

Assessment UPdate

March–April 2019
Volume 31, Number 2



Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education

What Makes a Performance Indicator an Equity-Driven, High-Performance Indicator?

Marilee Bresciani Ludvik

MUCH UNDERSTANDABLE CONFUSION RESIDES AROUND THE MEANING OF THE terms *benchmark indicators*, *performance indicators*, *dashboard indicators*, *scorecard indicators*, and *performance metrics*. As such, just as it is important for the members of your organization to determine a conceptual framework for outcomes-based assessment (e.g., an explanation of why you are engaging in outcomes-based assessment and what you hope to gain from it), as well as developing a common language for engaging in outcomes-based assessment (e.g., define what each term used means), it is important that the terms *benchmark indicators*, *performance indicators*, *dashboard indicators*, *scorecard indicators*, and *performance metrics* are also defined.

For purposes of this manuscript, we will use *benchmark indicators*, *performance indicators*, *dashboard indicators*, *scorecard indicators*, and *performance metrics* interchangeably. Dolence and Norris (1995) defined performance indicators as “measures that are monitored in order to determine the health, effectiveness, & efficiency of an institution” (p. 35). For practical application of what this means, consider the following analogy: I used to drive a red Jeep Wrangler that only had three indicators on the dashboard: (1) the temperature gauge—which was an indicator of how hot or cool the engine was, (2) the speedometer—an indicator of how fast or slow the Jeep was going, and (3) the gas gauge—an indicator of how much fuel was in the tank. These three indicators were broad signals of three areas of Jeep performance. As such, they informed some decisions I could make in order to optimize the performance of the Jeep. For example, if the gas gauge became low, I would determine that the Jeep needed more fuel and I knew how to respond to that. However, I learned through trial and error by recording some data points in a notebook which kind of fuel provided the most optimal performance for my Jeep. I also learned that the Jeep ran out of gas before the indicator actually recorded the fuel as empty. So, the decision I would make was to put more fuel in the gas tank when the indicator reached 1/4 full as opposed to 1/8 full. This was true about my Jeep Wrangler, but I don’t know whether it was true for other Jeep Wranglers because I never collected that data. Taking this analogy further, if the temperature gauge indicated the engine was hot, I needed to make a decision to take the Jeep to a mechanic who would lift the hood and conduct diagnostics in order to determine why the Jeep was no longer performing well. Often during this process of gathering additional data, the mechanic would discover other things that were not

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Assessment Update

Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education

ASSESSMENT UPDATE (Print ISSN: 1041-6099; Online ISSN: 1536-0725) is published bimonthly by Wiley Subscription Services Inc., a Wiley Company, 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774.

Presorted standard U.S. postage paid at Providence, RI.

Postmaster: Send all address changes to ASSESSMENT UPDATE, John Wiley & Sons Inc., c/o The Sheridan Press, PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331.

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performing optimally for which decisions needed to be made—things for which there were no dashboard indicators to provide early warnings about.

Outcomes-based assessment is like the diagnostics the mechanic would run when a performance indicator pointed to a need for further exploration. In essence, we needed more data than the dashboard indicators would provide in order to make decisions about how to get that Jeep to perform at its most optimal levels. Outcomes-based assessment done well provides us with the kind of data that informs decisions for how to empower our students or our colleagues to “perform” optimally. It might also reveal things we never thought to even explore that are very useful in advancing all students’ learning and development. While cars now have much more sophisticated dashboard indicators and we have a number of growing institutions engaged in using performance metrics to determine optimal points in time to intervene and influence student and institutional performance, without outcomes-based assessment, we risk not gathering the kinds of data that will ensure an understanding of what is actually going on in any one learning-and-development intervention for any particular group of students, albeit a statistics course or a workshop intended to cultivate students’ attention regulation.

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For all five of the performance indicator terms, it is expected that the data used (e.g., indicators) to inform decisions are comparable across programs and comparable across institutions. If the data are not comparable across programs, then it may be that the institution is using outcomes-based assessment measures and their results from some programs to predict success for other students who have similar characteristics and are also participating in similarly designed programs. While it may be efficient for an institution to engage in predictive analytic practice, it is not wise if the organization is committed to transforming students and serving students in an equitable way. It also assumes that other

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Call for Contributions

The editor welcomes short articles and news items for *Assessment Update*. Guidelines follow for those who would like to contribute articles on outcomes assessment in higher education.

- **Content:** Please send an account of your experience with assessment in higher education. Include concrete examples of practice and results.
- **Audience:** *Assessment Update* readers are academic administrators, campus assessment practitioners, institutional researchers, and faculty from a variety of fields. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.
- **Style:** A report, essay, news story, or letter to the editor is welcome. Limited references can be printed; however, extensive tables cannot be included.
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- **Length:** 1,000–2,000 words.
- **Copyright:** Articles shall not have been registered for copyright or published elsewhere prior to publication in *Assessment Update*.
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Please address mailed contributions and comments to Stephen P. Hundley, Executive Editor, *Assessment Update*, Suite 4049 University Hall, 301 University Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46202. ■

EDITOR'S NOTES

The Leadership Imperatives for Assessment Excellence: Imperative #1, Making Assessment Excellence a Strategic Institutional Priority

Stephen P. Hundley

IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE OF *ASSESSMENT Update* (Issue 31, Number 1), I provided an overview of The Leadership Imperatives for Assessment Excellence:

1. Making assessment excellence a strategic institutional priority
2. Attracting and retaining talent to support assessment excellence
3. Developing sufficient capacity for assessment excellence
4. Rewarding, recognizing, and promoting assessment excellence
5. Sustaining a culture supportive of assessment excellence

In these Editor's Notes, we examine imperative #1: making assessment excellence a strategic institutional priority. This involves leaders setting the "tone at the top" through words and deeds; aligning goals for learning throughout the institution; developing the infrastructure to support learning and improvement; offering multiple opportunities for student learning to occur; and using and communicating results effectively. To accomplish all of this, people, plans, resources, processes, and communication are essential.

People

In what ways does the institution make known its commitment to student learning, and to the assessment and improvement efforts that undergird this work? It begins with senior leaders—presidents, provosts, and institutional governance leaders—who set the "tone at the top" through their words and deeds.

