

Book Review

Real-Time Student Assessment: Meeting the Imperative for Improved Time to Degree, Closing the Gap, and Assuring Student Competencies for the 21st Century Needs

Peggy L. Maki

Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2017,
214 pp. ISBN-10: 1620364883. Paperback \$29.00

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In *Real-Time Student Assessment*, Peggy Maki challenges us to reframe our assessment commitment considering the needs of currently enrolled students. Maki's leadership and expertise in higher-education assessment is well known and her call for assessment practices that help current students attain their degrees is worthy of the attention of everyone involved in student-learning assessment. As George Kuh notes in the foreword for this book, her call to action is "just in time" to inform current discussions about how to gather more actionable assessment data and it is also just the beginning. The guidelines Maki provides in this book are valuable insights that will inevitably spur conversations about how student-learning assessment data can be used to bolster the achievement of currently enrolled students.

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In this book, Maki introduces "real-time assessment" as a distinct approach to student outcomes assessment in which data is collected soon after matriculation and periodically during a degree program. The results are analyzed and interpreted immediately to enable timely actions and interventions to address the observed weaknesses of the students who were assessed. Maki contrasts real-time assessment with the more common "point-in-time" assessment practices in which student assessment of outcomes is conducted at or near program completion, observing the achievements of those who have persisted in their degree, and examining the data after those students have graduated, with the purpose of making programmatic changes to benefit future students.

Maki calls for an expanded commitment to real-time assessment, seeing the potential it has to address critical issues in higher education such as low levels of degree attainment and differential attainment rates across demographic groups. There is an urgency to her call; Maki's view is that responding *now* to demographic changes and increasing national demand for 21st century skills is imperative. Maki's call expresses a concern for equity and a desire to ensure that American higher education delivers

on its promise for all admitted students. This urgent and aspirational tone is compelling, especially for readers who view Maki as an authority in the field and recognize the value of her perspective on future directions.

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The call to action in this book is accompanied by Maki's sage advice for how to go about real-time assessment. Unlike Maki's book *Assessing for Learning* (2010), this book is not a step-by-step handbook with instructive guidance and resources. In contrast, this text is an expression of Maki's vision for real-time assessment. She sees that the necessary groundwork for real-time assessment of learning is in place with frameworks of learning outcomes and their associated measures already integrated at many institutions. Readers will be pleased that the hard work they have done to establish learning outcomes frameworks can serve as the foundation for real-time learning assessment. Maki suggests the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP, www.aacu.org/leap) outcomes and the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP, degreeprofile.org) as valuable resources that enable the early identification of specific achievement gaps that may prevent certain groups of students from achieving a college degree. Given these frameworks, Maki sets out guidelines for what will be needed to generate real-time student assessment data. She reviews technologies available to make real-time assessment work feasible, and suggests strategies for how institutions might begin shifting their assessment practices to benefit current students. Examples illustrating the concepts, technologies, and strategies are provided to give ideas and demonstrate possibilities.

Although the twin purposes of the book are intertwined in each chapter, the beginning chapters focus on providing evidence that supports Maki's call for a commitment to real-time assessment and the later chapters focus on providing guidance and identifying resources to enable and support real-time assessment. The first chapter sets the tone and provides the context for the rest of the book. Chapter 1 is a straight-forward presentation of data about how student demographics are changing and how degree attainment rates vary by demographic groups. Chapter 1 ends with a review of why college degrees are so important to individuals and society and reviews the national and economic demands for them. In Chapter 2, the need for real-time assessment becomes clearer as Maki presents facts showing the increasingly varied paths students take to their degrees, along with the questions this trend raises about the equitability of degree outcomes given the limitations of the credit system. She presents the outcomes-based initiatives in

higher education as movements that can validate the varied pathways students take and help ensure that each one leads to success. In Chapter 3, Maki explains the five learner-centered commitments that institutions make when setting out to adopt and integrate an outcomes framework. The commitments described here are consistent with those called for by accreditors and other advocates of current assessment practices. Readers will find these commitments familiar and be challenged to consider how these commitments, when fully integrated, form a necessary foundation for real-time assessment. Chapter 4 is where readers will find the six principles Maki has insightfully identified to support effective real-time assessment. This chapter also includes institutional examples to illustrate these principles and ends with a helpful chart comparing the who, when, and how of real-time and point-in-time assessment approaches. In Chapter 5, Maki overviews five types of academic technologies that support real-time assessment. I suspect that many readers will already be familiar with the types of technology reviewed here and will find the chapter valuable for how it clarifies the feasibility of the vision Maki has for real-time assessment. It is hard for me to imagine real-time assessment being possible without these technologies. Chapter 6 provides ideas for how to focus real-time assessment when comprehensive implementation on a large scale seems impractical. I found this last chapter most helpful because the ideas for how to narrow down assessment efforts could be helpful for anyone trying to figure out where to start in improving assessment

References

- Maki, P. L. (2017). *Real-time student assessment: Meeting the imperative for improved time to degree, closing the opportunity gap, and assuring student competencies for 21st century needs*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
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practice at an institution.

What I love about this book is that it brings the conversation about learning assessment into context with the conversation about graduation and degree quality. This connection is much needed and drawing attention to it is valuable for the scholarship of assessment. I am energized by the idea of institutions developing real-time assessment data because I readily see how it would create a situation in which assessment can fulfill its promise to be the powerful learning-enhancing tool it could be. I agree with Maki that the audience for the book is anyone involved in higher-education assessment, including academic technology specialists and students. I suspect that institutional leaders, administrators, and faculty leaders will be most interested in the book and will share the book to initiate and frame campus discussions about how to respond to Maki's compelling, insightful, and urgent call for real-time student assessment.