



## Notes in Brief

The Assessment Leadership Institute (ALI) is a faculty designed, faculty taught, professional development program that provides academic units with the knowledge and skills to conduct effective program-level student learning assessment. This article reports on the creation of a faculty professional development program intent on changing the campus assessment culture from one of accountability to one of improvement.

The article discusses the reasons for creating the ALI, provides an overview of the program, reports initial outcome data, and offers advice for faculty implementing a similar program on their campus.

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# Faculty Professional Development in Student Learning Assessment: The Assessment Leadership Institute

**I**n an accountability culture, assessment is conducted to meet administrative and external demands (e.g., accreditation requirements). Ewell (2009) explains that in an accountability culture the focus is on conveying the most positive impression possible about the progress of student learning. When assessment efforts do occur they usually produce data of limited value for improving student learning (Ewell, 2009; Maki, 2010). Alternatively, in an improvement culture, faculty members approach assessment as a scholarly pursuit in which they create, implement, and use assessment plans to understand student learning progress, uncover and address challenges that prevent or inhibit student progress, and improve teaching and learning (Maki, 2010).

This article reports on the creation of a faculty professional development program intent on changing the campus assessment culture from one of accountability to one of improvement. The article discusses the reasons for designing the Assessment Leadership Institute (ALI), provides an overview of the institute, discusses early indicators of success, and offers advice for faculty implementing a similar program on their campus. Evidence suggests that the faculty professional development program has already altered the assessment practices of faculty at our university and we believe it is a program that can be adapted by any institution that desires to improve assessment of student learning.

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## Background

### Institutional Context

The University of Northern Colorado (UNC) is a public doctoral research university with approximately 12,000 students. UNC was founded as the State Normal School in 1889, and the tradition of preparing educational professionals continues to be an important part of the university's mission. UNC offers a comprehensive array of undergraduate majors and specialized graduate programs in disciplines including education, health sciences, and

performing arts. Approximately 35% of UNC undergraduates are first-generation students, 32% are Pell-eligible, and 25% are students of color. UNC employs 490 full-time and 280 part-time faculty to deliver over 100 undergraduate and 100 graduate majors. Class sizes are small, with most classes enrolling fewer than 40 students.

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UNC's Assessment Office was formed in 2002 in response to a recommendation from the university's regional accreditor. The office was charged with coordinating campus-wide assessment with a broadly-defined scope of responsibility. Resources and infrastructure to support the mission and purpose of the office were limited. In addition to the Director, the office was supported by two part-time graduate assistants and a small operating budget. Early efforts were directed toward implementing a centralized assessment management system. Professional development offerings were focused primarily on teaching faculty to use the new assessment technology. While these efforts generally increased documentation of assessment activities and outcomes, examination of assessment plans and reports emerging from these efforts suggested limited understanding of the purpose of assessment, poorly defined program learning outcomes, and an overuse of course grades and indirect measures for assessing learning. Faculty viewed assessment as an administrative task with limited value.

Since that time, the structure and role of the Assessment Office has evolved. Significant investments in personnel and infrastructure began in 2008, strengthening institutional capacity for effective engagement in assessment. Those changes are summarized in Table 1. Ongoing challenges to effective assessment remain, including lack of consistent policies and expectations regarding assessment, limited knowledge and/or lack of interest in implementing effective assessment practices at the program-level, some departmental cultures where faculty operate in isolation with minimal formal or informal structures for discussing curriculum and student learning, and lack of professional development that faculty find useful and meaningful.

**Table 1**  
*Changes to the Office of Assessment*

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- Academic program review process revised to increase the emphasis on student learning assessment.
  - Implementation of student services program review to increase focus on student learning and program improvement using standards developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.
  - Academic program-level data collection and reporting capabilities improved to ensure that meaningful, comparable, and accurate data are available to support assessment.
  - Reinstatement of a University Assessment Council to provide guidance and recommendations to the university community on assessment policy and practice.
  - Establishment of college assessment committees and program-review coordinators.
  - Allocation of resources to support six Faculty Assessment Fellows assigned to lead assessment efforts in their respective colleges.
  - Implementation of a training program on assessment for student services units.
  - Two new positions were created - an Assistant Director and a Survey Specialist.
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## Need for Professional Development

