with the Gamecock Gateway program. Second, the unique learning context of the Gamecock Gateway program allowed them to explore and assess learning environments at both a two-year and four-year institution, strengthening their understanding of the complexity and the criticality of this transfer pipeline. This deepened understanding will serve them well as they consider career options throughout their professional lives.

Conclusion

Partnerships like the one we present in this paper can enhance both the graduate and undergraduate student experience while meeting institutional needs and a moral commitment to effective assessment and program analysis. This partnership, as we discovered, necessitated (a) vulnerability from course and program leadership, (b) a shared expectation of transparency and action from the reviewers and the program under review, and (c) an authentic willingness to partner between academic and student affairs entities. The collaboration between the graduate students and faculty and the inaugural Gamecock Gateway program students and leadership team provided enhancements that increased student success and ultimately motivated a doubling of enrollment in the 2014-15 academic year. We believe this win-win strategy is one that others can apply on their own campuses as assessment becomes a constant campus companion.

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All contributed to an understanding of not only quantifiable programmatic outcomes, such as number of credits earned, but also to a deep understanding of the lived experiences of the Gamecock Gateway students who represented a type of transfer student never before seen on the USC campus.



RESEARCH & PRACTICE IN ASSESSMENT ••••••

Notes in Brief

Institutions of higher education are faced with challenges when implementing an assessment initiative. These challenges include constraints on time and resources, the demands of specialized accreditation, and faculty motivation to comply. In addition, the communication of the expectations around assessment must be clear to all constituents in order for such initiatives to be successful. Communication begins with defining what the institution envisions to be the core elements that must be seen in a plan regardless of disciplinary uniqueness or specialized accreditation. When these core elements are developed and evaluated in a systematic and generalizable manner, institutions can move beyond the collection of quantitative data regarding the number of programs that are in compliance with the assessment mandate—i.e., merely counting the number of programs that report outcomes, measures, results, and action plans. Institutions can begin to conduct qualitative reviews of program-based assessment plans, identifying the clarity and value of plan components with regard to their usefulness for the improvement of student learning. Using the work of one regional comprehensive public university, this case study will demonstrate guiding principles for institutional success in both developing a generalizable assessment initiative and communicating this important work to institutional constituents.



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Guiding Principles to Impact an Institution-Wide Assessment Initiative

In light of increasing expectations of accountability for student learning outcomes, student learning assessment continues to be of central importance to institutions of higher education (IHEs). Institutions are looking for ways to implement successful approaches for assessment or the assurance of student learning to ensure it is taken seriously by faculty, and is integrated into the fabric or culture of the institution (Maki, 2004). Specifically, institutions want to actively engage faculty in the work of student learning assessment in order to help them see the value of this work for local, curricular, and pedagogical purposes, beyond merely meeting the requirements of external constituents. A recent Chronicle of Higher Education article entitled "Giving Assessment a Fighting Chance" (Havens, 2013) discusses several guiding principles for institutions to consider when implementing institution-wide change. These guiding principles include the following: (a) avoid conducting institution-wide change under the "gun" of an accreditation deadline; (b) avoid introducing a brand new system or process immediately and, instead, take stock of what programs are already doing and processes already in place; (c) ensure some level of quality control so that plans are not created or implemented in an inefficient or ineffective way; and (d) provide appropriate support to enable the work to be accomplished (particularly time and money). The purpose of this case study is to outline an institution-wide initiative using these guiding principles and to present data that demonstrate a positive change in the quality of student learning assessment as a result of that initiative.