Words convey and reinforce values surrounding student learning, communicate vision, and signal expectations for assessment excellence. Deeds demonstrate the meaning of words through intentionality of actions and behaviors. Leaders' engagement of others who have a stake in ensuring a collective focus on student learning is necessary. These include deans, support unit leaders, department chairs, program directors, faculty governance bodies, faculty and staff colleagues across campus, community partners, and, increasingly, students themselves.

Plans

To promote the learning priorities of the institution, prominent inclusion in plans is vital. Dynamic strategic plans do not sit on a shelf. Instead, they set direction, provide a framework for goal setting, help the campus/unit/program achieve its purpose, and are responsive to changing circumstances and opportunities. Planning also extends to the learning goals the institution has for its students at multiple levels and for varying contexts: learning goals at the institutional-level, program-level, course-level, assignment-level, and goals for learning in co-curricular, community, and international contexts. Ensuring widespread buy-in and adoption relies on cascading plans throughout the campus, while also aligning the efforts of individual faculty, staff, courses, programs, and experiences to the broader strategic directions of the institution.

Resources

The institutional infrastructure to support assessment excellence requires allocation of resources to make this a reality. Assessment and improvement efforts will be either facilitated or impeded by how much time is allocated to this priority. Collaborative activities require space for individuals to meet, share ideas, and connect with colleagues. Financial resources can support worthwhile activities such as adopting promising instructional practices, attending conferences, hosting professional development opportunities, and conducting investigations of learning interventions. Finally, sufficient human resources are needed to devote the efforts involved in cultivating meaningful assessment excellence expertise on campus.

Processes

At the heart of assessment excellence is creating conditions that foster student learning and growth. This relies on learning processes that offer students opportunities to acquire and apply their learning in general education courses, in their major field of study, through educationally purposeful activities, and in co-curricular and experiential settings. These learning processes provide for students meaningful, intentional pathways to scaffold and integrate their learning, and to reflect on and document learning in different ways and for various purposes and audiences. Additionally, learning processes should provide continual mechanisms for faculty

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Trust, Training, and a Strategic Plan: Assessment at an HBCU

Steven M. Culver

ASSessment has become an even more critical activity given increasing costs and questions regarding students' knowledge and abilities and future contributions to our economy. As Montenegro and Jankowski (2015) point out, with the increasing diversity of the US population, the role of minority-serving institutions, especially historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), becomes more important as part of the educational system of our country. Developing and sustaining assessment processes at these institutions is also becoming a more mainstream topic. At North Carolina A&T State University, the largest HBCU in the country, three critical elements have come together to ensure a dynamic assessment process focused on informing change: trust, training, and a strong strategic plan.

Trust

Much has been written about developing a culture of assessment and the difficulties that faculty have “buying in” to the process, even though it is generally acknowledged that faculty involvement is the key to effective assessment (Kuh and Ikenberry 2009). As Peter Ewell (2009) has pointed out, it seems that assessment has been “consciously separated” from what goes on in the classroom (p. 19). This separation is not surprising given the accreditation processes, regional and disciplinary, at most institutions that require response to standards with less relationship to classroom activities. Witness the current fascination with outcomes such as job satisfaction and placement of our alumni, constructs less dependent on what students know and more related to

major, gender, socioeconomic status, and the state of the economy.

It is hard to have faculty believe that assessment is primarily for improvement, especially when they are prodded to meet deadlines to report material in time for an accreditation visit. Then, when they submit their assessment work, they may be criticized because they have an outcome that is not measurable or a measure that is neither valid nor reliable. Faculty begin to distrust the process because it may seem to be focused on assuaging an ex-

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ternal entity, they may be chastised for student performance even though they have been told that the integrity of the process is the important thing, and they feel confused about this work that seems only tangentially related to their teaching and not at all related to their pursuit of tenure and promotion.

How do you get faculty to trust the process and to trust an assessment professional? It is important to return to the reason why we are at the institution: teaching. As Weimer (2016) points out, the climate in which we work and engage can be enhanced by “small actions” that can have a large impact. One small action might be, when an assessment professional meets with a faculty member, to meet faculty in their offices, at a coffee shop, or any other place of their choosing. In my own experience, I have found

these conversations much more honest and personable, and I learn much about the philosophy and approach to teaching from those I meet in this way. Often, if we meet for an hour, 20 minutes is really on assessment issues and the other 40 are discussions of teaching and other issues at the university.

For such conversations to be successful, we have found it beneficial to have people leading assessment at the institution who are/have been faculty. Faculty feel a kinship with those who “have been

in the trenches.” Likewise, sending out the message that teaching, learning, and assessment are all part and parcel of the same package has a greater validity coming from another professor.

Talking to faculty groups (e.g., departmental faculty, curriculum committees, undergraduate program coordinators) whenever asked is a valuable part of this process. Sometimes you may feel you are adjudicating your own boxing match, but some of the harshest critics become the best assessment supporters and advocates. Faculty sometimes need to connect with the person first before engaging in the process.

The message about teaching, learning, and assessment as inextricably woven should be consistent and conveyed through assessment materials at the institution, or, at the very least, on your own

unit website. Be clear about your story and have a stated vision and a mission statement that can be emulated. Reduce anxiety by providing resources, not only instructional, helpful resources, but also a little humor. Assessment, after all, is not life or death.

It is important to talk the talk, but it may also be necessary to walk the walk. Given the positions of faculty and administration in higher education, there are times when assessment leaders on campus must seemingly choose sides with either the faculty or the administration. It may be necessary to earn and maintain faculty trust by, when appropriate, defending their efforts, explaining the context of the issues they face, and “having their back” (Jenkins 2017).

Training

As a culture of trust develops, assessment training becomes a useful, practical activity, rather than a required workshop. Most faculty have not had training in developing student learning outcomes and measuring them or in pedagogical approaches. Using Bloom’s taxonomy, though illustrative, may not be the best place to start a discussion. Many faculty are not familiar with social research methods and differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Faculty are used to being the experts in their own disciplinary areas, so with assessment they are placed in an awkward position.

