American Association for Higher Education

ASSESSMENT FORUM
9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.

3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way -- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic. Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.

6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved. Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and

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standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.

9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to ourselves, our students, and society -- is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

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California State University, Long Beach
Division of Academic Affairs

Assessment: Revised Responsibilities and Timetable
September 2005
(DRAFT)

Introduction

In 1995, California State University, Long Beach, established a University Assessment Committee as a cross-divisional body with a broad mandate concerning assessment on campus. Following this mandate, as well as Academic Senate Policy #98-06 on Assessment and a draft campus assessment plan written in 1995, the Committee encouraged best practices in the assessment of student learning across the campus by offering assessment retreats, workshops, and numerous grants programs. As a result, individual faculty as well as entire programs and departments throughout the University have become actively engaged in collecting and using assessment findings to promote student success.

After ten years, responsibility for assessment both in the Division of Academic Affairs and in the Academic Senate has recently re-organized. At this point it is important to build upon past successes by taking the next steps in the process of institutionalization of assessment at CSULB, as well as to review responsibilities for accomplishing these goals, as detailed below and on the following pages.

Assessment Next Steps

For academic year 2005-2006:
By the end of AY 05-06, all degree programs will have:
♦ defined their student learning outcomes;
♦ identified assessment methods to be used;
♦ developed a plan for using the results of assessment for program improvement to enhance student success;
♦ begun writing annual reports on assessment activities.

For academic year 2007-2008:
By the end of AY 07-08, all degree programs will have:
♦ conducted assessment for at least two years;
♦ used assessment for program improvement at least once.

For academic year 2009-2010:
By the end of AY 09-10, all degree programs will have:
♦ incorporated their assessment process into program review.
**Assessment Responsibilities**

The University Assessment Committee, the seven college assessment coordinators, and the Associate Vice President for Graduate and Undergraduate Programs have recommended that the responsibility for taking these next steps be distributed as follows:

1. **Division of Academic Affairs**
   The Associate Vice President for Graduate and Undergraduate Programs will:
   - provide overall leadership for activities pertaining to student learning outcome assessment on campus.
   - provide resources for the accomplishment of these activities.
   - establish timelines for assessment of student learning outcomes.
   - hold appropriate actors accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities.
   - monitor the assessment results reported in annual reports and/or program reviews.
   - synthesize information for reporting purposes to external agencies such as WASC or the CSU Chancellor’s Office.
   - convene the academic deans each year to review the results and to recommend actions for the subsequent academic year.

2. **Campus Coordinator for Program Review and Assessment**
   The coordinator will:
   - contact academic programs to determine their needs for assistance with their responsibilities for assessment;
   - provide workshops and other assistance to faculty, in conjunction with the Faculty Center for Professional Development, external consultants, members of the campus Assessment Talent Bank, and others;
   - provide or arrange for mentoring, sample assessment instruments and sample assessment plans, examples of using assessment in program review, and other relevant materials;
   - make presentations to faculty during new faculty orientations and GE workshops and at other times and places as requested;
   - perform other duties related to assessment as requested.

3. **Academic Programs**
   Faculty of academic programs or units will:
   - define student learning outcomes for each degree program;
   - identify appropriate assessment methods;
   - conduct program level assessment on an ongoing basis;
   - develop a plan for using the results of assessment for program improvement;
   - send an annual report on assessment to the AVP for Graduate and Undergraduate Programs via the college assessment coordinator. (once a program has completed its program review, the assessment
report will be incorporated from that point on into the annual report that updates progress on the MOU);

4. Colleges and College Assessment Coordinators
The Colleges and the College Assessment Coordinators will:
- propose assessment activities and projects for funding, and match funds provided by Academic Affairs;
- provide a brief report at the end of each academic year regarding how funding on assessment was deployed and what was accomplished;
- provide assistance to academic programs on student learning outcomes assessment;
- monitor the progress of the academic programs in respect to assessment;
- review the annual reports on assessment from each degree program sent to the AVP for Graduate and Undergraduate Programs.

5. Program Assessment and Review Council
The Program Assessment and Review Council will:
- recommend policies to the Academic Senate related to assessment;
- provide other advice and reports as detailed in the charge of the Council related to assessment, accountability, and program review.

6. Faculty Center for Professional Development
The Faculty Center for Professional Development:
- will offer workshops on assessment and program review for individuals and groups of faculty;
- will provide resources on student learning outcome assessment;
- will maintain the Assessment Talent Bank;
- may assemble teams for program review and assessment consultation.
Never Let It Rest

Lessons about Student Success from High-Performing Colleges and Universities

We’re back at Macalester College for our second site visit. This meeting is with the provost to get feedback about the interim report we sent a few weeks ago. We’re ready to record what he says we missed about what the college does to enhance student success. Instead, he pulls out a pen and legal pad and says, “This was a fine report. Now tell us how we can do things better here at Mac.”

There’s a lot of buzz these days about student success and educational effectiveness. College costs are rising and enrollments are at all-time high, yet the proportion of students earning degrees has stayed more or less constant for decades. This leads some to conclude that colleges aren’t holding up their end of the educational bargain.

The question, Do they graduate? is receiving the most scrutiny by state legislatures and by those drafting the re-authorization legislation for the Higher Education Act. But policymakers, parents, and students are also asking tough questions about what they can reasonably expect from colleges and universities while students are enrolled. Are schools allocating resources in ways that enhance student learning? Are students challenged and supported in their studies? Do they acquire the lifelong learning skills and competencies that will enable them to lead productive, civically responsible lives after college?

A time-honored approach to improving effectiveness is to learn what high-performing organizations within a given industry do and then to determine which of their practices are replicable in other settings. A team of 24 researchers coordinated by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Institute for Effective Educational Practice at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research set out to do just that.

The Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) project was a two-year study of 20 four-year colleges and universities that had both higher-than-predicted graduation rates and higher-than-predicted scores on the NSSE. Graduation is increasingly used in accountability and performance systems as an indicator of institutional effectiveness, and student engagement is important because research shows that it’s linked to a host of desirable outcomes of college.