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Avoid Conducting Institution-Wide Change Under the Gun of an Accreditation Deadline

While accreditation visits are the impetus for much of the student learning assessment activity that takes place on campuses, it must not be the only motivation for activities to occur (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2002). The time spent preparing for



accreditation visits allows institutions to reflect on their current practices and validate their work through evidence. During a recent regional accreditation visit, the institution discussed in this report was successful in satisfying the standard related to student learning assessment. Upon further reflection, however, it became clear there was unevenness in the overall state of student learning assessment on campus. In essence, the institution became its own biggest critic. There clearly were pockets of good, even excellent, assessment practices, but there was significant variability across programs and colleges with regard to the quality of assessment practices. Building on the momentum of the regional accreditation visit, the institution implemented a campus-wide assurance of student learning (ASL) initiative to encourage programs to critically evaluate, and revise if necessary, their program-level student learning assessment plan(s).

Avoid Introducing a Brand New System

It was important to listen to a variety of constituents on campus to fully understand existing processes and to avoid duplication of previous or current efforts. At this institution, assessment of student learning is overseen by an appointed faculty member (provided half-time release from the office of the provost), who has the title of Faculty Associate for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and an associate dean within each of five academic colleges (one of the academic colleges is broken into two schools for a total of six associate deans). Individual departments within each college have faculty-appointed assessment coordinators who provide oversight of the process for individual programs and serve as liaisons between department faculty, department chairs, and associate deans. At the time we were first planning the ASL initiative, departments, faculty, and administrators had just worked tirelessly to put together reports related to student learning assessment for the regional accreditation site visit. Thus, it was very important to listen to their views about the status of assessment efforts in an attempt to best address their needs. Thus, we first initiated a conversation with the associate deans and assessment coordinators to try to understand their perspective about the processes in place and to hear their collective thoughts of the limitations and/or stumbling blocks associated with those processes.

One of the key findings of this exercise was a recognition of the lack of knowledge/ expertise around effective practices in student learning assessment among the associate deans and the assessment coordinators. Many assessment coordinators, it turned out, were junior faculty members and their experience with student learning assessment, as well as that of the associate deans, was dependent upon their disciplinary backgrounds. For example, faculty and administrators within specialized accredited programs had more assessment knowledge and/or experience than faculty and administrators from programs without specialized accreditation. This lack of evenness in key constituents' knowledge around assessment has also been identified as potentially problematic in other studies exploring program-level student learning assessment (Kelley, Tong, & Choi, 2010). In response to this concern, those leading the ASL initiative identified a rubric in the existing assessment literature and modified it (with permission) so that expectations were clear around the institutional expectation for program-level student learning assessment (Fulcher & Orem, 2010). In addition to the rubric, faculty and administrators were sent screencast videos made by the faculty associate that discussed key terms and provided explanations to help increase knowledge of student learning assessment. All academic programs were then asked to evaluate their plans using the adapted rubric. Initially, all programs were given the same deadline to evaluate all elements of their assessment plans (from the articulation of their outcomes to follow-up action plans). But, it quickly became clear that this approach would not be the best way to engage faculty in a thoughtful and reflective process. Some colleges needed more time than others, in part because they had more programs within their departments. Thus, different completion timelines were established but all participated in the same evaluation.

Ensure a Level of Quality Control

As noted above, the rubric adopted for this initiative was a modified version of an existing rubric (Fulcher & Orem, 2010). It was modified specifically to fit our institutional needs and captured what our assessment initiative leaders viewed as the core elements of an assessment plan regardless of discipline. These elements include:

Specifically, institutions want to actively engage faculty in the work of student learning assessment in order to help them see the value of this work for local, curricular, and pedagogical purposes, beyond merely meeting the requirements of external constituents. Outcomes that are clearly measureable and indicate specifically the knowledge, skills, or attitudes that students are expected to have at a certain point.

- Curriculum maps that specifically identify where program-level outcomes are introduced, practiced, and assessed.
- Assessment measures that correspond to each outcome and include at least one direct measure of each outcome.
- An appropriate rationale for each measure and measurement practice (i.e., information about the specific content of the measure or specific items of a larger measure that are used to indicate performance, about the reliability and validity of the measure, where appropriate, and about the context of the measure including course information, student level, etc.).
- Criteria for success (e.g., benchmarking) for each measure of an outcome that includes a rationale for the selection of the specific criteria (e.g., program, discipline, or regional accrediting requirements).
- Results that include analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as some specific follow-up action plans relevant to student learning (i.e., results that go well beyond the report of merely "criterion met" for all outcomes).