We see increasing assessment knowledge as building evaluation capacity through discussions of aspects of the process, rather than didactic trainings. Faculty are the best students; they want to be engaged, ask questions, and interrupt; they voice their skepticism and concerns. These kinds of interactions are more effective than when we stand behind a podium with a laser pointer and our PowerPoint slides. The same principles derived by Chickering and Gamson (1987) for good teaching in undergraduate education apply to our work as assessment professionals: encourage contact and build rapport, work together, realize that learn-

ing is an active process, encourage reflection, stay on task, communicate high expectations (not just filling out forms to meet requirements), and recognize that people learn in diverse ways.

An effective website with practitioner-oriented resources directed at faculty can complement face-to-face trainings. For these resources, consider those who are beginners in assessment or who are looking for examples of one particular thing (e.g., an example of a critical thinking student learning outcome for a program in the sciences). It is less effective to focus on access to assessment resources that are focused on other assessment directors, such as establishing a culture of assessment or evaluating the success of the assessment process. These higher-level resources are good only after assessment of student outcomes gains some maturity on your campus.

Strategic Plan

At North Carolina A&T State University, through the collaboration of the administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and valued community partners, a detailed strategic plan, *A&T Preeminence 2020: Embracing Our Past, Creating Our Future*, was developed to set a long-term strategic course for the institution. The plan is focused on making a significant difference in the lives of those we educate and in solving critical problems of the local, regional, and global communities we serve.

Especially important for the assessment of student learning on campus is that the strategic plan calls for ownership at all levels of the institution, such that academic deans and division vice chancellors are held accountable for the development of plans that link to the goals of the university. Strategies for achieving these goals are noted in the plan, as well as key metrics for measuring the progress toward achieving the six university goals: (1) create an intellectual climate that encourages the creative exchange of ideas and increases the quality of the professional environment; (2) commit to

excellence in teaching, research, public service, and engagement; (3) position the university to be a national, premier research-intensive doctoral, science and technology-focused learning institution; (4) embrace an entrepreneurial spirit that intentionally engages university and community partners to expand economic development and civic engagement; (5) foster a diverse and inclusive campus community by promoting cultural awareness and collegiality, and by cultivating respect for diverse people and cultures; and (6) achieve excellence in academic and operational effectiveness and efficiency.

This institutional emphasis on measuring the progress of our initiatives has created an atmosphere that enhances the assessment efforts in academic programs. Supporting “continuous course and program content evaluations ... that may inspire the need for course redesign to ensure students achieve desired learning outcomes” is language directly from *Preeminence 2020*.

Conclusion

Within the context of a strong university strategic plan that describes tangible paths toward goals and targets, specifies how progress will be measured, and commits to targets, assessment efforts are given support and a life (as opposed to life-support) to help faculty reflect on the strengths and weaknesses in their programs. These reflections are more fruitful if faculty have the needed training to write outcomes, develop targets and measures, and analyze data (qualitative and quantitative) in appropriate, effective ways. Relying on institutional resources outside of their areas also is a plus, but only if faculty first trust where those resources are coming from and why. It is important for us as assessment practitioners to be as transparent as we hope our programs will be. ■

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Reassessing the Elephant, Part 1

David Eubanks

Introduction

IN 2008, MY FIRST *ASSESSMENT UPDATE* article (Eubanks 2008), “Assessing the General Education Elephant,” described a faculty-centered method of gathering data on general student learning outcomes like thinking and communication. The title references the parable about the blind men and an elephant, employing the idea that multiple perspectives help us understand complex outcomes. In this two-part update, I will review the methods used and summarize findings from the intervening years.

Trusting the Faculty

Formal assessments like standardized tests or rubric ratings of student work are often used to make general assessments about student abilities. Such extrapolation from a single point in time is not ideal. Measurements over a longer period of time can benefit from error-averaging. For example, high school grades are better predictors of college grades than are standardized tests.

Instead of assessments based on very limited evidence, the “assessing the elephant” method relies on two kinds of multiple perspectives. One is that instructors are asked to holistically summarize student work over an entire term, not by just considering a single student work. The other is that the same student is assessed by multiple instructors. This approach trusts the faculty as domain experts and teachers.

Holistic ratings of students are commonly used as data in K–12 education and in some areas of higher education, like the arts. In 1991, DuPaul, Rapport, and Perriello wrote of such methods: “Teachers are able to observe student performance on a more comprehensive

sample of academic content than could be included on a standardized achievement test. Thus, their judgments provide a more representative sample of the domain of interest in academic assessment.”

The assessment office at Furman University administers a universitywide survey at the end of each term that asks the faculty to provide their holistic ratings of their students on predetermined learning outcomes. These include thinking and communication skills as well as discipline-specific skills like computer programming.

Faculty members are asked to rate

Getting Enough Data

Single-point assessments, such as regrading papers with a rubric, are statistically useful only if there are large sample sizes (Bacon and Stewart 2017). With only 20 or 30 samples, for example, it is barely possible to get a sense of reliability, and no trustworthy validity work can be done on such tiny amounts of data. When regulatory compliance demands frequent assessment reports of every academic program, faculty members may feel pressure to draw conclusions based on statistically insignificant findings. I gave a more detailed version of this argument elsewhere (Eubanks 2017).

Data-collection methods should be judged by the usefulness of the data collected.



students at the end of each course on a five-point developmental scale, but only if they have a basis for judgment. The rating scale uses a common language to describe student development over a four-year undergraduate degree. The low end of the scale is “the student is not doing college-level work,” and the high end is “the student is ready to graduate.”

The reporting is done through an online form that only requires a few minutes to complete. The reports are a natural conclusion to teaching a class—a reflection on the success of each student, judged holistically and in comparison to an ideal four-year career. One faculty member recently told me she asks her students to assess their own abilities at the beginning and the end of the course, and then she compares their responses to her own assessments; she says her students are too hard on themselves.

The “assessing the elephant” survey of student competencies avoids the small sample problem by inviting all course instructors to participate in evaluation of student competencies. At each of the four institutions where I have employed this type of survey, around half of the teaching faculty participated with only modest encouragement to do so, resulting in a great volume of data and multiple perspectives on student achievement. Not only does each rating benefit from “averaging” weeks of observations of students, but there are large enough sample sizes to do interesting statistics.

At Furman, we generate about seven ratings per student each term, more than enough to understand how different types of students develop over time. That data contributes to a larger project to build a research platform on student development and achievement. For example, the approximately 14,000 ratings of student

writing over four years help us to understand the relationship between high school grades and writing development in college.