In 2011, UNC began the process of reaffirmation of accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), preparing for a campus visit from the HLC in March 2015. Like other accrediting agencies, the HLC has increased its requirements for institutions to demonstrate evidence of student learning. As is typical with many institutions, the approaching external accreditation process motivated UNC to examine its assessment practices and work to improve those practices. For example, in a survey of university and college assessment leaders, it was found that most assessment efforts are primarily motivated by external accreditation requirements (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Working with the University Assessment Council, the Director of Assessment at UNC began developing a strategy that would meet the accreditation criteria while also improving the quality and use of assessment to improve student learning. Key to this strategy was the appointment of six faculty to serve as Faculty Assessment Fellows (FAF) within their respective colleges. The FAF were recruited in 2011 to support and improve teaching and learning by increasing

understanding of the purposes and practice of assessment, fostering communication about effective teaching, identifying faculty development needs related to assessment, and providing consultation on the development and assessment of program-level student learning outcomes. The FAF disciplines included business, computer information systems, economics, education, geoscience, library sciences, music, and science education.

## Institutional Challenges and Opportunities

In anticipation of increasing institutional and program efforts to assess student learning, the FAF embarked on a listening tour with faculty across campus in order to identify challenges associated with student learning assessment. The listening tour was informally structured based on cultures within the respective colleges. Some FAF held open forums, others met with faculty individually or with departments, and one conducted an online survey. Regardless of the structure of meetings, all FAF drew from a set of 25 questions developed to guide conversations (See Table 2). The listening tour provided the FAF with a better understanding of faculty perceptions of student learning assessment, institutional challenges, and resources that might be needed for improving assessment. Based on the results of the listening tour, key challenges and opportunities for improvement were identified.

Table 2  
*Listening Tour Question Protocol*

<p><i>Sample questions about program-level student learning assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Does your program have a set of common learning goals for what students should know or be able to do by the time they graduate?</li> <li>▪ How often do faculty in your program get together formally and informally to discuss learning goals and/or student performance?</li> <li>▪ If your program doesn't have a set of common learning goals for students, why do you think this is so?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Sample questions about assessment practices</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Please describe how assessment is currently practiced in your program.</li> <li>▪ Do you think your department's current assessment processes are providing information that is useful for faculty? Why or why not?</li> <li>▪ What do you think are the biggest roadblocks to effective assessment in your department?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Sample questions about the value of assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is your opinion about the value of assessment in relation to teaching and learning?</li> <li>▪ How important do you think it is for academic programs to regularly collect information about what students are learning at the program level? How about at the course level?</li> <li>▪ What do you see as the role of assessment beyond accreditation compliance?</li> </ul>

**Challenges.** The most significant challenge was that faculty and the institution operated within an assessment culture focused more on accountability than improvement. This culture presented a central barrier to meaningful and effective use of assessment in support of teaching and learning. Many of the characteristics of an accountability culture described by Ewell (2009) were reflected in the results of the listening tour. For example, a belief that the purpose of assessment is to prove a program's effectiveness to external stakeholders can result in programs developing easily quantifiable outcomes and/or setting performance criteria low enough to ensure that students will consistently perform well. What we observed at UNC was many programs using outcomes and measures that almost guaranteed a result of students meeting or exceeding expectations every year. Another challenge with an accountability culture is a focus on reporting summative results with an emphasis on compliance, or at least the appearance of compliance. While nearly all programs at UNC regularly reported assessment results in annual reports and program review, many faculty viewed these reports as "data dumps" rather than meaningful information about what and how well students were learning. On the surface, a significant amount of assessment activity was occurring; however, very little of this work was producing actionable results that faculty found meaningful and useful for program improvement.

Another challenge was that many faculty lacked knowledge and skills in effective assessment practices at the program-level. While assessment of student learning occurred across all levels of the university at varying degrees of proficiency and enthusiasm, faculty

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were most comfortable with course-level assessment. Many academic programs struggled to articulate well-defined, program-level learning outcomes and to implement aspects of assessment such as curriculum mapping, collection of appropriate assessment data, and curricular and teaching changes based on data results. The listening tour revealed that faculty felt unprepared to conduct meaningful assessment, felt that they did not have the time to do assessment, and felt that assessment would negatively impact tenure and promotion decisions. These concerns are similar to those identified elsewhere in the literature on assessment (Beld, 2010; Ewell, 2002; Hutchings, 2010; Ryan, 1993).

