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Jaclyn Zacharias, Nancy Ackerman, and Christine S. Yates

Capella University is an accredited online university with a mission to extend access to high-quality bachelor's, master's, specialist, doctoral, and certificate programs for adults who seek to maximize their personal and professional potential. This mission is fulfilled through innovative programs that are responsive to the needs of adult learners and involve active, engaging, challenging, and relevant learning experiences offered in a variety of delivery modes.

All Capella curricula are competency-based, defined by scholar-practitioner faculty, and aligned to the expectations and standards of professional associations and accreditors, state licensing boards, and respected employers. Capella offers academic programming in the fields of business; information technology; education; nursing and health sciences; public administration; counseling and therapy, human services and social work, and psychology.

Capella University's assessment system is modeled on the assessment triangle (cognition, observation, and interpretation) and is operationalized through a fully embedded assessment model (FEAM). Assessment is one component in our academic quality framework, a logic model articulating the elements of the educational ecosystem in terms of input, output, outcome, and impact. The assessment system is founded on clearly stated and defined outcomes at the university, offering, and course level; consistent development of and use of scoring guides; and a tight alignment structure between all the curricular elements.

Outcomes. University outcomes clearly state what learners at all degree levels are expected to demonstrate during their education. Program- and specialization-level learning outcomes express the expectations of the discipline and measurable performance standards. Competencies articulate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions learners are expected to demonstrate and are assessed in multiple assignments in courses.

Scoring Guides. The purpose of a scoring guide is to provide clear, measurable criteria and grading information for each assignment. Faculty use these criterion-referenced scoring guides to directly assess the demonstration of each competency in every

ARTICLES

Capella University's Journey Toward Sustained Excellence in Assessment
Jaclyn Zacharias, Nancy Ackerman, and Christine S. Yates 1

Editors' Notes
Stephen P. Hundley and Caleb J. Keith 3

Reflections on California State University East Bay's Excellence in Assessment Designation through the Lens of Student Learning and Success
Kevin W. Kaatz and associates

Nurturing a Culture of Continuous Improvement: Sustaining Excellence in Assessment at the Community College of Baltimore County
Jennifer Kilbourne and associates

Broadening and Deepening a Campus Culture of Assessment at Cameron University
Karla J. Oty

Transformative Principles Contributing to Whatcom Community College's Assessment Progress
Anne Marie Karlberg, Tresha Dutton, Peter Horne, and Ed Harri 10

Sustaining a Culture of Assessment Excellence at IUPUI
Susan Kahn and Stephen P. Hundley 12

COLUMN

NILOA Perspectives
Gianina Baker and Kate Drezek McConnell 1

assignment. The use of standard scoring guides in all sections helps ensure grading consistency across faculty and over time. Faculty judge competency demonstration as reflecting one of four performance levels: nonperformance, basic, proficient, and distinguished.

Alignment Leading to Measurement of Learning. Capella's FEAM embeds curricular expectations—in the form of course competencies aligned to program outcomes—into every graded assignment and assessment instrument. Scoring guide criteria are aligned to competencies and are, therefore, used as measures of outcome and competency demonstration. As a result, faculty judgments can be aggregated over time as a measure of learning at the unit, course, and program level and builds a rich context for interpreting data to improve the learning experience.

Capella conducts regularly scheduled reviews at different frequencies and levels of detail that include data trend analysis, interpretation, and action plan development as needed. The two primary reviews are Academic Program Review (APR) and Learner Performance Review (LPR). Additionally, Capella uses measurement of learning to facilitate transparency to both internal and external audiences.

Academic Program Review. APR is a holistic analysis of the health of a particular academic offering using the Academic Quality Framework. APRs are conducted every five years by faculty in collaboration with assessment specialists, accreditation special-

EDITORS' NOTES

University-wide Growth. It is clear from this university-wide work that faculty have a passion for student learning and a desire to dedicate more time and energy to best support students' learning. Campus-wide activities and discussions provided forums to remind students that they are doing good, albeit challenging, work. It showed faculty are not alone in helping students attain these learning outcomes. This work also allowed faculty the chance to learn more about their own institution and to realize that they are working collectively toward similar goals. It is also clear that the university as a whole has matured in its collective decision-making ability. We now have a range of faculty and staff highly experienced in assessment who also operate very effectively as a group to make meaningful improvements.