The Need for New Methods

Others have voiced a need for simplified, useful assessment. A survey of university provosts (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, and Kinzie 2014) revealed “[...] the need for meaningful measures that

- are not overly expensive or time consuming to implement,
- provide actionable information for guiding decision-making and curricular change, and
- leverage and share what people from different corners of the institution are discovering about student attainment in order to improve teaching and student learning” (p. 7).

These items have in common the entailment of having sufficient sample sizes and a diversity of perspectives. Engaging and trusting the faculty to rate students based on their observations meets this need.

So why aren't such surveys routine in assessment practice? An answer can perhaps be found in the DuPaul, Rapport, and Perriello (1991) article cited earlier. After describing the usefulness of direct observation, the authors also noted, “At the present time, however, teachers typically are not asked for this information in a systematic fashion, and when available, such input is considered to be highly

suspect data.” I have encountered similar prejudices.

It is interesting that subjective data are gathered elsewhere in universities without prejudice. We routinely use satisfaction surveys to make decisions, asking respondents to reflect on an academic term or year, or a whole college career. Employee evaluations are not based on a single-blind reviewed work product; no one would accept that as valid.

Data-collection methods should be judged by the usefulness of the data collected. Studies in K–12 show good predictive validity of trust-the-faculty methods (Kettler and Albers 2013), and my own experience over 15 years and four institutions has been positive. At the first institution where we used this method, a continuous five-year history of ratings of student writing was good enough to plausibly distinguish the effect of a writing lab intervention over time. By comparison, the parallel rubric rating of student portfolios had such low rater agreement that it was abandoned. Both in absolute quality and quantity of the outcomes, and in comparison to more common methods, the trust-the-faculty “assessing the elephant” method shows its worth.

In Part 2 of this article, scheduled for publication in *Assessment Update*, Volume 31, Number 3, I will describe some of the characteristics and uses of the data collected at Furman University from fall 2015 through fall 2018, comprising more than 130,000 ratings of student learning

outcomes. It is my hope that others will try this trust-the-faculty approach for themselves and report back. ■

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Call for Ideas and Contributions to a Community College-focused Column

Later this year, a refreshed column focusing on promising assessment trends and practices, entitled Community College Connections, will be unveiled in the pages of *Assessment Update*. Organized by Dr. Marcus Kolb, Associate Vice President, College Accreditation, Academic Quality, and Learning Assessment, Ivy Tech Community College, this periodic column will feature assessment work occurring at the vast numbers of 2-year institutions. It will complement other periodic columns from assessment leaders that appear in *Assessment Update*. Please send suggestions for content to be considered for inclusion in Community College Connections to Stephen Hundley, Executive Editor, auupdate@iupui.edu.

Enhancing the Quality of High-Impact Practices Through Taxonomies

Jennifer Thorington Springer, Julie Hatcher, Matthew Rust, and Amy A. Powell

HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES (HIPs) have been endorsed as effective strategies for promoting active learning and increasing rates of student retention and engagement. HIPs, when well-designed, can have a significant and positive influence on students' success, by engaging students at high levels in various stages of the learning process (Kuh 2008). To enhance HIPs at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), we recently developed taxonomies to support the quality of HIPs. We aim to improve institutional assessment of HIPs to understand how the quality of these learning experiences contributes to student learning and academic success.

The RISE Program at IUPUI is one of the many ways in which our institution advocates for the use of HIPs. RISE courses foster transformative teaching, while subsequently affording undergraduate students opportunities to apply what they learn in the classroom within real-world contexts. Such learning occurs through courses grounded in *research*, *international experiences*, *service learning*, and *experiential learning* through internships, themed learning communities, and the like. RISE courses meet four criteria: (1) qualified experiences, (2) integration of knowledge, (3) reflection, and (4) assessment. IUPUI students are encouraged to participate in two out of four high-impact practices before graduation because we believe that the “experiential pedagogies articulated in RISE will better prepare students to meet the challenges within our global world and to become productive citizens” (Baker, Fisher, and Johnson 2012).

Our campus values professional development and offers instructors a range of resources to design HIP experiences; therefore, the campus seeks to understand how this investment contributes to student learning and success. Our executive vice chancellor and chief academic officer asked that each unit with responsibility for a high-impact teaching practice develop a taxonomy to serve as a framework that can guide quality course design, implementation, assessment, and improvement. Influenced in large part by the California State University's use of taxonomies in the tracking of HIPs, this approach has been adapted by our campus to improve practice and to gather data on aspects of course design in a systematic way.

Our taxonomies support faculty understanding of good practice and can strengthen the fidelity and quality of a RISE designated course. One of the challenges we have encountered within the RISE program is the issue of fidelity to the criteria for RISE designated experiences, as well as fidelity to good practice. Instructors will now be able to use taxonomies as guides to create and redesign HIPs. Faculty can explore a more nuanced understanding of the characteristics that lead to student outcomes, and document their teaching through scholarly inquiry.

High-impact teaching is the cornerstone of the RISE Program, but we have taken a broader approach in implementing the use of taxonomies across many forms of experiential learning, including curricular and co-curricular learning experiences. Eight taxonomies have been developed and piloted in Communities of Practice (<https://rise.iupui.edu/taxonomies>). Our taxonomies align with our institutional

value for student participation in HIPs as an added dimension to an undergraduate education. Below are three case studies that describe the development of the taxonomies for service learning, themed learning communities, and internships. Each study describes the unique features and challenges that needed to be considered during development, as well as the implementations taken to date. We conclude with a list of recommendations for others who may want to replicate this approach in their own context.

Service Learning Taxonomy

The development of the service learning (SL) taxonomy was coordinated by the Center for Service and Learning (CSL). The SL taxonomy was developed by four staff members over a six-month period of time, with additional input from colleagues on campus and through a national webinar hosted by the International Association for Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement (Hahn and Hatcher 2015). CSL staff valued the taxonomy as a resource tool that could support instructional design, course assessment and improvement, and, most importantly, improve research and scholarship on SL courses.