A final challenge was a lack of faculty assessment leaders. The Director of Assessment and the FAF recognized the need for assessment advocates from within the faculty who could lead assessment efforts and gain faculty support for those efforts. The Director realized that the institution needed to find creative ways of supporting and rewarding faculty for addressing the challenges and improving assessment practices.

**Opportunities.** The listening tour indicated that major barriers for assessment efforts were faculty members’ lack of assessment knowledge and skills and the existing accountability culture. The FAF and the Director of Assessment decided to address these barriers by creating a faculty training program. We applied to participate in the Higher Learning Commission’s Academy for Assessment of Student Learning. Our participation was funded by the University Provost and President. Through participation in the Higher Learning Commission’s Academy for Assessment of Student Learning, we designed the Assessment Leadership Institute with the goal of achieving three short-term outcomes:

- Prepare UNC for re-accreditation
- Increase faculty knowledge and skills in assessment
- Improve faculty attitudes toward assessment

A longer-term outcome for the Assessment Leadership Institute and other university assessment activities is that these efforts will contribute to establishing a culture of assessment for improvement. In the remainder of this article, we describe the Assessment Leadership Institute, discuss preliminary indicators of its success, and provide advice for other institutions considering adopting similar professional development programs.

### The Assessment Leadership Institute

The Assessment Leadership Institute (ALI) is a two-year professional development program that provides faculty and academic units with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct effective program-level student learning assessment. In year 1, faculty participants attend a total of seven, two-hour workshops. Workshops occur monthly. In year 2, faculty participants complete their work started in year 1 to create or revise a program-level assessment plan, conduct an assessment project, and present their project at the UNC Assessment Fair. The year 1 and year 2 activities are outlined in Table 3. To date, 25 programs and approximately 70 faculty members have participated in the ALI.

**Table 3**  
*Outline of Assessment Leadership Institute*

Year	Major Activity
Year 1	Participants attend the following workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop 1: Introduction to Assessment and Institute</li> <li>• Workshop 2: Program Mission Statement</li> <li>• Workshop 3: Program Student Learning Outcomes</li> <li>• Workshop 4: Curriculum Mapping</li> <li>• Workshop 5: Assessment Methods and Performance Criteria</li> <li>• Workshop 6: Data Collection</li> <li>• Workshop 7: Data Analysis and Using Results</li> </ul>
Year 2	Participants complete three tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finish creating/revising assessment plan</li> <li>• Conduct an assessment project</li> <li>• Present assessment project at the UNC Assessment Fair</li> </ul>

## Year 1

The goals of the ALI workshops are to increase faculty knowledge about program-level assessment, improve skills for creating and implementing a program-level assessment plan, and improve faculty attitudes toward assessment. During initial planning, the assessment cycle served as a conceptual framework around which to organize the workshop topics so that the individual workshops connected to and built upon each other. Figure 1 illustrates the framework for the ALI. Each workshop focuses on a single topic connected to the assessment cycle. There are 30 to 60 minutes of lecture and 60 to 90 minutes of hands-on activities and group discussion in each workshop. Participants from the same program work in teams during group activities to apply the workshop concepts and start the process of creating or revising an assessment plan. The text *Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education* (Allen, 2004) serves as the primary source for readings assigned prior to each workshop; however, additional readings from research articles, books, and white papers are also assigned. Participants complete homework assignments in the weeks between the workshops that both emphasize the concepts presented and prepare participants for the next workshop. The homework serves as a way for participants to remain engaged with assessment work and to involve the other faculty in their programs.

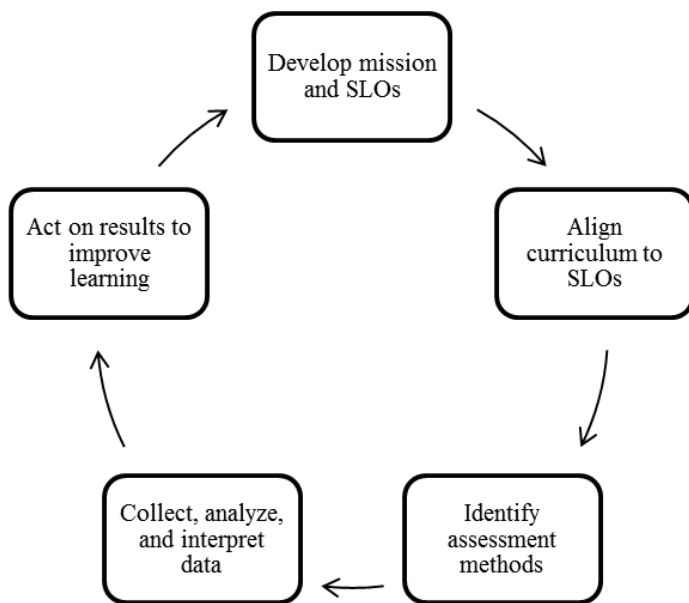


Figure 1. Assessment Cycle Framework for the ALI.