The schools listed in the box on page 48 are not necessarily the “most engaging” institutions in the country, nor do they necessarily have the highest graduation rates. But they exceed what they are expected to do in these two key areas, after taking into account relevant student and institutional characteristics. Taken together, these two indicators suggest that these colleges and universities “add value” to their students’ experiences.

The DEEP research team visited each institution twice for several days. Altogether, we talked with more than 2,700 people; observed dozens of classes; and spent time in libraries.
cafeterias, and other campus venues. We also reviewed hundreds of print and electronic documents. From this mountain of data, we distilled a handful of common themes that cut across these very different colleges and universities. These are described in our new book, Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter.

One of the most important conditions characterizing the DEEP institutions is an intentional focus on institutional improvement. In this article we illustrate what this improvement-oriented ethos looks like in practice and conclude with some ideas for what other institutions can learn from DEEP.

**AN IMPROVEMENT-ORIENTED ETHOS**

The Macalester College provost’s response to our description of his institution illustrates several key features of the DEEP schools. They constantly experiment with new approaches for improving teaching and learning, occasionally adopting promising practices from other institutions. Confident as to who and what they are, their motivation for getting “better” generally is internal. And they continuously monitor what they’re doing, where they are, and where they want to go, in order to maintain momentum. Although generally self-critical, they aren’t plagued by a culture of complaint, in large part because of their bent toward innovation. To varying degrees, they’re emblematic of the learning organizations described by Peter Senge and the firms studied by Jim Collins that catapulted from good to great.

Supporting this orientation toward improvement is a “can-do” ethic that permeates the campuses—a tapestry of values and beliefs that reflect the institutions’ willingness to take on matters of substance consistent with their priorities. Indeed, they exude a sense of “positive restlessness” in how they think about themselves and what they aspire to be.

**Positive restlessness.** Never quite satisfied with their performance, DEEP colleges and universities are restless in a positive way. A faculty member at Evergreen State College explained what this feeling is like on that campus. “We talk about what needs to be fixed all the time. This is very much a part of our culture.” Indeed, much of Evergreen’s academic program is reinvented on an annual basis. Anchoring its curriculum is the “Program,” an interdisciplinary semester- or year-long study of a topic or problem that a small group of faculty from different disciplines design and pursue with two dozen or so interested students. Faculty who teach similar material or the institution’s core courses follow the basic approach of the Program by frequently revising both the content and pedagogy of their courses as well.

Improving the quality of learning and teaching is pretty much the order of the day at DEEP schools. As a sociology faculty member involved in the Teaching and Learning Center at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina told us, “We are very conscious of the need to understand students and to engage them actively in the classroom.” Another faculty member explained that it’s part of the institutional culture here “to address poor teaching.”

Faculty Learning Communities at Miami University provide a venue for faculty members to discuss ways to extend their pedagogical repertoires. Each participant identifies a specific course that he or she wants to improve, discusses ways to make improvements, and implements changes during the academic year. Theme-based learning communities focus on such issues as cooperative learning and ethics across the curriculum, using team teaching and small-group strategies to enhance learning. Other groups experiment with problem-based learning and teaching portfolios, along with strategies for assessing student learning.

From its founding in 1994, California State University at Monterey Bay set out to be an innovative, learner-centered educational institution. Today, the university integrates interdisciplinary academic programs, active and collaborative learning, and service learning throughout its curriculum. According to one administrator, “We are our biggest critics....We hold ourselves to a higher standard because we’re supposed to be

### PROJECT DEEP COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

- Alverno College (WI)
- California State University at Monterey Bay (CA)
- The Evergreen State College (WA)
- Fayetteville State University (NC)
- George Mason University (VA)
- Gonzaga University (WA)
- Longwood University (VA)
- Macalester College (MN)
- Miami University (OH)
- Sewanee: University of the South (TN)
- Sweet Briar College (VA)
- University of Kansas (KS)
- University of Maine at Farmington (ME)
- University of Michigan (MI)
- University of Texas at El Paso (TX)
- Ursinus College (PA)
- Wabash College (IN)
- Wheaton College (MA)
- Winston-Salem State University (NC)
- Wofford College (SC)
trying new things.

George Mason University's (GMU) similar inclination to innovate is due in part to its relative youth and its self-perception as an "underdog" in the Virginia higher education system. As one staff member told us, "Because this is a young institution, there's a strong dynamic sense, an openness to try new things and do interesting things." Another said, "What's so great is there's no predefined way of doing things, of how this place moves—except forward." A student voiced a similar sentiment: "We're big on improvement here, and this place is so responsive. You can make things happen very fast." A faculty member added, "The attitude is, 'Let's do it and see what happens.'"

Investing in student success. Discretionary resources exist at the University of Michigan to seed innovation. The provost supports initiatives to improve undergraduate education, and academic units sponsor scores of small programs that significantly enrich the undergraduate experience. Among these are the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program and a number of highly visible diversity initiatives, such as the Pathways to Student Success and Excellence Program, the Minority Engineering Program, and the King/Chavez/Parks College Clubs.

Even DEEP schools with modest resources are committed to support good ideas that promise to enhance student learning. For example, although resources at Gonzaga University are limited, one senior administrator asserted, "We have a can-do attitude....We figure out how to get things done." Students are part of the solution, as one administrator pointed out: "We need to employ students to operate.

Campus work experiences are often educationally enriching as well as a source of income, providing students with substantive leadership and learning opportunities. Another positive side effect of hiring large numbers of students for campus jobs is a strong sense of student ownership of university programs and services.

Although resources at the University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) are stretched thin, its financial challenges seem to strengthen, not threaten, its sense of purpose. A senior administrator told us, "We do a lot with a little, but where you put your money speaks volumes." Like Gonzaga, its Student Work Initiative employs students on campus in jobs essential to keeping the campus functioning. Jump-started with $50,000 from the president's office, the program ensures that more than half of UMF students work on campus, and the school's persistence rate is rising.

