

COMMISSION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Thursday, September 12, 2013

PUBLIC SQUARE A: **Assessment of Learning Outcomes: An Update on Emerging Practices**

Staff Recommendation For information only.

Background This dialog represents the last of a three-part discussion of the *Quality* section of the Commission’s strategic plan, *Reaching Higher, Achieving More* (RHAM).

Consideration of the *Quality* section of RHAM began at the June meeting, when the Commission had an opportunity to discuss various assessment-related projects and initiatives of the Association of American Colleges and University (AAC&U). The Commission heard from three public campuses that were involved in these AAC&U efforts – IUPUI, Ivy Tech Indianapolis, and Purdue University North Central. Dr. Carol Geary Schneider, President of AAC&U, also made a presentation to the Commission at its June meeting.

At its August meeting, the Commission focused on approaches recognized by the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) to assess learning outcomes. The VSA is referenced in the *Quality* section of RHAM as one way of using comparable assessments to gauge student learning. The August discussion began with a presentation by Dr. Alex McCormick, Director of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and was followed by a panel discussion that included representatives from Indiana Wesleyan University and Indiana State University.

The Commission and the State have paid increasing attention to learning outcomes in recent years, beginning in 2009 with Indiana’s involvement in the three-state Tuning pilot project and continuing right through the 2012 and 2013 sessions of the General Assembly, which resulted in the passage of significant legislation. In 2012, a set of competencies and learning outcomes were identified for the legislatively mandated Statewide Transfer General Education Core, and within the past two months, the Commission and the institutions began work on identifying competencies and learning outcomes for a set of ten program areas, as part of the Single Articulation Pathways legislation passed earlier this year. As this work proceeds, attention is now turning to ways of assessing learning outcomes, so stakeholders can be confident that students are mastering the required competencies and outcomes.

The purpose of this discussion is to hear some of the latest thinking and promising innovations on learning outcomes assessment, so that the Commission can have a richer context for future directions in the area of learning outcomes assessment. To that end, the Commission will hear from a nationally recognized expert in this area, Dr. George Kuh, who is a co-principal investigator, along with Dr. Stan Ikenberry, with the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, a leading source of information on this topic.

Supporting Document

- (1) George Kuh Bio
- (2) National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment: Making Learning Outcomes Usable & Transparent

George Kuh

George D. Kuh is Adjunct Professor of Education Policy at the University of Illinois and Chancellor's Professor of Higher Education Emeritus at Indiana University Bloomington. He currently directs the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment co-located at Indiana University and the University of Illinois. Founding director of the widely-used National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), George has written extensively about student engagement, assessment, institutional improvement, and college and university cultures, and consulted with more than 350 colleges and universities in the U.S. and abroad. His recent publications include *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* (2005, 2010), *Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions, and Recommendations* (2007), *High-Impact Practices* (2008), and *Ensuring Quality & Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale* (2013). He's been awarded seven honorary degrees and in 2001, he received Indiana University's prestigious Tracy Sonneborn Award for a distinguished career of teaching and research. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) named its award for Outstanding Contribution to Literature and Research after him in 2011. George earned the B.A. at Luther College, M.S. at the St. Cloud State University, and Ph.D. at the University of Iowa.

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

Making Learning Outcomes Usable & Transparent

About NILOA

NILOA's primary mission is to champion and support efforts by colleges and universities to obtain, use and share evidence of student learning to strengthen student attainment and improve undergraduate education.

- Founded in 2008, NILOA is based at the University of Illinois and Indiana University. George Kuh and Stan Ikenberry serve as co-principal investigators. In addition, NILOA works with several senior scholars including Jillian Kinzie, Pat Hutchings, Tim Cain, and Peter Ewell.
- Influential thought leaders and heads of national higher education associations serve as members of the NILOA Advisory Panel and oversee our work.
- NILOA is currently supported by Lumina Foundation for Education, The Teagle Foundation, and the College of Education at the University of Illinois. Past funders include the Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- While NILOA has a strong record of accomplishment, it seeks to expand its impact going forward as much remains to do in order to realize the promise of student learning outcomes assessment as a means to improve student and institutional performance.