Based on an extensive literature review of research and best practices in SL course design (Jacoby 2015), essential attributes were identified that contributed to differences in student learning, particularly civic learning outcomes (Hatcher, Bringle, and Hahn 2017). Informed, in part, by lessons learned during the design and usability of the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, we set a goal to identify no more than six essential attributes in course design. Lim-

iting the number of attributes reduces the specificity of the taxonomy, but limiting the attributes will likely increase the usability of the taxonomy by instructors.

CSL offers consultation and workshops, on campus and nationally, that feature the SL taxonomy. Additionally, CSL has sponsored a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) that involves instructors in a yearlong program that uses the taxonomy as a framework for course design and implementation, as well as scholarship on teaching and learning (SoTL). CSL staff work with FLC members to design and conduct a SoTL project based on changes in particular variables of the SL course design.

Service learning often requires a course design that involves faculty, community partners, community residents, and other students in roles as co-educators and facilitators. The SL taxonomy is designed to be instructor-centric, and, therefore, it does not seek to adequately address all of the perspectives of diverse stakeholders in the learning process. Going forward, we plan to design taxonomies from the perspective of both the community partner and the student.

Themed Learning Communities Taxonomy

In response to the campuswide taxonomy project and an external program review, the Themed Learning Communities (TLC) advisory board developed a taxonomy to guide TLC teams in their planning and implementation of a high-impact TLC. Key stakeholders of the TLC program comprise the advisory board, including faculty, professional staff from advising and student affairs, and representatives from the Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support. Through a process of reviewing the national literature for best practices and discussing the importance of key attributes of learning communities, the board identified five essential attributes of a TLC at IUPUI. Descriptors were written for these five attributes, drawing on the eight key elements of high-impact practices (Kuh and

O'Donnell 2013), and deepening in practice from high-impact to higher-impact to highest-impact. The descriptor headings were chosen to emphasize that even at the "lowest" level, faculty are creating high-impact learning experiences.

The pilot taxonomy was introduced to all TLC faculty teams at the annual faculty development retreat, where everyone was given an opportunity to give feedback and to formatively rate their team on each of the five attributes. At the end of the pilot semester, faculty completed a survey, during which they reflected on their team and individual engagement with the attributes. Based on feedback from the TLC faculty teams and lessons learned during the pilot, the taxonomy language was updated.

Our executive vice chancellor and chief academic officer asked that each unit with responsibility for a high-impact teaching practice develop a taxonomy to serve as a framework that can guide quality course design, implementation, assessment, and improvement.



A team planning guide, faculty survey, and student survey were all developed in alignment with the final taxonomy. Professional development and support are determined annually based on needs identified through these tools. Key elements that led to its success include the buy-in and development of the taxonomy by key stakeholders, the focus on best practices from the literature, the opportunity for all TLC teams to provide feedback, and piloting the taxonomy at full scale. The taxonomy gives instructional teams, academic departments and schools, and administrators a common language to focus the work of the TLC program, and an aspirational model for teams to engage in practices at ever-higher levels of impact across time.

Internship Taxonomy

The goals for the internship taxonomy were to (1) coach internship instructors and employers on incorporating principles of learning into the experience (as opposed to merely tracking hours worked) and (2) provide consistency in quality of

experience for students across majors as they complete internships for credit. In reviewing existing literature on internships, the taxonomy drafters identified several themes of best practices. First, internships should give students the opportunity to apply, in meaningful ways, the knowledge they have gained through coursework. Second, students should have the opportunity to experience the complexities of organizational life at the internship site. Third, students should be able to utilize their internship experience as a means to explore career paths and employment settings. Last, students should be able to pursue these workplace learning experiences free from harassment, exploitation, or physical harm. Each of these themes is

represented within the taxonomy.

Though students in an internship course may all be in unique roles and workplace environments, the taxonomy unifies these experiences around two broad learning goals. Students should (1) apply and further grow knowledge and skills learned through classroom experiences in a professional environment and (2) navigate social and organizational systems such that they acknowledge and respect the values of others in their interactions while creating conditions of mutual benefit for themselves and those around them.

Implementation of the internship taxonomy was threefold. First, a new course was developed based on highest-impact practices from the taxonomy. This course is open to pre-major students and students in majors without internship courses. It also has been offered to all instructors as a template course on which they could build. Second, internship coordinator representatives from all 18 degree-granting schools on campus used the taxonomy to

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Assessment Institute Insights

Experiencing the Assessment Institute Through the Eyes of Students

Zachary J. McDougal, Shawn R. Peters, Arthur H. Pearcy, and Yunah Kim

The Assessment Institute, held annually each October in Indianapolis, is designed to provide useful information and experience for faculty, student affairs professionals, assessment practitioners, and others from multiple institutions and at all assessment experience levels. During the 2018 Institute, presenters provided helpful introductions to assessment, guidance on improving current practices, and perspectives on the future of higher education and assessment. As student research assistants in the Office of Planning and Institutional Improvement at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), the sponsor of the Assessment Institute, we had a unique vantage point from which to experience the discussion of teaching, learning, assessment, and improvement. This column briefly encapsulates some of our main lessons learned and emerging trends we identified as a result of attending the Institute.

Presentations at the Assessment Institute are organized into tracks to provide a cohesive narrative throughout the Institute for those interested in particular subjects within assessment. In 2018, these tracks included: Community Engagement, ePortfolios, Faculty Development, Global Learning, Graduate Education, High-Impact Practices, Learning Improvement and Innovation, NILOA, STEM Education, and Student Affairs Programs and Services.

Despite the wide variety of tracks, several emerging trends were consistent regardless of institution, background, or topic. In this era of accountability, the role of assessment is

rapidly increasing and evolving. Good assessment practices are leading to innovations, developments, and new or improved programs that benefit the institution as well as the students. From simple entry-level topics such as “How do you define assessment?” to more complex challenges such as designing an overall academic program assessment, the Institute created an opportunity for rich conversations and collaborations. Below are a few emerging trends we identified from the 2018 Institute.