Utilization of the rubric enabled the institution to ask faculty to step back from viewing assessment of student learning from primarily a quantitative perspective (i.e., in terms of how many students meet the criteria, or whether it was complete or not complete) and to focus instead on the quality of the process. Each component of the rubric had specific language aligned with numerical scores (1 to 4, with 1 identifying the element as absent and 4 representing the highest quality element) to enable programs to understand how to define quality for each core element. This is consistent with the approach endorsed by Fulcher and Orem (2010), who contend that the quality of the assessment process must be evaluated and considered if institutions are to guide programs toward improving student learning outcomes, which is, of course, the true purpose of student learning assessment. Additionally, the campus-wide rubric began to standardize the language of assessment across the institution and facilitated an increase in the assessment knowledge of individuals who were responsible for this work. Having clear descriptions of the core elements and their level of quality helped to bring faculty across campus to a common understanding of the assessment process, assessment language, and the expectations of the institution around student learning outcomes.

Introduction and completion of the rubric by faculty was the first step to achieve an initial quality check; however, an institution-wide check was also necessary. This was important for two reasons. First, it was important to determine if program faculty were using the rubric correctly and if they were being honest in their evaluations. Second, it was critical to pinpoint the programmatic variability noted earlier within the institution as it pertained to the core elements. Having a more specific idea regarding variability would enable the institution to celebrate the disciplines and/or programs that were doing well and to appropriately address the programs that were not meeting expectations. To achieve these goals, the institution utilized several levels of review.

First, the University Assessment Committee, including faculty representation from each of the five colleges as well as student affairs and student support services, were included in the review process. Their specific responsibility was to evaluate individual plans using the modified rubric. Random assignment of plans to committee members, along with use of an electronic assessment management system, allowed the process to be streamlined. In order for the committee members to evaluate the plans appropriately, norming sessions were held to establish inter-rater agreement. The second level of review was completed by the associate deans who scored all program plans within their respective colleges. All evaluators (committee members and associate deans) were instructed to provide specific qualitative feedback for any scores below 3.5 (on the 4-point scale) in order to provide direction for program improvement. The faculty associate was responsible for reviewing all plans and then compiled the results from the reviewers and the qualitative feedback. The reports were then sent to each of the respective programs. If programs received scores below 3.5, they were provided a time frame to make necessary modifications to their plan based on the feedback. The faculty associate

Building on the momentum of the regional accreditation visit, the institution implemented a campuswide assurance of student learning (ASL) initiative to encourage programs to critically evaluate, and revise if necessary, their programlevel student learning assessment plan(s).



then went back in to review the plans a final time after programs had time to modify and the programs were scored again, producing a pre-ASL initiative and post-ASL initiative score.

Using these scores, heat maps were developed. A heat map is a graphic representation of data where the values contained in a matrix are shown using colors. In the case of these heat maps, a high score of 4 was illustrated using the color green (good) and a low score of 1 was illustrated using the color red (needs improvement). All numbers in between are variations of those colors. Heat maps were developed using average element scores across the entire institution, within individual colleges, and for individual programs. Presentation of the heat maps at all three levels allowed faculty and administrators to see more clearly where improvement was needed and allowed them to create intervention procedures at multiple levels. Two example heat maps, with pre- and post-scores (i.e., before and after feedback was provided and plans were revised as part of the initiative), across all colleges/schools can be seen in Figure 1. Statistically significant differences (with improved scores) were found for at least some of the core elements across all colleges. The heat maps proved to be very beneficial in communicating a clear visual of the results of this work that was easy for all constituents to understand. In one college, an associate dean indicated that the heat maps were particularly effective in demonstrating areas that needed attention. Faculty did not enjoy viewing an area of red or orange amongst the green. Two assessment coordinators immediately asked, "What do we need to do to get out of the red and into the green?"