## Year 2

We are interested in the impact of the training after the workshops end, so year 2 of the ALI is a transition year for programs to apply what they learned in year 1, with some accountability measures built in to encourage ongoing work toward improving assessment practice. During year 2, participants work with the other faculty from their programs on three activities. First, the participants finish creating or revising an assessment plan. Second, participants develop and implement an assessment project. Assessment projects address real issues, questions, or challenges that the participants' program has related to the assessment of student learning. For example, a program might develop and pilot a rubric for scoring student performance data for a specific student learning outcome, or a program could develop and implement a process of communicating their assessment results to stakeholders. Third, participants present their assessment project at the annual UNC Assessment Fair.

## Characteristics of the Assessment Leadership Institute

There are six characteristics that we believe make the ALI an effective faculty development program. These characteristics represent a structured approach for introducing program-level assessment into a university environment.

### Characteristic 1: Role and Focus of Assessment

The goals of the ALI workshops are to increase faculty knowledge about program-level assessment, improve skills for creating and implementing a program-level assessment plan, and improve faculty attitudes toward assessment.

The feedback from the listening tour indicated most faculty members believed that the goal of program assessment activities was to satisfy external accreditation standards or for accountability purposes to judge individual faculty performance. Few faculty members thought that the goal of assessment was to improve student learning. We wanted to promote the concept that the main goal of assessment is to improve student learning; therefore, the ALI curriculum is intentionally designed to emphasize that the purpose of assessment was for program improvement with the intent of enhancing student learning.

A second ALI consideration that was influenced by the listening tour is the role of grades in the assessment process. Some faculty members equated assessment with course grades, thus implying that final course grades are adequate measures for assessing program learning outcomes. The ALI emphasizes that final course grades are not adequate measures of the students' mastery of program-level student learning outcomes. This is an important distinction because it raises the participants' focus from a course-level view of the curriculum to an integrated program-level perspective. This perspective is necessary to affect program improvement.

### Characteristic 2: Developed by Faculty for Faculty

The FAF developed the ALI goals, curriculum, and teaching methods and delivered the workshops. As local faculty, we were aware of the political environment and personalities of the key stakeholders on campus. We also understood the unique disciplinary challenges and approaches to assessment that ALI participants encountered because we were from a range of disciplines (business, computer information systems, economics, education, geoscience, library sciences, music, and science education). Our knowledge of institutional and disciplinary contexts helped us interact with participating programs and faculty. Our model of a locally developed, faculty-led program provided us with more credibility and access than would be afforded to an external consultant who provides short-term training. External consultants would have difficulty gaining our level of understanding of the political environment and key stakeholders.

### Characteristic 3: Faculty Teams

Our model of a locally developed, faculty-led program provided us with more credibility and access than would be afforded to an external consultant who provides short-term training.

It is not feasible for all faculty members in a program to attend the ALI workshops; therefore, each participating program assigns at least two faculty members as a permanent team for all workshop and follow-up activities. This requirement was put in place because consistent team members can be more cohesive, effective, and exhibit better performance than a single participant or a rotating group of individuals (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009; Dineen, 2005). In addition, a consistent team brings different perspectives and skill-sets to the discussion. Finally, by requiring permanent teams, inter- and intra-group relations formed during the workshops, thus improving the discussion and overall group dynamics (Chang, 2011). It is important to note that we allow flexibility in the faculty team make-up because many of the participating programs only consist of three or four faculty members. While permanent teams are ideal, they are not always feasible.

Another component of the faculty team model is that it incorporates aspects of a train-the-trainer model. In the train-the-trainer model, individuals attend training for a content area and are expected to train other individuals on that content. The model is an efficient, cost-effective method to disseminate information and build a group of local experts within the organization (LaVigna, Christian, & Willis, 2005; Suhrheinrich, 2011). In the ALI, a faculty team attends workshops to learn about assessment and then is expected to disseminate what they learned with the rest of the faculty members in their program. With this model, each

faculty participant attending the ALI workshops becomes a local resource for assessment within their respective programs. To support the train-the-trainer model, ALI workshop lectures, discussions, and homework stress that assessment should be a team endeavor and that participants should distribute the responsibility for assessment across the faculty members in their program. In this way we increase the reach of assessment participation within the university.