Decisionmaking informed by data. DEEP schools frequently combine stories with systematically collected information about student and institutional performance to estimate how well they're doing. As the University of Kansas (KU) provost told us, "Data drive most of the things we do." Most use some form of benchmarking and were among the early adopters of NSSE, using it in combination with other assessment tools to determine whether some aspects of student and faculty behavior could be better aligned.

Another example is the University of Michigan, which conducted six major studies of the undergraduate experience between 1986 and 2003. Alverno's assessment-driven ability-based education and Cal State Monterey Bay's Outcomes-Based Education model are vehicles for coordinating and revising academic offerings and for improving instructional practices.

Moreover, the DEEP institutions report their performance. A steady stream of reports from KU's Office of Institutional Research and Planning ensures that information is available for policy formation and decisionmaking there. Results from the General Education Assessment, Student Perceptions Survey, Senior Survey, and NSSE are reported routinely to academic and student-life administrators. These data are then used to modify advising practices, curriculum requirements, and administrative structures. Three-person faculty teams at KU annually conduct interviews with about 120 graduating seniors to assess the impact of general education
courses, information that is then fed back to departments. Longwood University and GMU operate under a Virginia state-mandated assessment requirement that has led to data-informed decisionmaking. Extensive faculty discussions at Longwood during the late 1980s led to a revision and expansion of its general education requirements in 1990. Today, Longwood evaluates the impact of these changes using multiple measures, including surveys, academic progress, statistics, curriculum evaluations, and externally normed discipline-specific achievement tests.

GMU faculty also responded to the state’s assessment mandate. Every semester faculty members in Mason’s New Century College develop a portfolio assessment for each course, on which they base changes in the course for the next term, while the GMU School of Nursing faculty use student focus groups to solicit feedback on course offerings and pedagogy.

Other GMU academic departments meet with the leaders of student organizations to obtain comments on courses and to plan revisions of them. Such efforts are essential, explained one faculty member: “You wonder if your assumptions about learning are correct because the student body constantly changes and comes from different backgrounds than do many of the faculty.”

Miami University faculty members talk about the “sense of momentum” that is fueled by continuous assessment. Groups there such as the Liberal Education Council, Multicultural Council, and Committee for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching review programs regularly and recommend ways to strengthen them. The Committee on Student Assessment and Expectations is pursuing an ambitious benchmarking exercise whereby each department and program evaluates its own practices, makes comparisons to six

strong departments at other universities, and implements the best practices they find. More than 100 plans for improvement have ensued.

And to varying degrees DEEP schools are willing to confront “the brutal facts of reality,” as Jim Collins puts it. Fayetteville State University and the University of Texas at El Paso, embarrassed by their poor graduation rates, did something about them. Sewanee was disappointed in its NSSE active and collaborative learning scores and revised its first-year program to encourage such activities.

In the early 1990s, Macalester commissioned a retention task force to examine first-year student retention, which was well below the 90 percent level to which campus leaders aspired. Identifying academic advising and student-faculty interaction as areas to enhance, Macalester now requires all students to take its effective—but previously “optional”—first-year seminar course and clarified the academic advising responsibilities of the faculty members teaching the course.

**How Did They Do It?**

While all 20 DEEP colleges and universities are inclined toward improvement, each took a different path. At some schools—Evergreen, Macalester, the University of Michigan, and Ursinus—the curriculum was the focal point for promoting student success. Gonzaga University, Longwood University, Miami University, and UMF use out-of-class activities to engage students with their classes and the institution.

Sometimes—for example, at Alverno College and Cal State Monterey Bay—a convergence of external forces, such as changing accreditation standards and an authentic desire to improve student learning, prompted schools to look closely at various aspects of the student experience and institutional performance.

At other schools—such as UMF, the University of Texas at El Paso, Fayetteville State, and GMU—visionary leaders pointed the way. At still others—Cal State Monterey Bay, Evergreen State, Michigan, Sewanee, Sweet Briar, and Wabash—a salient founding mission and strong campus culture sustain the necessary commitment to student success.
Although each DEEP school charted its own course to institutional improvement, there are some lessons from their experiences and circumstances that other colleges and universities can apply in their own context.

Stay the course. DEEP schools did not become high-performing institutions overnight: they had the advantage of people at the institution working on one or more initiatives for an extended period of time. Some of the key champions for change had been at the institution a long time, such as the KU provost and the Miami vice president for student affairs. Evergreen’s academic dean graduated from the college; his knowledge of the institution and its founding values were instrumental in aligning the college’s mission, educational philosophy, policies, and practices.

Provide leadership from every corner. Many institutions plod along without visionary executive leadership. This is not the case at DEEP schools. What sets most of these presidents apart from many of their counterparts is their holistic perspective on student development and institutional responsibilities for student success. They recognize that it is essential to provide a learning environment that combines high academic challenge with commensurate support.

They also surround themselves with talented colleagues—especially senior academic and student affairs officers—who work well together to implement policies and practices that realize the institution’s mission. The relationship may not be causal, but it’s worth noting that all the presidents had held academic appointments before being selected for their presidency.

As important as senior administrators are, effective leadership for student success is not concentrated exclusively in the executive ranks. Senior and junior faculty and staff members are encouraged to find ways to weave their ideas for improving teaching and learning into policies and everyday practices. Indeed, at many DEEP schools some of the more powerful innovations were introduced by faculty members.

Leaders are not necessarily expected to bring about the changes themselves but rather to motivate, monitor, encourage, and support others who are also working on the issues. Consequently, DEEP colleges and universities had lots of people pulling in the same direction at the time we conducted this study.

Put someone in charge, but make it collaborative. There is an old adage that when everyone is responsible for something, no one is accountable for it. For this reason, DEEP schools usually assign one individual or group the responsibility for coordinating and monitoring the status and impact of its student-success initiatives. Sometimes the usual suspects are enlisted—faculty and staff members with a reputation for getting things done. Sometimes key newcomers help lead the way, as did a new academic dean at Sewanee and the new vice president of student affairs/dean of co-curricular life at Sweet Briar charged with pulling the in-class and out-of-class experience on campus closer together.