- *Building a Culture of Assessment.* Many presentations spoke about the importance of building a culture that understands and embraces assessment. By creating this culture, students, staff, and faculty are more likely to participate and find the usefulness in assessment. It also provides some assurance that efforts are being measured and evaluated for the future, providing opportunities for increased engagement.
- *Student Engagement.* Engagement is always a trend when speaking of higher education practices, and student engagement in assessment practices is one of the most discussed topics. Several obvious positive effects come out of involving our students in assessment practices. They learn valuable skills; become part of an effort to improve a program; learn outside of the classroom; engage with other students, staff, and faculty; and, perhaps most important, begin to learn about the importance of assessment while they are still students.
- *STEM Initiatives.* The relationship

between assessment and STEM initiatives continues to grow, and will become increasingly vital as STEM-field needs increase to serve the evolving technology in today’s world.

- *Best Practices.* Another often-discussed topic, the sharing and collaboration regarding best practices, is visible in nearly every presentation. This sharing of ideas and experiences is vital to the widely diverse group of institutions that attend. Whether small or large, public or private, urban or traditional, we can all learn from what did and did not work for others.
 - *Planning.* When we talk about assessment, we often include success of programs or initiatives. Another key topic was the role of planning in assessment. While many agree that thorough and detailed planning will improve the chances of success, planning is not the only variable. Increasingly, practitioners are putting an emphasis on the role of planning in both overall program design and the assessment of those programs.
 - *Co-curricular Assessment.* With an increasing focus on co-curricular achievements and outside-of-the-classroom learning comes an increasing need for how we can assess these activities. How can participation in organizations or other co-curricular learning be measured against traditional program requirements and coursework?
 - *Assessment of Institutional and Educational Missions.* Finally, many par-
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NILOA Perspectives

Creating a Culturally Responsive Ecosystem for Learning and Assessment: Lessons from a Small Private University

Peter O. Nwosu

In fall 2016, Clark Atlanta University (CAU) embarked on a major initiative to streamline the process by which it measures student learning and success. The impetus for this effort emanated from the university's decennial review for reaffirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges. While the review process was successful, it prompted a wider conversation at the institution about student success. Today's student profile has changed. We now serve a new kind of student born after 1995—young men and women commonly referred to as Gen Z. While diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and abilities, they come to the university with a distinct set of cultural lenses. They have a different way of thinking, of being, and of doing. They are digital natives, tech-centric, and habitually online-connected. They rely heavily on digital means for collaboration with peers. They are entrepreneurial, with differing characteristics and expectations. They are highly mobile, have plenty of choices, and will exercise them. Institutions mindful of the success of this new class of students must be responsive to the challenges and opportunities they present, and therefore must create comprehensive and culturally responsive ecosystems to

support, engage, and assess their learning. This ecosystem requires the redesign of courses, new ways of teaching and engagement, utilizing technology-enhanced learning platforms to monitor and track performance, and reorganizing support services to enhance the learning climate.

At CAU, we set out to create a comprehensive ecosystem that was proactive, culturally responsive, and outcomes-focused. We clarified the concept of student success to include five components: access, learning, persistence/retention, completion, and postgraduation experiences (careers or graduate school). During the Academic Year (AY) 2016–17, we conducted multiple surveys of all entering freshmen to learn about their strengths, learning styles, research skills, and study habits, and we used the data to redesign our First-Year Seminar course. We completed a comprehensive evaluation of student performance in all lower-division gateway courses offered in AY 2012–13 to AY 2016–17 to assess student performance. Of the total of 1,196 courses offered during this five-year period, the university found high failure rates (> 40% D, F, W) among students in 52.8% of these courses. In many of these courses, student failure rates were as high as 50%. We assembled the most experienced faculty at the university to

engage in conversations about student learning. We partnered with the Association of Chief Academic Officers on a digital learning initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. As a result, we selected faculty digital learning champions to redesign the initial set of three gateway courses: Introductory Biology, General Chemistry, and Mathematics (Calculus I), utilizing the concept of *mindset pedagogy* and adaptive learning courseware (Cogbooks, Knewton, and ALEKS, respectively), which supports personalized learning. Lessons from the pilot resulted in faculty working as an interdisciplinary group to develop grant-funded proposals in order to scale up and scale out the three gateway courses. Today, 16 faculty members are teaching six redesigned courses involving 25 sections and nearly 1,000 freshmen, utilizing embedded assessment to understand student learning and further facilitate their engagement with content matter. The embedded assessment measures are guided by the university's new six-step assessment process (see below) put in place in summer 2017.

We restructured our Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), with a focus on innovative teaching and student engagement, and hired two new instructional design specialists to assist
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Figure 1. CAU Assessment Process

NILOA Perspectives

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faculty with course redesign. Our new TLC, called the Center for Innovative Teaching, Learning, and Engagement (CITLE), houses a *Zoom* room with video and audio conferencing capability to support instruction, meetings, and webinars across mobile, desktop, and multiple locations.

We also examined our student success infrastructure and practices across campus and then established a Student Success Team (SST) model, utilizing mainly retention and graduation specialists and assistant directors of residence life in the university's five residential facilities: Career Services Advisors, University Honors and Scholars Program, Health Professions Advising Unit, and Student Services and Campus Life Deans. The SST model is innovative, cost-effective, and data-driven, and utilizes a distributed advising system involving multiple campus stakeholders in a managed-care approach. It expands and scales up contextualized, timely, and intentional student interventions to improve student learning, enhance persistence and retention, increase graduation rates, and reduce time to degree. Through loosely coupled, decentralized teams, the SSTs utilize appropriate technology solutions such as the Student Success and Adaptive Courseware platforms and related actionable data, including data on student performance in midterm examinations derived from CANVAS, the university's learning management system, to foster responsive, systematic, and strategic experimentation as well as intentional student interventions. We also partnered with Complete College America and launched a Finish-in-Four Campaign, resulting in significant gains in credit accumulation. The campaign is a key part of a universitywide retention goal around a bold new initiative titled "77 in 27," with the goal of attaining a

77% retention rate in 10 years (2027). We implemented a system for tracking postgraduate experiences, whether they secured discipline-related employment or decided to pursue further graduate or professional education.