#### Characteristic 4: Homework Requirement

Required homework is a key component of the ALI model. The homework assignments are designed to relate to the content in each individual workshop, prepare participants for the next workshop, serve as a foundation for the program's assessment plan, and engage the program faculty members not attending the ALI in assessment work. Close coordination between the FAF teaching each workshop ensures that the homework assignments are connected to the workshop in which the homework was assigned and helps prepare participants for the next workshop. For example, the homework assignment for the mission statement workshop has participants develop or revise their mission statement, which was what they learned in the mission statement workshop. Also, that homework assignment prepares participants for the next workshop, developing student learning outcomes, by having participants brainstorm the learning goals for their program.

The homework assignments encourage involvement by the rest of the faculty members in participating programs who are not members of the ALI team. The intent is to initiate the process of culture change and to distribute the responsibility of assessment to all program faculty members. Table 4 outlines the homework requirements for the ALI workshops.

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Table 4  
*ALI Homework*

Workshop	Homework
Workshop 1: Introduction to Assessment and Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview faculty about perceptions of the program's current mission/purpose</li> </ul>
Workshop 2: Program Mission Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revise/write a program mission statement</li> <li>Create a plan to work with faculty on developing a mission</li> <li>Reflect on challenges encountered when writing the mission statement.</li> </ul>
Workshop 3: Program Student Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write 3-5 SLOs for the program</li> <li>Create a plan for working with faculty on developing SLOs.</li> <li>Upload program syllabi to SharePoint to prepare for Curriculum Mapping</li> </ul>
Workshop 4: Curriculum Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a curriculum map for the program, mapping 3-5 SLOs to key courses in the program</li> <li>Reflect on courses that do not support any SLOs and reflect on SLOs not supported by any courses.</li> </ul>
Workshop 5: Assessment Methods and Performance Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify direct methods and indirect methods for all of the program SLOs</li> <li>Identify performance criteria for all of the program's SLOs</li> </ul>
Workshop 6: Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a data collection plan for 3-5 SLOs.</li> </ul>
Workshop 7: Data Analysis and Using Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design a program data analysis and reporting data results plan</li> </ul>

## Characteristic 5: Participant Support

Based on our listening tour, we identified other areas of support that faculty members needed to sustain and encourage their assessment work while participating in the ALI. We provide the following resources and incentives to each participating academic department:

- One Faculty Assessment Fellow is assigned to each participating program to provide consultations and mentoring during and outside of the ALI workshops. During the ALI workshops, the FAF work with the faculty team on the workshop activities. Outside of the ALI workshops, the FAF answer questions, help with homework assignments, and deliver mini-workshops to the participants' program. Each program is assigned a secondary FAF to ensure availability in the event of scheduling conflicts and to provide a second opinion should the need arise. The consultations with FAF are particularly helpful when faculty teams encounter situations in their programs that they are not prepared to address.
- All participants receive a resource notebook containing the workshop slides, homework assignments, and external readings for all the ALI sessions. These materials are also posted electronically for participants to share with other faculty in their programs. Each participant is given a textbook, *Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education* (Allen, 2004).
- Participating programs receive \$2,500 of unencumbered funds: one-half at the start of the program and one-half after its completion. This is a significant amount of money in our cash-strapped university environment, and serves as a strong motivator. Participating programs are encouraged to spend these funds on assessment related activities such as training, brown bag seminars, etc.

Initial results from our data collection suggest the ALI is contributing to increased faculty skills and knowledge.

## Characteristic 6: Year 2 Activities

A final characteristic of the ALI model is that programs are expected to complete additional tasks for a year after the workshops end. To receive the second half of the incentive funds, during year 2, programs revise and submit an assessment plan, conduct an assessment project, and present their plan at the Assessment Fair. The intent of the year 2 requirement is to encourage the programs to replicate the train-the-trainer model within their respective programs and involve more faculty members in assessment activities. Ideally, this will contribute to our larger goal of changing program culture and will help embed assessment into regular departmental practices.