At the same time, collaboration is key. The success of Miami’s efforts was helped immeasurably by an effective working relationship among the provost, the academic deans, and the vice president for student affairs. Evergreen’s efforts benefited from a fixed-term “think force” of administrators, key faculty members, students, and governing board members. Such a high-profile group adds legitimacy to change initiatives and can engender commitment from others. By connecting to similar activities and individuals across the institution, these groups create support and synergy for change.

Faculty collaboration is a key ingredient of curriculum revision. At Wofford College and Ursinus, for example, creating common intellectual experiences tended to neutralize the polarizing effects of disciplinary loyalty by compelling faculty to work together on a project that benefited the whole college and enhanced the overall quality of the student experience.

Sustainable improvements are not usually the work of a single unit. Rather, these innovations typically cross traditional organization boundaries, such as the collaborations between academic and student affairs on learning communities at the University of Texas, El Paso; the early alert programs at Cal State Monterey Bay, Fayetteville State, and Winston-Salem State University; and the first-year initiatives at Miami.

Moreover, the innovations often spread horizontally to different areas, further increasing the chances that many students will be touched by the effort. For example, efforts aimed at enhancing undergraduate education at the University of Michigan involved administrative leaders in the president’s and provost’s offices and were championed by the governing board, the division of student affairs, faculty members, and students. Consequently, the commitment to improving undergraduate programs became embedded in strategic planning activities and, subsequently, policy decisions.

Get and keep the right people. As Jim Collins says, it’s important that the right people be on the bus. The change process starts with getting the best people in the hiring pool, something that DEEP provosts and academic deans are very intentional about and do very well. They unapologetically emphasize to potential faculty the importance of high-quality undergraduate teaching and probe the extent to which potential hires are enthusiastic about and committed to it. Some DEEP schools such as UMF feature an extended campus visit (three days) so that both the potential hire and institution can learn about one another in a variety of social and professional situations.
Lee Shulman reminds us that new faculty members are socialized during graduate school to do some things and not others and to value certain ideas and views about the professoriate, teaching, and learning over others. For this reason, newcomers need to be taught what the institution values; in some instances, they need to be countersocialized. This is best done by veteran faculty with support from administrators. Such efforts must be ongoing, not relegated to an hour during new faculty orientation.

The Ursinus vice president for academic affairs sponsors ongoing colloquia, attended by a few senior faculty, to introduce newcomers to various aspects of the college and to emphasize the institution's central focus on student learning and other values. Newcomers at KU hear plainly from senior faculty that they will occasionally be asked to set aside personal priorities for the good of the campus, such as when general education requirements are revised. As one veteran KU faculty member put it, "We give up a little to make the whole better," a legacy of the Populist heritage of its region.

Convert challenges into opportunities. As our research team colleague, Adrianna Kezar, pointed out, organizational change requires openness to surprises, a focus on creativity, and an appreciation for chance occurrences. In some cases, the triggering occurrence is a problem.

For example, Wofford's failure to obtain an NSF curricular-reform grant prompted it to revisit what it was doing and why, resulting in a renewed commitment to an interdisciplinary approach to general education, with learning communities as the featured delivery vehicle. Wheaton responded to enrollment shortfalls by changing its mission and reinvigorating its curriculum with a gender-balanced educational philosophy. In some instances, concerns about the state of affairs turned the institution in a different direction. UTEP adopted a new mission to take advantage of the inexorable shift in the demographics of its region.

What turns these problems into opportunities is when people—usually administrators, but often faculty members and occasionally students—identify successfully lobbies to have the issue addressed in an open forum. A faculty member at Evergreen State labeled this "sensing negative restlessness. Working out problems is vital," he said. "We have to learn to collaborate and help faculty, staff, and students to have faith in the process." Skills like "taking the temperature of the group" and "building group consciousness" are part of Evergreen's ethos and take different forms at other DEEP schools.

Cultivate a campus culture that makes space for differences. Virtually every study of high-performing entities concludes that culture is the single most important element that must be altered and managed in order to change what an organization values and how it acts. Unless they are stitched into campus culture, as Peter Ewell once observed, institutional change initiatives tend to be "trains on their own track," running parallel but not converging.

"Culture" consists in part of tacit assumptions and beliefs that influence both the substance of policies, programs, and practices and how they are implemented. Culture also gives people a common language and values. A strong, coherent institutional culture that features talent development, academic achievement, and respect for differences is congenial to student success.

But institutional culture is not monolithic—especially as students, faculty, and staff members become more diverse—and cultures have their "shadow sides," aspects of institutional life that are problematic. Who and what are privileged and valued are often contested, as are interpretations of events and actions. Some issues, such as striking an appropriate balance between teaching and research, can quickly galvanize parties into staking out all-too-familiar positions that foreclose alternative interpretations or reconciliation efforts. This is true at DEEP colleges as well as at other colleges and universities.

To their credit, DEEP schools generally address such matters head on by creating opportunities for issues and differences to be vetted, understood, and managed. Faculty leaders and senior administrators often take the lead in such dialogues to keep differences from festering and paralyzing institutional functions. When done well, public conversations strengthen academic values and remind colleagues of their responsibilities to encourage and model reasoned discourse about complicated matters and differences of opinion.

A hot-button topic almost everywhere is diversity. At Sweet Briar, students debate not only whether the institution is doing enough to realize its purported aspirations for a diverse student body and faculty but the meaning of diversity itself. At Miami, the desire to move beyond a tolerance of diversity to the construction of a pluralistic community has been a topic of healthy campus discussion for more than a decade.

