

FROM THE EDITOR

Finishing Strong

“Finish strong” is an acclamation shared by many distance runners, and likely athletes of any sport. The words encourage the individual to complete the race (or competition or game) with tenacity and vitality. This special issue of Research & Practice in Assessment affords me a strong finish as I conclude my tenure as RPA editor.

Research & Practice in Assessment would not exist without the dedication, effort, and expertise, of many volunteers. In particular I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Editorial Staff members for their tireless efforts in producing each issue and promoting the journal to assessment and higher education professionals around the world. My sincere appreciation extends to the RPA Review Board members who share their expertise and talent to advance the scholarship of assessment and the RPA Editorial Board who provide direction and support for the journal. RPA is made possible through the support of the Virginia Assessment Group and I would also like to thank the VAG Executive Board members with whom I have had the pleasure of serving.

I am delighted to present this special issue of Research & Practice in Assessment dedicated to learning improvement. The invited articles in this issue, under the leadership of guest editor, Keston Fulcher, represent a commitment of thought, action, and reflection to improve student learning. I welcome Keston Fulcher, Executive Director of the Center for Assessment and Research Studies at James Madison University and former RPA editor, who will introduce this special issue.



Regards,

Katie Busby

University of Mississippi

LETTER TO READERS

In April 2017, James Madison University and the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College hosted higher education experts in Washington D. C. The Summit's purpose was to explore assessment's role in learning improvement. At the outset, we endeavored to provide resources for the higher education community including videos and manuscripts. With respect to manuscripts, RPA editor Katie Busby graciously partnered with us to produce this special issue on learning improvement.

In the first article Jeanne Horst and Allison Ames provide more context regarding the need for the summit, the summit events, emerging themes, and lessons learned. In the next article Charlie Blaich and Kathy Wise provide a different type of overview. They re-visit the question: Why so much data collection and so little use in higher education?

The next articles provide ideas and tools to promote learning improvement. Cynthia Crimmins and Michael Reder speak to why assessment professionals should work with faculty developers. Kristen Smith, Megan Good, and Natasha Jankowski introduce and describe a new type of higher education position: a learning improvement facilitator. Monica Stitt-Bergh, Jillian Kinzie, and I argue that higher education is accustomed to telling learning stories that emphasize assessment. We suggest a different narrative: a learning improvement story.

Finally, Diane Lending, Jeremy Ezell, Jeff May, Tom Dillon, and I share a real-life example of a high-quality learning improvement report. The piece illustrates how an educational team partnered to create a much more effective learning environment. As a result, students' interview skills improved dramatically (three standard deviations) from one year to the next.

As a concluding note, I hope this issue broadens readers' conceptualizations of assessment and improvement. I encourage readers to think more broadly than just assessment. As Megan Good once said, "Assessment is not the answer to the lack-of-learning-improvement problem." Let's start thinking about learning systems and how teams of professionals – faculty, educational developers, administrators, and assessment practitioners - can navigate and improve them.



Regards,

Keston H. Fulcher

James Madison University