

FROM THE EDITOR

Sharpening the Ax

Abraham Lincoln said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the ax.” His wise words apply to many endeavors, including higher education assessment. Faculty, assessment practitioners and scholars, student affairs educators, and administrative leaders alike should dedicate time and effort to ensuring their assessment tools are “sharp”. By using a sharp ax - or in this case appropriate methods and measures - decision makers will have the necessary and accurate information to improve student learning. The contributions presented in this issue of *Research & Practice in Assessment* represent a sharpening of assessment axes and demonstrate important advancements in the practice and scholarship of assessment.

The Summer/Fall 2018 issue of RPA includes five peer-reviewed articles that exhibit the development and use of assessment measures. Pastor, Ong, and Orem use latent class analysis to categorize students’ civic engagement activities as part of a general education curriculum. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is the focus of two articles in this issue. First, Rocconi and Gonyea examine effect sizes within the context of NSSE offering users of this instrument recommendations for interpreting effect sizes in the context of the survey. Later in this issue, Fosnacht and Gonyea use Generalizability Theory to examine the dependability of NSSE Engagement Indicators and consider the sample size needed to draw appropriate conclusions. Rincon and Castillo-Montoya offer a qualitative study demonstrating how student affairs graduate students learn assessment best practices and apply those skills through a service-learning course. Wiens and Gromlich examine the use of the Video Assessment of Interactions and Learning (VAIL) to assess learning in teacher preparation programs and offer recommendations for utilizing this instrument.

Beyza Asku Dunya reviews *Demonstrating Results: Using Outcome Measurement in Your Library*, by Rhea Joyce Rubin, a text that provides guidance and best practices for assessment student learning outcomes foster by programs with university libraries. This issue also includes a Notes in Brief by Blumberg highlighting two assessment practices – anticipating use of assessment results and identifying academic bottlenecks – that are often underused, but can be very effective.

I hope this issue of *Research & Practice in Assessment* will serve to sharpen your approach to assessment practice and scholarship.

Regards,

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