Avoid overload. The inclination to continually improve undoubtedly exacerbates the universal sense that people at DEEP schools—and just about everywhere else—are on overload. One faculty member described the teaching load at his institution as "crushing." Thus, one of the most important questions for institutions to address is what not to do next but what to stop doing so there is time and energy to invest in promising new initiatives. Otherwise there are few periods during which people give themselves permission to coast, catch their breath, and renew their spirit and energy.

To their credit, some DEEP schools are working on these matters. For instance, Ursinus has a panel of faculty studying workload demands, which increased after
the college introduced a package of curricular revisions to enhance student engagement and academic rigor. Evergreen State uses Disappearing Task Forces (DTFs) to address important governance matters as they arise in order to concentrate faculty service commitments on key issues. Unlike standing committees elsewhere, which take time away from teaching and advising, these task forces are subsequently decommissioned.

Overload can affect students, too, which is why Miami University introduced Choice Matters, an initiative that encourages undergraduates to more deliberately select among the many learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom that they will pursue in order to get the most out of college.

CONCLUSION

Our time on DEEP campuses has convinced us that an improvement-oriented ethos contributes to student success at these institutions. It sounds simple, even trite, but these institutions set priorities consistent with their espoused mission and educational purposes, fund these priorities to the extent possible, monitor their performance and that of their students, and use data to inform decisionmaking. They create effective learning environments for large numbers of students by linking together educational practices that challenge and support them. Institutional leaders champion and reward experimentation consistently with the school’s mission and values.

If these very different colleges and universities can do this, so can many others. That’s not to say it’s easy. The path to institutional improvement is littered with failed and faltering interventions, because often too little thought is given to where the resources or energy will come from to sustain the efforts beyond a first or second cycle. But DEEP schools did not let sustainability paralysis set in. Highly self-critical, they do not allow themselves to become complacent. Rather, they exhibit a persistent tendency to move forward with eyes wide open and alternative strategies in mind to deal with changing circumstances.

These institutions are doing many things from which other schools can learn. But they are not perfect—close inspection reveals flaws in each of these gemstones. For example, as good as they are, each has one or more groups of students who are not as engaged as the institution would like. Although their priorities and properties make them attractive on a variety of levels, faculty and staff at DEEP schools are the first to admit that they would like to be even better than they are.

Indeed, this drive to improve is one of their more distinctive and endearing characteristics. More than any other trait, it may be the one that leads them to discover even more effective strategies for promoting student success.

We are indebted to Lumina Foundation for Education and the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts (CILA) at Wabash College for their support of Project DEEP and our partners at the American Association for Higher Education who assisted in various aspects of the study. However, the views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors, not Lumina or CILA.

Also we wish to acknowledge other members of the DEEP research team: Rob Aaron, Charles Blaich, Anne Bost, Larry Braskamp, Ed Chan, Arthur Chickering, Jason DeSousa, Elaine El-Khawas, Sara Hinkle, Mary Howard-Hamilton, Bruce Jacobs, Adrianna Kezar, Richard Lynch, Peter Magolda, Kathleen Manning, Caria Morelon, Shaila Mulholland, Richard Muthiah, Charles Schreeder, and Mary-Beth Snyder.

Finally, we wish to thank the faculty, staff, and students at the 20 DEEP colleges and universities who gave freely of their time during our campus visits and helped us discover what "matters" to student success.

To assist institutions in taking stock of the extent to which the conditions for student success exist on their campus, we developed the Inventory for Student Engagement and Success described in Kuh et al. (in press).

RESOURCES

An archive of all past postings (with a two week delay) can be found at:

http://ctl.stanford.edu/Tomprof/index.shtml

* * * * *

Folks:


Regards,

Rick Reis
reis@stanford.edu
UP NEXT: Preparing Doctoral Students for Faculty Careers That Contribute to the Public Good

Tomorrow's Teaching and Learning

-----------------------------------------------4730 words-----------------------------------------------

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER?

In this essay I want to talk about ten of the qualities that make a good teacher. My method is absolutely unscientific. Readers who want to know what extents say about good teaching should stop reading right now and open to a different page of Inspiring Teaching. Readers who want to know what Pete has noticed about good teaching are welcome to read on. My evidence is personal, memorial, observational, and narrow. I have known teachers in Indiana, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Texas, England, and China. Like Henry David Thoreau, I refuse to apologize for writing so much about myself. There is, simply, no one else I know as well. My hope is that my readers will be inspired to think far less about what I have noticed makes a good teacher than about what they themselves have noticed.

1. Good Teachers Really Want to Be Good Teachers

Good teachers try and try and try, and let students know they try. Just as we respect students who really try, even if they do not succeed in everything they do, so they will respect us, even if we are not as good as we want to be. And just as we will do almost anything to help a student who really wants to succeed, so they will help us to be good teachers if they sense that we are sincere in our efforts to succeed at teaching. Some things teachers can fake. Some things teachers must fake. We have, for example, to act our way into letting our students know that we can't think of any place we would rather be at 8:10 on a Friday morning than in a class with them talking about the difference between a comma splice and a run-on sentence. An acting course is a good preparation for a life in the classroom because it shows us how to pretend. Our students probably know on some level that we would rather be across the street sipping a cup of Starbucks coffee than caged up with 24 paste-faced first years who count on our joyous enthusiasm and enlivening wit to be the cup of Starbucks that will get them ready for their 9:10 class. But they will forgive our chicanery, even if they suspect that we are faking our joy. They will know it by the second day, however, if we don't really want to be good teachers, and they will have trouble forgiving us for that. Wanting—really, truly, honestly wanting—to be a good teacher is being already more than halfway home.

2. Good Teachers Take Risks

They set themselves impossible goals, and then scramble to achieve them. If what they want to do is not quite the way it is usually done, they will risk doing it anyhow. Students like it when we take risks. One of my own favorite courses was a first-year writing course in which I ordered no writing textbook for the course. On the first
day I announced, instead, that my students and I were going to spend a semester writing a short textbook on writing. It was, I said, to be an entirely upside-down course in which the students would write lots of essays, decide as a group which ones were best, and then try to determine in discussion what qualities the good ones had in common. Whenever we hit upon a principle that the good essays seemed to embody and that the weak papers did not, we would write it down. Then we eventually worked our discovered principles into a little textbook that the students could take home with them. It was a risky course. It was built on a crazy notion that first-year college students in a required writing course could, first of all, tell good writing from less-good writing, and, second, that they could articulate the principles that made the good essays better. My students knew I was taking a risk in setting the course up that way, but because they knew that my risk was based on my own faith and trust in them, they wanted me—they wanted us—to succeed.