NILOA's Reach

NILOA has become the leading resource on learning outcome assessment at the collegiate level. The primary communication link with campuses is through a rich, well-developed and continuously updated website and a monthly electronic newsletter.

- On average, over 7,000 individuals visit the NILOA website monthly seeking information, tools, and other resources. This is a 40% increase over previous years. One third of these are regular return visitors, but nearly two out of three are new to the site, and so the level of use is expanding. While most users come from the US, NILOA's reach extends to over 120 countries/territories.
- The NILOA newsletter alerts over 6,000 college presidents, provosts, institutional research directors, faculty, and assessment professionals to new resources, best practices, and fresh thinking about assessment and related topics.

NILOA has addressed the challenge of making learning outcomes visible and useful to the public. A Transparency Framework was created for institutions to use in advancing this work. The Voluntary Framework for Accountability being developed by the American Association of Community Colleges has adopted NILOA's Transparency Framework and thus far over 30 institutions are independently using the Transparency Framework to modify their websites.

- NILOA engaged in an evaluation of the Voluntary System of Accountability student learning outcomes pilot project on the College Portrait website resulting in the evaluation report, *Transparency and Accountability: An Evaluation of the VSA College Portrait Pilot*. NILOA worked with the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, a consortium of Big Ten universities plus the University of Chicago, on mapping institutional assessment practices and communicating said practices to multiple audiences based around key questions of interest.
- NILOA is shaping and advancing the student learning outcomes agenda in American higher education at the national level through dialogue at national conferences of academic leaders and faculty members from public and independent colleges and universities, community colleges, state governing and planning boards, regional accrediting bodies and many others. NILOA staff have presented or appeared at the following meetings.

NILOA's Focus

NILOA is committed to creating and disseminating tools, resources, and perspectives useful to campuses as they assemble and use evidence of student learning to improve academic performance and respond to calls for greater accountability to society.

- **NILOA Reports** provide the first systematic examination of assessment on a national scale since 1999.

More Than You Think, Less Than We Need: Assessment in Higher Education reported findings from the first national study about learning outcomes assessment at two- and four-year institutions;

Down and In: Assessment Practices at the Program Level summarizes learning outcomes assessment at the program level where improvements in teaching and learning must occur;

Exploring the Landscape: What Institutional Websites Reveal About Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Activities summarizes the state of institutional web page transparency;

Perspectives from Campus Leaders on the Current State of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment shares the views of campus leaders and others on the current state of quality assessment;

Connecting State Policies on Assessment with Institutional Assessment Activity compares NILOA survey findings with a NCHEMS study on state policies on student learning outcomes assessment;

Making Student Learning Evidence Transparent: The State of the Art examines the impact of national transparency initiatives, the display or assessment results, and their subsequent use by institutions; and

Using Assessment Results: Promising Practices of Institutions That Do It Well presents findings from NILOA's nine case studies regarding using information from student learning to improve.

- **NILOA has engaged the nation's leading scholars and leaders to address challenging contemporary issues.**
18 Occasional Papers to date examine the current state-of-the-art in assessing learning outcomes in American higher education.

NILOA's Future

Much remains to be done. Looking to the future NILOA aspires to expand its impact through advocacy and capacity building. NILOA intends:

- To continue to track institutional engagement with the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) and begin examining DQP in relation to Tuning efforts.
- NILOA has a contract with Jossey-Bass to produce a book on the changing nature of assessment in an effort to reframe the national conversation about assessment from compliance to use.
- NILOA has added Facebook and Twitter accounts which has increased by 40% the number of visitors to our website, now about 7,200 a month.
- Future occasional papers include how to roll assessment results from the program level up to the institutional level, the role of faculty and academic freedom in assessment, competency-based education and its implications for assessment, and the relationship between Tuning and the DQP

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

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