The heat maps proved to be very beneficial in communicating a clear visual of the results of this work that was easy for all constituents to understand.

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				Rationale			
• "		Curriculum	Type of	for	Criteria for		Action
College	Outcomes	мар	Measure	Measure	Success	Results	Plans
A	3.5	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.0	2.4
В	3.5	2.8	3.2	2.7	2.3	2.0	2.0
С	3.6	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.5
D	3.0	2.8	3.2	2.6	3.1	1.7	1.3
E	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
F	2.8	3.3	3.3	2.1	2.2	2.6	2.3
OVERALL	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.1	3.1	3.4	3.2

Year 2 ASL Initiative Scores, Fall 2014

College	Outcomes	Curriculum Map	Type of Measure	Rationale for Measure	Criteria for Success	Results	Action Plans
A	3.6	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.5		
В	3.8	3.0	3.2	3.3*	3.2*		
С	4.0*	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0*	4.0*
D	4.0*	4.0*	4.0	4.0*	4.0	3.1*	2.8*
E	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
F	3.8*	3.7	3.6*	3.6*	3.5*	3.1	2.9
OVERALL	3.8*	3.7*	3.8*	3.7*	3.6*	3.7*	3.6*

Figure 1. College-Wide Heat Map.

Note. *Year 2 means significantly different from Year 1 means (p < .05), gray cells post-measure not completed yet.

Provide Appropriate Support and Resources

This qualitative review process now occurs on an annual basis. We continue to see improvement in the quality of the core elements of assessment plans. One key reason this initiative continues to be successful is the continuing support of the academic administration. The provost's budget includes line items for the purpose of supporting student learning assessment on campus. For example, assessment coordinators are provided The process was beneficial for both university administrators and faculty. Academic administrators now have a clearer picture of the status of student learning assessment across the campus. some level of course release or summer funding in exchange for their service. The faculty associate is supported by a part-time alternate work assignment to coordinate this (and other) work, including chairing the university-wide assessment committee. Associate deans are charged with supervision of the assessment of student learning within their colleges and are evaluated, in part, on the degree to which programs within their colleges improve with regard to university expectations regarding the assessment of student learning. This level of support is crucial for the initiative to be successful. It is important to note, however, that this support was also in place prior to the implementation of the initiative. What really changed is that we implemented both a comprehensive plan for evaluating assessment quality and a comprehensive communication plan regarding the requirements of this plan. Those appear to be the key to the success of this initiative.

Conclusion

Assessment is about both the process and the end result (improving student learning outcomes). The ASL initiative described in this report was focused on process. It took a year and a half to produce the initial pre- and post-results described. The investment of time and resources was, we believe, a good one. The process was beneficial for both university administrators and faculty. Academic administrators now have a clearer picture of the status of student learning assessment across the campus. Specifically, they are now aware of the quality contained with the program assessment plan rather than knowing a plan exists with "x" number of outcomes, results, and action plans. And, faculty report that they have a better understanding of the expectations of the institution regarding student learning assessment and several of our specialized accredited programs feel this process has strengthened the efforts necessary to meet external mandates related to student learning assessment. There is clear alignment between the guiding principles suggested in the literature and the successful implementation of an ASL initiative at this regional comprehensive institution. These principles, as well as the experience of this IHE, provide a generalizable and practical model for other institutions who are interested in this approach to improving student learning.

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RUMINATE: INTEGRATING THE ARTS AND ASSESSMENT



RAIN Artist: Brooke Snow *Utah, USA*

"We gaze continually at the world and it grows dull in our perceptions. Yet seen from another's vantage point, as if new, it may still take the breath away."

-Alan Moore

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