We teachers have something called academic freedom. Too many of us interpret that to mean the freedom from firing. I suggest that we should interpret it rather as the freedom to take chances in the classroom. I love taking risks. It keeps some excitement in what is, after all, a pretty placid profession. I like to try things that can fail. If there is no chance of failure, then success is meaningless. It is usually easy enough to get permission to take risks, because administrators usually like it when teachers organize interesting and unusual activities. For some risky activities it may be best not to ask permission, partly because the risks that good teachers take are not really all that risky, and partly because it is, after all, easier to get forgiveness than to get permission. Teachers who regularly take risks usually succeed, and the more they succeed the more they are permitted—expected—to take risks the next time. Taking risks gives teachers a high that is healthy for them and their students. It makes good teaching, good learning.

3. Good Teachers Have a Positive Attitude
I don't much like being around people who are cynical about their work, who complain about students or student writing or student-athletes or fellow teachers or administrators or trustees or teaching loads or salaries. I occasionally succumb to cynicism myself, but I find that I don't much like myself when I am waxing cynical, and I try to unwax myself. I like humor, but not when it is directed against others. I distrust whiners who put themselves into the role of victims. "How can we do anything with the students the admissions office is sending us these days?" "My goodness, I've never had such a hopeless set of students." "Don't the high schools teach them anything anymore?" "How do they expect us to teach these kids at 8 a.m.? All they do is sleep after partying all night." "This profession surely isn't what it used to be. Why, I remember..." Casting ourselves in victims' roles gets us off the hook, but we teachers ought to enjoy being on the hook. We ought to enjoy, not eternally complain about, the challenges students give us. Why do we think we deserve smart, self-motivated, hard-working, wide-awake students—students who do not really need to be taught? Why do we think we deserve not to be challenged? I do not always succeed in being positive about my students or my job, but when I feel the need to scratch my cynical itch, I remind myself that the teachers I admire the more are sometimes frustrated, usually underpaid, always overworked, but rarely cynical or negative, and then almost never about students.

4. Good Teachers Never Have Enough Time
Just about all of the good teachers I have known are eternally busy. They work 80-100 hour weeks, including both Saturdays and Sundays. Their spouses and families complain, with good reason, that they rarely see them. The reward for all this busy-ness is more busy-ness. The good teachers draw the most students, get the most requests for letters of recommendation, work most diligently at grading papers, give the most office hours and are most frequently visited during those office hours, are most in demand for committee work, work hardest at class preparations, work hardest at learning their students' names, take the time to give students counsel in areas that have nothing to do with specific courses, are most involved in professional activities off campus.

For good teachers the day is never done. While it does not follow that any teacher who keeps busy is a good teacher, the good teachers I know rarely have time to relax. The good teachers I know find that they are as busy teaching two courses as teaching three. They know that they do a much better job with the two courses than the three because they give more time to the individual students, but they also know that for a responsible teacher the work of good teaching expands to fill every moment they can give to it. They might well complain about how busy they are, but they rarely complain, partly because they don't want to take the time to, partly because they don't like whining. Actually, they seem rather to like being busy. To put it more accurately, they
like helping students-singular and plural-and have not found many workable shortcuts to doing so.

5. Good Teachers Think of Teaching as a Form of Parenting
No one likes to think of college teaching as in loco parentis, but the best teachers I know seem to find that their best teaching feels a lot like parenting. By that they do not mean that as teachers they set curfews or lock the dorms up at 11 p.m. or take away television privileges for students who get below a C or confiscate X-rated videos or Jack Daniels. It does not mean that they offer sex education (though they will, if a student trusts them enough to ask), and it does not mean that they offer spiritual instruction (unless a student asks them to). But good teachers seem to find that the caring that goes into their teaching feels a lot like the caring that goes into parenting. It means knowing when to stand firm on a deadline or a standard of excellence, and when to bend or apologize. It means knowing when to give students someone to talk with, when to be the rock that students can test themselves by trying to move out of the way, when to protect students from the ugly evils of the world, and when to let them face those evils in all of their ugliness. It means knowing the difference between soft caring and tough caring. It means recognizing that students are adults, sort of, but children, sort of.

Looking back, I know that as a student I found several father and mother figures among my teachers. And now, at a time in my life when all four of my own children are in grade school, I know that they are finding replacement parents out there, teachers who are continuing and in some ways correcting the job my wife and I did as parents. But mostly I know that I feel especially comfortable with college students these days. Having just come away from years of parenting young people very much like the ones I see in my classrooms, I feel that I know them, their insecurities, their problems, their capacities. I feel that I have a reasonably sure instinct about when to stand firm and when to bend, when to be someone to talk with and when to say "Well, see you in class tomorrow" and when to say "Got time for a coffee?" Actually, it feels a lot like love.

6. Good Teachers Try to Give Students Confidence
I have come to the conclusion that the specific subject matter I teach is less important for itself than for what students learn by learning it. My Chaucer students can for the most part get along in life just fine without knowing much about Chaucer's language or the Canterbury Tales or why the low-class Miller feels free enough to tell a raunchy tale in reply to the tale of the high-class Knight. My Chaucer students cannot get along, however, without the confidence they gain by mastering a new language, learning to understand what social classes were in Chaucer's time, and why a miller would, in the carnival atmosphere of pilgrimage, feel enough courage to joust verbally with a knight. When students write papers, it is far less important that they say something worth reading about the Wife of Bath's fifth husband than that they develop the confidence to know that, when they really do have something important to say, they will be able to say it clearly, forcefully, and with a proper marshaling of evidence.