Assessment Practices that Differentiate Between Teaching and Learning. Engaging students in evidence-based active learning experiences is a priority at CSUEB. Providing students multiple ways to externalize their thinking, with more emphasis on no- or low-stakes assessments, allows us greater insight into student learning and the ability to adapt as needed. We are shifting the metrics of our teaching from "content coverage" to "student mastery." By improving assignment design to be transparent, anti-racist, and equitable, we better serve our diverse students by giving them the opportunity to be more reflective on their learning, which more authentically represents their learning. We are also moving toward the idea that assessment is "student-centered and instructor-supporting." It is our expectation and assumption that improving assignments for assessment purposes will allow for a better understanding of student learning while also pointing out areas for improvement. As part of this, we plan to continue collecting comparative data to show improvement of student learning over time.

Integration of Curriculum and Assessment Processes. We will continue to integrate our curricular and assessment processes in our ongoing work to strengthen student success. This process has intentionally brought together faculty from all over the university at every stage of the process, on every ILO. It is apparent we have a collective responsibility around shaping and developing a student's progress toward any given outcome. This also highlights the need to continue to work together to help better understand the interconnectedness of curriculum and assessment and to provide the most cohesive student experience possible, particularly around the core competencies. Institutional and pedagogical goals will also continue to focus on alignment and supporting student learning and success. As part of this effort, we are evaluating technologies that support a more integrated curriculum development and assessment infrastructure. By better integrating processes into all aspects of curriculum and assessment, faculty have a better understanding of student learning while simultaneously providing CSUEB with the necessary data for accreditation and institutional improvement.

Increased Inclusion of Student Voices in ILO Assessment. Another future direction is to give students more opportunities to engage with the ILO process and listen to their feedback on assessed assignments. As we prepare our students to be life-long learners, a more intentional and structured process for them to reflect on their own development across all the learning outcomes over time will prove useful.

Increased Integration of Experiences Outside of the Classroom. We recognize

students' growth over the course of their college experience extends beyond the classroom to their involvement in activities such as internships and clubs. This engagement contributes to student learning and supports mastery of skills as they apply them in "real-world" settings. We plan to increase assessment across various student experiences over time to gather more on the progression of core competency development. Aligning and assessing students' experiences outside the classroom will also broaden the campus conversation about institutional effectiveness.

CSUEB's President on Assessment Journey. CSUEB President Cathy Sandeen effectively summarized our assessment journey in the August 2021 award announcement. "We know that a Cal State East Bay education is transforming for our students' lives. This honor recognizes how our faculty and staff connect the dots throughout an entire degree program, including our beyond-classroom experiences. The significant collaborations that occur to ensure these learning outcomes are unparalleled and make students' learning equitable, accessible and useful." ■

Kevin W. Kaatz is an associate professor of history, Ana Almeida is an assistant professor and associate director of the Green Biome Institute, Sarah Aubert is the curriculum services project manager, Paul Carpenter is a professor and chair of kinesiology, Caron Inouye is the director of general education and a professor, Danika LeDuc is the associate dean in the College of Science, Balaraman Rajan is an associate professor of management, Julie Stein is the educational effectiveness project manager, and Fanny Yeung is the director of Institutional Effectiveness and Research at California State University East Bay.

Assessment Institute in Indianapolis

Hosted by IUPUI, the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis is the oldest and largest U.S. higher education event focused on assessment and improvement. This year, we will resume our in-person event at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown Hotel October 9–11, 2022.

Learn more about the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis: <https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/>

Jennifer Kilbourne, Amber Wilton, Glenda Brearley, and Joaquin G. Marin

Since 2001, Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) has had an assessment system in place

Karla J. O

ameron University (CU) is a regional public university located in southwest Oklahoma. CU is an open admission institution at the Associate in Applied Science level with minimal admissions requirements at the Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, and bachelor's degree levels. CU also offers a limited number of master's degrees in the professional areas of teaching, business, and psychology. In Fall 2020, CU's enrollment was 3,471 undergraduate students and 300 graduate students.

Assessment activities at CU began in annual year (AY) 1992–1993 for academic programs and in AY 2008–2009 for units in Student Services. Units have been added to the assessment process annually since AY 2011–2012. In AY 2020–2021, all academic programs and all but eight non-academic units participated in the formal assessment process. This sustained practice of assessment helped CU be selected to the inaugural class of Excellence in Assessment (EIA) designees and as a continued Sustained Excellence designee in 2021.

At CU, the primary purpose of assessment is to use data to determine if student learning, engagement, and satisfaction is at the desired level and, if not, to develop action items to address shortfalls. CU's comprehensive system of assessment is managed by the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Accountability (IRAA) and the Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC) and is overseen by the Executive Council (EC) of the University. IAC is comprised of 26 faculty and staff members including the vice president for academic affairs, the IRAA director, the

chair of the General Education Committee, the chair of the Developmental Education Assessment Committee, a Faculty Senate representative, and other members representing both programs and units.