### Early Indicators of Success

We are collecting data to understand the impact of the ALI. Participants complete pre- and post-surveys and short, open-ended evaluations of each workshop. Each program provides its assessment plan prior to participation in the ALI and a revised plan created by the end of its participation in the ALI. Data collected from individual faculty members are confidential. Assessment plans are not anonymous. Early results of our assessment of the ALI are promising. In the first cohort, all nine programs finished the first year of workshops and turned in pre- and post-assessment plans. For the second cohort, seven of the initial eight programs completed participation. Cohort 1 and 2 programs completed assessment projects and presented at the annual Assessment Fair. The third cohort, which includes nine programs, is currently participating in year 1 workshops.

### ALI Goal 1: Prepare UNC for Re-Accreditation

Participation in the HLC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning and the subsequent implementation of the ALI were instrumental in preparing UNC for its recent decennial accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission. Faculty involvement in assessment was cited as an institutional strength in the self-study, in part due to the



implementation of the ALI. At the time of the accreditation visit in March 2015, 25 programs from approximately 45% of academic schools or departments at UNC had participated in or completed the ALI. Sixty-four faculty members had actively participated in ALI workshops (about 13% of full-time faculty), and their work in their departments increased the number of faculty involved in discussing assessment and student learning on a regular basis. Although a final action from the Higher Learning Commission had not been determined at the time of publication, the ALI was viewed positively by the HLC site team, who commented on the number of faculty who knew about and referenced the Assessment Leadership Institute, including faculty who spoke at an open forum with the review team.

## **ALI Goal 2: Increase Faculty Skills and Knowledge in Assessment**

Initial results from our data collection suggest the ALI is contributing to increased faculty skills and knowledge. For example, 25 participants have completed post evaluations and 24 of the participants reported increased understanding of assessment in general while 14 reported that participation in the ALI had improved how their programs assess student learning. Pre- and post-assessment plans from cohort 1 have been evaluated and all programs have improved their assessment plan. In the future, annual assessment reports will be analyzed to evaluate the long-term impact of participation in the ALI and to determine whether the assessment plans developed by participating programs are implemented and used for program improvements.

**Initial feedback from participants suggests the ALI has positively affected faculty attitudes.**

## **ALI Goal 3: Improve Faculty Attitudes toward Assessment**

Initial feedback from participants suggests the ALI has positively affected faculty attitudes. Of the 25 participants who completed post evaluations, 24 reported that participation in the ALI increased their confidence to conduct assessment. This is further supported through written feedback on questionnaires. Anonymous representative comments showing a positive attitude toward assessment activities include:

- “This is really exciting because we now know how to identify where and why there are gaps in our program.”
- “I’m recognizing the benefit of these ‘formal’ processes...I’m recognizing how this is an iterative process.”
- “[The ALI is] helping me better articulate what we are doing in our program.”

We are collecting additional pre- and post-attitude survey data from participants to triangulate these preliminary results.

## **Long-Term Goal: Establish Culture of Improvement**

One of the long-term goals of the ALI is that it will help create a culture of improvement of student learning on campus. One component of a culture of improvement is that assessment is a shared activity across faculty members in a program. For many departments at UNC, assessment has been viewed as an administrative reporting activity assigned to the chair or to a single faculty member. For this reason, we designed the ALI so that all faculty members in participating programs are engaged, not just those attending workshops. We collected data to determine how participants who attended the workshops planned to engage other faculty in their respective programs in assessment activities. Some participants described how they might discuss topics from a specific session without specifying when these discussions would occur. Representative comments include:

- “Work with other faculty to think through and articulate our program’s mission and goals.”
- “Plan with faculty what implementation results reporting/sharing and action might look like and get their help/buy-in in figuring it out.”
- “I could help colleagues in my department to identify how they can write SLOs that would hook into program-level goals.”

These written reflections illustrate how ALI participants are beginning to expand assessment activities to include other faculty members in their program. We believe the activities described by the ALI participants are early indicators that a culture of improvement is starting to develop.

- “Will get all faculty together to begin a discussion of individual course expectations that match program expectations. Are the program goals and SLOs reflected in the whole set of courses offered?”