Allen, one of my best students in 1995, did well on tests and papers, but refused to speak in class. In a conference I asked him why, since he was doing so well, he would not contribute to the classroom discussion. "I guess it kind of scares me," he replied, "with all of those really smart students in there saying intelligent things. I learn more if I just listen." I understood, of course, because I gave similar excuses when I was an undergraduate. Like Allen, I counted on hard work and good test and paper grades to pull me through, but I never talked in class. I told Allen he was as smart and as articulate as anyone in the class, and I hoped he would feel comfortable sharing his ideas with the rest of us. I told him that the most of those other students looked and sounded smart in part because I tried always to find something in what they said to praise, because I had tried to develop a knack for creatively rephrasing what they said so they sounded smart, and that if necessary I would do the same for his comments. Shortly after that, he did, once, offer a comment in class, and I said something encouraging about it. But then he clammed up again for the rest of the semester.

About a week after the last class, Allen came in and asked if I would write letters of recommendation for him for his applications to law school. I said I would, of course, but when I found out about his desire to be a lawyer, I knew I should have pressed him even harder to be more aggressive in class. How much of a future is there, after all, for a smart lawyer who does well on tests but is afraid to speak his mind in front of others? Allen will do all right, of course, and he will gain the confidence he needs to succeed in his profession, but I wish I had pushed him harder while I had the chance to force him to feel the confidence he has every right to feel. I think I should have tried harder to knock him off balance.
7. Good Teachers Try to Keep Students-And Themselves-Off Balance

I have learned that when I am comfortable, complacent, and sure of myself I am not learning anything. The only time I learn something is when my comfort, my complacency, and my self-assurance are threatened. Part of my own strategy for getting through life, then, has been to keep myself, as much as possible, off balance. I loved being a student, but being a student meant walking into jungles where I was not sure my compass worked and didn’t know where the trails might lead or where the tigers lurked. I grew to like that temporary danger. I try to inject some danger into my own courses, if only to keep myself off balance. When I feel comfortable with a course and can predict how it will come out, I get bored; and when I get bored, I am boring. I try, then, to do all I can to keep myself learning more. I do that in part by putting myself in threatening situations.

A couple of decades ago, I developed a new teaching area-an area I had never had a course in when I was a student: Native American literature. It would have been more comfortable for me to continue with the old stuff I knew, but part of what I knew is that I detest stagnation. I rashly offered the department’s curriculum committee a new course. When they rashly accepted it, I was off balance, challenged by a new task in a new area. I now teach and publish in Native American literature regularly.

In 1988 I began to feel that I was growing complacent teaching the privileged students I have always taught at Lehigh University-mostly the children of upper middle class white families. It was getting too comfortable, too predictable. I applied for a Fulbright grant to teach for a year in the People’s Republic of China. When the appointment came through, I was scared, but I signed the papers and not long after went with my wife and four teenaged children to Chengdu in Sichuan Province to take up the teaching of writing and American literature to Chinese graduate students. I have never felt so unbalanced in my life-teaching students who could just barely understand me, even when I was not talking “too fast.” It was a challenge to teach such students to read the literature of a nation most of them had been taught to hate and to write papers in a language that was alien to them. And that was only part of the unbalance. The rest was riding my bicycle through streets the names of which I could not read, eating with chopsticks food that was almost always unrecognizable and often untranslatable because nothing quite like it grew in my native land. Never have I felt so unbalanced for so long a time, but never have I learned so much in so short a time.

I have noticed that good teachers try to keep their students off balance, forcing them to step into challenges that they are not at all sure they can handle. Good teachers push and challenge their students, jerking them into places where they feel uncomfortable, where they don’t know enough, where they cannot slide by on past knowledge or techniques. Good teachers, as soon as their students have mastered something, push their best students well past the edge of their comfort zone, striving to make them uncomfortable, to challenge their confidence so they can earn a new confidence.

8. Good Teachers Try to Motivate Students by Working Within Their Incentive System

Most undergraduate students of my generation-at least the ones at Earlham College, where I took my bachelor’s degree-were eager to serve their fellow humans. Most of the undergraduates I encounter these days, on the other hand, are eager to make a lot of money. Some humanities teachers complain about the crassness of these students. Others try to figure out ways to use their students’ desire for financial security to motivate them. They point out that many business executives were liberal arts majors in college, and that while a good liberal arts background does not always help college graduates get their first jobs in business and industry, once they have that first job they tend to advance more rapidly than graduates with more narrowly technical degrees. They point out that liberal arts graduates know how to synthesize things, how to explain things to others, how to persuade others to their point of view, how to understand the people who many any business work. In English departments, I sometimes point out, we teach students all sorts of money-making skills, like reading and analysis, speaking and writing, picking up ideas quickly, critical thinking, psychology, pedagogy, pattern-finding, drawing conclusions from evidence, persuasion, and so on. We also encourage students to think about why they are on earth, about where they are going, about what some of the greatest thinkers and most creative writers in the past have said about the meaning of human existence, about what is most worth doing in life, and about how wealthy people might best spend their hard-earned money. Good teachers do not complain about how crass the students are these days. They try to understand what makes students tick these days, and then they build on that knowledge to make them tick.
9. Good Teachers Do Not Trust Student Evaluations

Neither do bad teachers. But there is a difference in their reasons for distrusting them. I have noticed that good teachers, when they get really good evaluations, don’t quite believe them. They focus instead on the one or two erratic evaluations that say something bad about them. They good teachers tend to trust only the negative evaluations: "I wonder what I did wrong. I suppose I went too fast, or perhaps I should have scheduled in another required conference after that second test. I wish I could apologize to them, or at least find out more about what I did wrong." The not-so-good teachers also do not trust student evaluations, but they distrust them for different reasons. They tend to trust the positive evaluations but not the negative ones: "Those good evaluations are proof that I succeeded, that my methods and pace were just about right for these students. The others just fell behind because they were lazy, because they never bothered to read the book or study for the exams. Naturally they did not like my course because they put nothing into it. Besides, how can students judge good teaching, and anyhow, what do they know? Anyone can get good student evaluations by lowering their standards, being popular, and by pandering to the masses." Good teachers tend to discount the positive evaluations, however numerous they may be; less-good teachers tend to discount the negative evaluations, however numerous they may be.