Programs leading to a degree or certificate, general education, developmental education, and non-degree granting academic and non-academic units participate in the assessment process each year. Information for programs and units is entered into a software package to create an assessment report. Two members of IAC acting as peer

while programs with a well-developed assessment process participate in roundtables once every three years.

In 2010 the assessment process was changed in an attempt to shift the mindset away from compliance and toward one that would result in improvements of student learning, engagement, and satisfaction. The implementation of roundtables was intended to ensure there were

Programs leading to a degree or certificate, general education, developmental education, and non-degree granting academic and non-academic units participate in the assessment process each year.

reviewers and the appropriate supervisor use a PDF form to indicate elements that are addressed, provide written comments, and make a recommendation as to whether the program or unit would benefit from a roundtable discussion. The appropriate EC member determines whether the program or unit will participate in a roundtable; all programs and units participate in a roundtable at least once every three years. Each roundtable begins with the program or unit members answering questions about what they have learned from their assessment data and how they have used what they have learned to make improvements. The rest of the allotted time is spent discussing feedback, results of the assessment process, and suggestions for improvements. The flexibility of the scheduling of the roundtables ensures programs struggling with a particular part of the assessment process can participate in conversations each year to help them make progress,

substantive conversations about what was working well and what could be improved. The discussions were also meant to emphasize the role of IAC as peer reviewers providing advice and guidance, and not as individuals who were trying to find something wrong in the assessment report. There was also an added emphasis in encouraging faculty and staff to critically examine the data collected and to use the data to identify strengths and weaknesses. It was, and is, sometimes difficult to admit students may not be doing as well as would be desired on a particular measure, and the roundtable conversations provide a vehicle in which weaknesses in student learning, engagement, or satisfaction can be discussed in a non-threatening manner. The IAC peer reviewers share examples of approaches that they have tried in their program or that they have seen in other programs they have reviewed, which can lead to

a rich conversation on how to make improvements based on data. Although the process is not perfect, and there have been adjustments made along the way, the assessment culture at CU has changed dramatically over the last 10 years.

Other key lessons learned were that training, resources, and timely responses to questions were needed to help faculty and staff. The IRAA director conducts training sessions on the assessment software used for the assessment reports, provides an updated User Document each year, and hosts office hours. Each year IAC members undergo peer reviewer training before beginning their reviews, which helps the reviewers provide consistent, clear, and constructive feedback to the programs. Faculty and staff can send an email to assessment@cameron.edu with any questions or concerns they have relating to assessment; someone in the IRAA office responds within one business day.

CU also provides resources to assist programs and units participating in the assessment process to ensure the processes and methodologies for assessment reflect good practice. The chair of IAC conducts an annual campus-wide meeting to update

and inform faculty and staff on the assessment process. Additionally, IAC hosts workshops to provide support for assessment topics. Workshops in the last 10 years include developing SLOs, rubrics, curriculum mapping, inter-rater reliability and content validity, online assessment strategies, data tables, and co-curricular assessment. In 2021–2022, members of IAC are making short videos on key assessment topics that will be available on demand. Over the last 10 years, additional funding has been available to offset costs associated with assessment, including external reviews of locally developed measures and rubrics for content validity, external experts to conduct workshops on assessment-related topics, and opportunities for faculty to participate in conferences related to assessment. The IRAA Office provides funds to purchase standardized assessment exams.

Although the writing of the EIA narrative for the application process can

involve significant time and effort, we found the process to be meaningful and useful. The application process allowed us to reflect and articulate the improvements we have made as a campus and to help focus the discussion on what areas still need improvement. The provided rubric is especially valuable in preparing a successful application. We formed a smaller sub-committee to write the application narrative. This draft was then shared with the relevant committees and leadership to garner feedback and strengthen the application. One of the most challenging parts of the application was to include as much information as possible while still coming in under the word count of the application. Our most recent application was one word short of the limit! The feedback received from CU's successful Excellence in Assessment application in 2015–2016 helped guide improvements in the assessment process, and CU looks forward to using the feedback received this Fall from EIA to guide improvements over the next few years. ■

Karla J. Oty is the director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Accountability at Cameron University.

and on resumes to show employers their achievements.

Reflecting on challenges and implementing continuous improvements with our own assessment strategies is no different from the process we do on a regular basis. Here are a few of the lessons we have learned and are actively targeting for improvement:

1. *Closing the Loop*: One of our biggest challenges was “closing the loop” on our quality-improvement efforts. Each

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Anne Marie Karlberg, Tre ha D on, Pe er Horne, and Ed Harri

hatcom Community College (WCC), in Bellingham, Washington, served 7,400 students in 2020–21. WCC offers transfer degrees, professional-technical degrees and certificates, Bachelor of Applied Science degrees, basic education, and community and continuing education courses.