Many participants, however, described plans for initiating discussion of session content through formal departmental meetings and retreats:

- “I can use some of the discussion prompts in our planned faculty meeting focused on assessment.”
- “This class discussion will inform our summer ‘retreat’ with faculty.”
- “The ALI session #3 provided us with an opportunity to brainstorm our student learning outcomes. We found that our brainstormed ideas fit well with [our accreditor’s standards]. We will meet during the week of December 16 and during the week of January 6 to discuss begin the more applicable task of Homework Assignment #3.”
- “We will hold two faculty meetings in early spring 2014 to revise our current SLOs. These meetings will be on Monday January 20th, and Monday January 27th. We will order lunch to motivate faculty to attend.”
- “We will host several catered breakfasts during the spring semester to gather faculty feedback on the program SLOs. We then plan to reach consensus on program-level SLOs during our retreat that takes place the week before the fall semester starts.”

These written reflections illustrate how ALI participants are beginning to expand assessment activities to include other faculty members in their program. We believe the activities described by the ALI participants are early indicators that a culture of improvement is starting to develop.

### **Advice for Other Institutions Interested in Adopting the ALI model**

After facilitating the ALI for three years, we have learned several lessons about the design and implementation of professional development for faculty. In this section we provide recommendations to other institutions that want to implement faculty-led professional development.

#### **Instructional Team**

- The make-up of the instructional team is an important consideration. The interdisciplinary nature of our team strengthens the program by bringing different experiences, expertise, and skill-sets. Ensure that the team is made up mostly of faculty members so that they can relate to the needs and concerns of participants.
- Instructional team members must be assessment advocates. Avoid having individuals unwillingly appointed to the team, especially if they do not care about assessment. This not only wastes a team slot but could also impair the effectiveness of the group.
- While expertise is not essential, enthusiasm and interest in assessment are important. We spent time reading intensively and attended conferences to develop the necessary knowledge to create and deliver the program.
- Spend time building trust among the instruction team. We worked together for one year prior to designing the ALI. There can, and will, be disagreement among team members, but there also needs to be respect for each other and for the process. This level of cooperation does not happen overnight.
- Designate one team member for administrative duties. This would include communicating with participants about deadlines, distributing printed materials, maintaining online materials, selecting and reserving the venue, etc. Failure to do this increases the likelihood of miscommunication and workshop oversights.

Collaborative curriculum design by those teaching the workshops provides structure and predictability to the professional development and keeps participants in an organized, year-long conversation about assessment.

## Collaborative Curriculum Design

Collaborative curriculum design by those teaching the workshops provides structure and predictability to the professional development and keeps participants in an organized, year-long conversation about assessment.

### Homework

Assign homework after each session to ensure that participants are working with the material and remaining engaged in the weeks between meetings. This homework should be “graded” by the faculty member who taught the session. The feedback keeps participants on track and helps the instructional team know when participants did not understand the material.

Structure homework assignments so that multiple members of the participants’ home programs must be involved. This increases involvement within the participants’ departments and communicates that assessment is everyone’s job, not an activity to be completed by one person in the program.

### Assessment

It is important to establish an evaluation process to provide feedback to participants concerning what is going well or not. To do this, data should be collected from participants.

### Continuing Work & Support

Design a program with year 2 activities required of all participants. This helps ensure that the information presented in year 1 is applied, and provides participants more time to continue developing and implementing a viable assessment plan. During the second year, consider meeting with participating programs for lunch or coffee so that they continue to feel connected to the instructional team. Also create opportunities for participants to share their assessment projects and activities with colleagues on campus (we do this through an annual assessment fair). This provides recognition and affirmation that the work is valued by the university and provides another venue for disseminating best practices across campus.

Create an on-line FAQ document so that participants feel their questions are being considered by the instructors and answered in a timely manner. A side benefit of this is the FAQ becomes part of the infrastructure of the program which can be made available to the rest of the campus as the program continues.

## Looking Forward

The Assessment Leadership Institute is a faculty-led assessment model designed to facilitate how faculty conduct, perceive, and discuss student learning assessment. The initial data provide evidence of the success of the ALI through the improvement of the quality and completeness of participants’ assessment plans and the positive impact of the ALI on the assessment culture in their programs. This model offers a framework that may be adapted and implemented on other campuses.

The next task for the Faculty Assessment Fellows is to complete the research project exploring the effectiveness of the ALI. These results will help us to determine which aspects of the ALI are most valuable for faculty, and allow us to explore opportunities for providing condensed models of the ALI in the future. In addition, it is time to reassess campus faculty members, perhaps through a new listening tour, so that we can offer needed, continuing professional development around student learning assessment on our campus.

**These results will help us to determine which aspects of the ALI are most valuable for faculty, and allow us to explore opportunities for providing condensed models of the ALI in the future.**

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