We are still in the early stages of our work, but the initial results show promise. First-time, full-time freshmen enrolled in 15 or more credit hours increased 24%, from 66% in fall 2016 to 90% in fall 2017. Retention rate moved from 66% to 70%, and the six-year graduation rate increased from 38% to 45% within two years, surpassing

At CAU, we set out to create a comprehensive ecosystem that was proactive, culturally responsive, and outcomes-focused. We clarified the concept of student success to include five components: access, learning, persistence/retention, completion, and postgraduation experiences (careers or graduate school).



the 42% national graduation rate for African-Americans. Seventy-four percent of students in the spring 2017 pilot redesigned courses reported increased engagement in their classes because of the use of adaptive courseware. In one of the redesigned General Chemistry I courses, the average DFW rate of between 36 and 38% was the same as for the prior three years. Assessment of students' performance in the pilot redesigned course offered in spring 2017 showed that among students who passed the course, there was a significant increase in the percentage of B grades earned, 55.6% in the redesigned course vs. 11% over the previous three years, and a concomitant decrease in the percentage of C grades earned. This distribution of passing grades also reflected deeper learning by the students that passed the course. We found a strong correlation between the amount of time students engaged with the adap-

tive learning system and student learning outcomes. Based on these findings, we expanded the use of the adaptive learning courseware to all sections of General Chemistry I and II in fall 2018. In an additional effort to decrease the DFW rate, we are piloting a program in one section of General Chemistry I to support students' social and emotional learning, reducing test anxiety, and to encourage additional course engagement. We are also piloting pedagogy workshops for STEM faculty focused on growth mindset versus fixed mindset and how faculty can support student social and emotional learning.

In fall 2018, we celebrated the death of the "traditional lecture." Faculty and

staff gathered on Halloween day at CITLE to reflect on this long-used approach to teaching and its implications for educating a new generation of students. The invitation to faculty read as follows: "After 382 years of service to college students around the world, our beloved method of instruction will be laid to rest and we will discover new and engaging pedagogies for our future learners."

In summer 2018, we hosted a summit on digital learning involving 30 historically black colleges and universities in the southeast region of the country. The summit included a workshop session on the use of adaptive learning platforms to improve students' performance in gateway courses for 16 of our faculty.

We have focused *intentionally* since 2016 on the professional development of faculty and staff as a key driver for

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successful student outcomes. Our intentional conversations have included workshops on assessment of student learning utilizing the university's six-step assessment process as well as workshops on course redesign, and the use of supplemental instruction, as well as technology-enhanced applications such as adaptive learning courseware to improve student learning. Finally, monitoring and tracking student learning and deploying multiple culturally responsive assessments and improvement strategies are essential pillars when building

a comprehensive ecosystem of learning and successful matriculation for today's students. Our investment of human capital and fiscal and physical resources, including technology enhancements and regular assessment of student performance, aim to increase our students' academic and career success, consistent with our mission of transforming lives and igniting new possibilities. This, in turn, leads to the long-term health and sustainability of our graduates and the institution. Finally, we have implemented these interventions by reallocat-

ing existing resources and making minimal additional investments. ■

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Assessment Institute Insights

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Participants specifically mentioned the increasing need to assess and evaluate the mission statements of their institutions, schools, departments, and programs in order to measure their promise.

As we look toward the future of higher education, and the importance of meeting the needs of the students and community, it becomes even more vital to effectively assess our efforts. It is through well-planned and administered assessment practices that we

can design programs to enhance our students' learning to better match the needs of a rapidly changing world. Experiencing the Institute through the eyes of students was interesting and informative, and provided perspectives on why and how student learning assessment is important to the overall college experience. ■

Note

Assessment Institute Insights is a column featuring ideas, content, and

resources from the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis. Now the nation's oldest and largest of its type, the Assessment Institute attracts over 1,000 participants from all 50 states and several foreign countries. The Institute is held each October at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown. More information about the Assessment Institute may be found at <http://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/>.

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Register for the 2019 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis October 13–15, 2019, at the Indianapolis Marriott Downtown Hotel Learn more at assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu

The Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, organized and hosted by IUPUI, is now the nation's oldest and largest event of its type, routinely attracting 1,000+ participants from all fifty states and several foreign countries. The Assessment Institute strives to be a valuable resource for faculty, administrators, policymakers, and others engaged in assessment. The sessions offered annually at the Institute address the full array of current and emerging assessment issues: methods, tools, processes, measures, design and implementation models, and assessment in a variety of contexts, as this volume demonstrates. The Institute welcomes and invites participants from all backgrounds, levels of experience in assessment, and higher education sectors.

Enhancing the Quality of High-Impact Practices Through Taxonomies

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conduct a self-review of their own courses and identify areas they would like to improve. Third, two different schools used the taxonomy as part of a Community of Practice to revise their existing internship courses.

Implications

Labeling a learning experience as high-impact is alluring from a branding perspective and, therefore, easily overused in practice. If this label is truly going to distinguish more engaged learning experiences, however, we must have criteria to use when deciding whether to affix this label to a course. More important, these criteria are needed as goals for instructors to strive toward as they work to infuse high-impact practices into their teaching. Our work at IUPUI in developing high-impact practice taxonomies has enabled us to better understand what those criteria are. Specifically, the taxonomies:

1. Create a common approach and language in working with instructors to support the fidelity and quality of high-impact teaching practices;
2. Support institutional assessment and research on high-impact practices by

asking instructors to report on selected course attributes (dimensions of the course design that may vary based on intensity levels) and then explore the relationship between these course variables and student outcomes;

3. Inform and advance a research agenda for teaching and learning by identifying course attributes (i.e., variables) that may relate to student outcomes; and
4. Support institutional and multicampus research on high-impact courses through the use of a common taxonomy that describes variations in course attributes.

We encourage other institutions to either adopt or adapt the taxonomies depending on how high-impact practices are conceptualized within institutional mission and campus context. ■

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The Leadership Imperatives for Assessment Excellence: Imperative #1, Making Assessment Excellence a Strategic Institutional Priority

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and staff to examine assessment findings, determine changes needed in a given context (assignment, course, program, curricula, or service), implement those changes, and investigate subsequent changes or improvements realized.

Communication

Conveying the abundance of activities contributing to student learning is

challenging. Communication is critical to telling the institution's assessment excellence story. Leveraging student-centric communication vehicles, such as ePortfolios and Comprehensive Learner Records, is one way to demonstrate progress through authentic student artifacts. Periodic internal reporting opportunities, coupled with meaningful discussion about use of findings, serve to document

outcomes and improvements. Finally, transparently showcasing results to internal and external stakeholders—in ways that speak to their interests and expectations—goes a long way toward courting support for and understanding of the aims and purposes of higher education.