In February 2008, the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities expressed “grave concern” that WCC did not have meaningful assessment processes linking data, analysis, and planning. With new leadership and faculty, WCC made critical and meaningful changes to its processes, developing sustainable assessment processes to support student learning and inform college planning. In 2007, WCC created a faculty outcomes assessment coordinator position with release time and, in 2008, hired a director for assessment and institutional research (AIR) to build an AIR office. These two individuals have worked together for the past 13 years. In its 2019 accreditation visit, WCC received no recommendations and three commendations, including recognition of “its widespread and systematic use of data for decision-making and

2. Engaging in collaborative learning

- a. Engage faculty and staff in peer-driven professional development opportunities to advance assessment work: WCC is committed to instituting transformational change by encouraging faculty and staff to use innovative, equity-driven strategies for student learning and assessment. To advance this effort, WCC engages faculty and staff in peer-driven professional development. Since 2011, WCC has offered faculty education workshops (FEWs) focused on teaching, learning, and assessment practice. Through these FEWs, which are 15-hour mini-courses, WCC established and institutionalized the foundational work of outcomes assessment and data-driven reflection. Initial FEWs were designed by AIR and focused on topics such as writing course outcomes; creating meaningful rubrics; and aligning course outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessments. Over time, an increasing number of faculty and staff developed FEWs, and WCC now offers about 13 FEWs annually, focusing on assessment, equity, student-centered pedagogy, and using student success data for improvement. As part of WCC's commitment to assessment and equity-driven pedagogy, full-time faculty completing FEWs receive permanent salary increases, and adjunct faculty are paid stipends. This investment has provided a huge incentive for participation in outcomes assessment and data-driven equity work and has reinforced the value of this work by faculty.
- b. Routinely request feedback on processes and reports: For example, WCC includes a space on its reports for faculty and staff to suggest improvements to its reports and processes. The College then tries to integrate substantive suggestions. For instance, the faculty

reports Canvas page noted below resulted from a faculty suggestion on a program outcome report.

3. Providing transparent communication

- a. Make outcomes assessment data and resources accessible on a public website: Since 2009, WCC has maintained a comprehensive public AIR website, which includes a wealth of outcomes assessment, student success data, and educational materials and serves as a resource for faculty, staff, students, and the public. Maintaining resources in an easily accessible central location broadens engagement and participation in assessment efforts. Providing access to resources and transparency is central to WCC's assessment work.
- b. Create a central place for faculty to submit reports: WCC has a faculty reports Canvas page centralizing all faculty assessment resources, reporting, and tracking.
- c. Provide timely feedback to each faculty and staff member who submits an assessment report: Faculty and staff receive feedback on all reports submitted, to acknowledge the value of their work and appreciation for the time dedicated to creating the reports. The "next steps" identified by faculty in their course and program outcome reports are emailed to faculty during the quarter in which the information is relevant, reminding them of the great ideas generated when the initial reports were submitted.
- d. Communicate assessment-related information in multiple forums and encourage conversations: In addition to communicating information via the website, professional development day, and other workshops, AIR staff routinely meet one-on-one and in small groups with faculty and staff to discuss assessment information. WCC tries to create spaces—at workshops, in meetings, or one-on-one—where

faculty and staff can reflect about outcomes assessment information and, together, consider possible next steps. Also, in 2018, AIR began sharing recent assessment results in short catchy monthly or quarterly emails to employees titled "What's in the AIR?" In spring 2020, AIR also began sending regular "Assess-Minute" emails to faculty communicating brief, relevant, and timely assessment, teaching, and learning resources.

- e. Invest in relationships across campus to build trust, solicit input and feedback, improve relevance and responsiveness, offer support, and increase receptivity. When possible, respond to individuals requesting assistance through a phone call, in-person, or zoom, rather than through email.

Embracing its guiding principles of creating sustainable processes, engaging in collaborative learning, and providing transparent communication, WCC is focusing on two major initiatives this academic year:

1. WCC's core learning ability process, which has been in place for the past eight years, is being revised by its outcomes assessment committee to increase the meaningfulness of the data and simplify the process.
2. WCC will be more proactive in engaging students in all assessment processes by forming an AIR student advisory group (with paid students), which will take WCC's assessment work to the next level, providing more systematic student input and feedback. ■

Anne Marie Karlberg is the director for assessment and institutional research, Tresha Dutton is a professor of communication studies and faculty outcomes assessment coordinator, Peter Horne is a senior research analyst, and Ed Harri is the vice president for instruction at Whatcom Community College.

on- and off-campus partners. The Profles and program-level SLOs get introduced and/or reinforced in these learning experiences. Finally, assignment-level SLOs include specific interventions and assessments designed to implement course- and activity-level goals for learning. These also give students plentiful opportunities to demonstrate competence related to the Profles and program-level learning goals.