In the next issue of *Assessment Update* (Issue 31, Number 3), we continue discussing The Leadership Imperatives for Assessment Excellence with imperative #2, attracting and retaining talent to support assessment excellence. ■

What Makes a Performance Indicator an Equity-Driven, High-Performance Indicator?

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variables involved in learning and development can be constantly and consistently controlled. In essence, predictive analytics removes the human being and all of the human's unpredictable ways of *interacting* with what is offered within their environment from the analysis. As such, the organization will be creating systems that are perfectly designed for some students to succeed and others to fail. And it seems we have already created that in higher education, and that is why we are inviting an exploration of equity-driven outcomes-based assessment program review.

When we say that all five of these performance indicator terms assume that the data used to inform decisions needs to be comparable across programs and comparable across institutions, we mean that the instruments used in data collection must be the same or the definitions for what is being collected must be the same. In addition, this also means that the points in time that the data is collected must be similar points in time, such as the enrollment figures after the drop/add deadline or the definition of first-time, first-year students. This gets complicated in an equity discussion, as we never know which identity, or intersection of identities, is most prominent for that student at the point of data

collection. For example, research is showing clear four-year and six-year graduation rate (e.g., performance indicator) gaps as reported by race, ethnicity, and gender and the intersections of those identities (e.g., performance indicator informed by equity identifiers) for many institutions. This is a useful dashboard indicator (e.g., graduation rates by the intersection of race and gender) and one that requires the use of outcomes-based assessment to determine what is happening within that organization for those students so that their post-secondary experiences can be improved.

The following table (adapted from Bresciani Ludvik 2018) simply provides some examples of performance indicators that can be used in an equity-driven conversation *if* the student identifier data has also been collected in a trustworthy and reliable way. In addition, we posit some performance indicator data that we hope institutions will seriously consider as recent research from the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Educational Sciences is supporting the need to focus on these kinds of measures. What is important to note is that these performance indicators assert how the organization is performing; however, the data is collected on *individual student*

performance or on variables assumed to influence individual student performance and then reported in the aggregate.

In order to improve organizational performance for all students, *we must understand individual student experiences*. This is where well-executed outcomes-based assessment can provide meaningful data if data outliers are taken into consideration to inform decisions as well. For example, if an institution is losing 63% of its Native American students in the first year, understanding those students' experience is obviously important. That means if you only have one Native American student in your class and that student is not learning what he/she needs to learn—particularly in comparison to what the rest of the students are learning—then we have to see what decisions need to be made for that student. However, often, organizationally we are looking at acceptable performance as an 87% pass rate. That means we are indicating to the other 13% (for which there is one Native American student in this particular example), it is acceptable to this institution that they fail. Again, a performance indicator informs you that you have a problem that you then need to examine in a finer, more granular level. However, that takes time, and the question remains as to whether most faculty and administrators have time to accommodate all of their students' needs.

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For example, I can't stand to see a student slipping through the cracks, but I do witness it almost every semester. I often feel there is nothing I can do about it—sometimes because I don't know what to do, or I believe we've already tried everything we know how to do, or I believe I don't have the capacity to do what I think needs to be done. And what's

wrong with this picture? It's unacceptable to me and to our institutional leaders to have one student fail and yet, it occurs. We are working to become efficient with designing, delivering, and assessing what we do—most organizations are. Nonetheless, if we don't gather outcomes-based assessment data, discern what that data means, and inquire into what deci-

sions it informs, we can't "fix" our current challenges. Students will continue to fall through the cracks. How can *that* continue to be acceptable? How can we continue to accept that a shortage of time, energy, and money means a diversion of investment in continuous improvement of students' learning and development? Utilizing as many performance indicator data points as possible may prove useful in allocating the detailed outcomes-based assessment processes to the areas that need them most.

Below is a table listing *some examples* of comparable data that can be used to inform where we need to place more attention. These performance indicators become equity-driven when the data are aggregated by groupings of student self-identifiers (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, disability, veteran, first-generation, foster youth, commuter, Pell-eligible, number of hours/week working off campus, etc.). It is also useful to aggregate data by the intersections of these identifiers (e.g., comparing female Muslim first-generation commuters with African-American male commuters). Knowing which intersections to aggregate the data by is a topic for another conversation and may require a more sophisticated random forest tree analysis.

For now, we simply ask, what else might you want to add to this table? Please let us know by emailing mbrescia@mail.sdsu.edu. Thank you! ■

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Performance Indicators	Data Collection Definition or Instrument Example
Term-to-term persistence rates	IPEDS definition extracted from student transactional system
Graduation rates	IPEDS definition; data extracted from student transactional system
Cumulative grade point average (GPA)	IPEDS definition; data extracted from student transactional system
Learning outcome rubric scores	AAC&U LEAP rubric scores; data extracted from student transactional system
Time to degree	IPEDS definition; data extracted from student transactional system
Pass rates of gate-keeping courses	Campus definition of gate-keeping courses; data extracted from student transactional system
Job placement rates	Data collected at graduation or in a six-month alumni follow-up survey
Progress toward degree	Campus definition of progress toward degree; data extracted from student transactional system
Discipline competency exam scores	Campus definition; data extracted from student transactional system
Licensure and certification exam pass rates	Data extracted from student transactional system
Number of major changes and hours accumulated when change was made	Major and Minor changes and additions as well as cumulative grade point hours that align with future trajectory; data extracted from student transactional system; data extracted from student transactional system
Participation rates in campus-approved student activities and organizations	Campus definition of student activities; data extracted from student transactional system
Participation rates in high-impact practices (HIPs)	AAC&U definition of HIPs; data extracted from student transactional system
Sense of belonging	Hoffman's scale
Overall well-being	NEF's (New Economics Foundation) well-being scales
Personal and social responsibility inventory	AAC&U suggested scale
Self-regulation	Self-regulation scale
Global citizenship	Global citizenship scale
Compassion level	Jazaieri's compassion scale
Growth mindset	Dweck's mindset scale
Grit	Duckworth's grit scale
Resilience	Brief resilience scale
Mindfulness	FFMQ (Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire)
Engagement	NSSE, CSSE
Active empathetic listening	AELS (Active-Empathic Listening Scale)