Undergirding these activities is IU-PUI's mission, vision, values, and strategic plan. Our #1 strategic plan goal is to promote undergraduate student learning and success. In addition to academic affairs, student affairs, and the academic units, a host of offices and committees engage in distributed leadership to support our efforts, including: PRAC; Center for Teaching and Learning; Planning and Institutional Improvement; Institute for Engaged Learning (IEL); Student Experience Council; Institutional Research & Decision Support (IRDS); Undergraduate Affairs Committee; Division of Undergraduate Education; and Office of Community Engagement. Several processes and tools enable faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders to facilitate and document student learning and assure our ongoing commitment to quality. Processes include degree proposals, periodic

reviewers, co-sponsors, endorsers, and the assessment community writ large, we recognize that to ensure relevance the EIA Designation needs to evolve.

NILOA is now going through its own transitions, and we, too, need to acknowledge change. In response to these changes, AAC&U, a long-time collaborator on the EIA, will take on stewardship of the award beginning in January 2022. Under the leadership of Kate Drezek McConnell, Vice President for Curricular and Pedagogical Innovation and Executive Director of VALUE, AAC&U will engage the broader assessment community in a robust and reflective evaluation of the EIA Designation's mission, processes, and outcomes in order to identify areas of excellence within the current protocols as well as opportunities for change, growth, and enhancement. Drawing on its history of community engagement and crowdsourcing within the higher education community, AAC&U is excited to embark on this

important work. You can expect a call to engage in this process in the near future.

At AAC&U, we believe now is the right moment for further reflection, review, and possible enhancement of the EIA designation. As we work to ensure the long-term viability and relevance of the EIA designation, there are questions we will continue to ask of ourselves and of the designation, from deciding whether or not there should be additional levels (e.g., a "Rising to Excellence" or "Honorable Mention" for those institutions who were told to resubmit their application) to addressing the dynamic tension between articulated and enacted assessment practices, along with demonstrated results of these processes. These questions and more will assist in our evaluation of the EIA process and help decide the path forward.

NILOA has shepherded the EIA process through its many changes, and while it is tough to let go of the reins, we are excited for EIA's future. We know and

trust it is in the good hands of AAC&U, and we look forward to assisting where needed. We want to recognize the hard work of our expert assessment reviewers in providing feedback to institutions that applied each year.

And most of all, we want to thank the 41+ institutions that have applied and made the EIA Designation what it is today. As we continue to highlight and celebrate your excellence in assessment, we hope to have earned your trust and friendship. For those of you with whom we have interacted over the past few years discussing and lifting up your excellent assessment practices, it was our pleasure. ■

Gianina R. Baker is the acting director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment and the associate director for evaluation, learning, and equitable assessment in the Office of Community College Research & Leadership at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; and Kate Drezek McConnell is the vice president for curricular and pedagogical innovation and executive director of VALUE at AAC&U.

place within learning experiences at the course, program, and institutional levels. We will discuss Principle #1 in greater detail in Volume 34, Number 2.

including internal colleagues, external subject matter experts, community mem-



Peer review processes require an understanding of how perspectives, contexts, and methods support assessment and improvement activities. *Perspectives* in peer review include those of reviewers, stakeholders, and decision-makers. The value of peer review is often maximized by leveraging and incorporating feedback from multiple peer reviewers,

Effective peer reviewers often adopt a consultative approach to the peer review process, which involves reviewing information, querying stakeholders, evaluating evidence, making judgements, and generating recommendations. Such a consultative approach entails having the peer reviewer serve as a “critical friend” to the program, entity, or context undergoing review, along with understanding desired roles, behaviors, and expectations of a consultant. The consultative process in which peer reviewers participate include phases such as preparation, initial entry, engagement, analysis, judgment, feedback, clarification, and exit, with specific stakeholder relationships unfolding in each phase. There are numerous other considerations involved in the consultative approach, including using specific tools and resources to engage in peer review; adopting an appreciative inquiry perspective to the work; placing the review of an activity in its broader context, such as institutionally, disciplinarily, or nationally; navigating ambiguity, complexity, and interpersonal or political dy-