10. Good Teachers Listen to Their Students

Shortly after I read Professor Levi’s statement that no one has ever defined what makes a good teacher, I asked the students in my undergraduate Chaucer course at Baylor University (where I was a visiting professor during 1995-96), to write a sentence or two about what, in their own experience, makes a good teacher. The responses ranged widely, but I sorted through the pieces of paper on which they wrote them and put them in different piles. Then I combined the piles into ones that seemed to be generically related. Then I combined the piles into ones that seemed to be generically related. Three quarters of their responses fell into two piles. The first of those I call the "A" pile, the second I call the "E" pile.

In the "A" pile I found words like "accessible," "available," and "approachable." Here are some of the sentences they wrote in response to my question, "What makes a good teacher?" I have edited them slightly, mostly to put them into more parallel constructions:

Good teachers

Š are available to assist students with questions on the subject, and they show concern.
Š do not have a lofty, standoffish attitude.
Š can interact with a student on an individual basis.
Š want to know each individual student.
Š give time, effort, and attention to their students.
Š are personable, on your side.
Š are willing to be a friend to students.
Š are actually interested in the students.
Š are actively involved with their students.
Š are first friends, then educators. The friend encourages, supports, and understands; the educator teaches, challenges, and spurs the student on.

In the "E" pile I found words like "enthusiastic," "energetic," "excited":
Good teachers should love what they teach and convey that love to the class.

They have both an enthusiasm for and an encyclopedic knowledge of the subject.

They have such an obvious enthusiasm for what they do that it is contagious and their students pick up on it.

They have a desire to learn, and for others to learn, all of the exciting things they have learned.

They are obviously excited about teaching. When a teacher enjoys teaching, it is usually obvious, and that enjoyment is passed on to the students. The classes I've had with teachers who loved the subject they were teaching are the ones I've enjoyed the most, and the ones I've been the most eager to learn in. A teacher who isn't enthusiastic can ruin even the most fascinating of subjects.

These students are English majors at a Christian university in Texas. Their answers might well not ring as true for computer science majors at MIT in Massachusetts. The point is not that all good teachers must be available to their students and enthusiastic about what they teach—though that is surely not bad advice for anyone aspiring to be a good teacher. The point is that good teachers listen to what their students try to tell them about what makes a good teacher.

Hey, I've done it! Good teachers are those who want to be good teachers, who take risks, who have a positive attitude, who never have enough time, who think of teaching as a form of parenting, who try to give students confidence at the same time that they push them off balance, who motivate by working within the students' incentive systems, who do not trust student evaluations, and who listen to students. Who says no one has ever defined what makes a good teacher?

But wait. The trouble with good teachers is that, finally, they won't be contained in a corral labeled "good teachers." The trouble with exciting teachers is that they are almost always mavericks, trotting blithely off into some distant sunset where no one can brand them. The trouble with inspiring teachers is that they won't stay put long enough to be measured, perhaps because they know that if they did they would be expiring teachers.

Damn.

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Richard M. Rois, Ph.D.
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ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

BOOKS


Moore, D. Shaping department goals and objectives for assessment, Assessment Workbook. Muncie, IN: Ball State University, 1992.


Shaffer, P. Designing a Department Assessment Plan. Assessment Workbook. Muncie, IN: Ball State University, 1992.

WEB RESOURCES

The Office of Institutional Assessment at Indiana University has a good collection of articles on assessment: (http://www.oir.uiuc.edu/assessment)

The Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research at Ball State University offers an on-line guide to designing a department assessment plan in workbook form: (http://www.bsu.edu/web/assessment/WB/contents.htm)

A continuously updated outcomes assessment manual is available on-line at the University of Wisconsin Madison: (http://www.wisc.edu/provost/assess/manual.html)

The University of Colorado at Boulder offers a summary of various types of assessment measures employed by different academic programs on campus: (http://www.colorado.edu/pba/outcomes/)
Links to assessment resources are available on the CSULB PAR Council web page:
(http://www.cslub.edu/divisions/aa/grad_undergrad/senate/committees/assessment/resources/)

The searchable ERIC database (available through the CSULB library) offers thousands of articles on outcomes, assessment, and student learning.

Penn State University maintains a database of articles on using portfolios for assessment:
(https://www.c-education.psu.edu/portfolios/bibliography.shtml)

University of Arkansas at Little Rock has a list of all academic program assessment plans on its “Assessment Central” web page (http://www.ualr.edu/provost/assessment/).

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) web page describes its expectations for educational effectiveness (http://www.wascweb.org).

Weber State University has both assessment plans and assessment reports for all its academic programs on its web page (http://programs.weber.edu/assessment/).

OTHER RESOURCES

Contact colleagues in your discipline at other universities or visit their web pages to find out what they are doing in assessment—you may be surprised! For example, CSU Sacramento, Fresno, and San Bernardino all have assessment plans online for many types of departments.

Browse the web page for your discipline’s regional and/or national professional association(s) to find out what they are doing in assessment. Many have publications available on the subject. For example: SAUM (Supporting Assessment in Undergraduate Mathematics).

Look at the programs for your disciplinary association’s regional or national meetings for presentations on teaching and learning, student outcomes, and program level assessment.

Contact the College Assessment Coordinator for your college:
Arts—Holly Harbinger
Business—Debra Grace
Education—Steve Turley
Engineering—Anastasios Chassiakos
Health and Human Services—Michelle Saint-Germain
Liberal Arts—Mark Wiley
Natural Science & Math—Alan Colburn

Contact the Coordinator for Program Review and Assessment—Michelle Saint-Germain—and ask her about the CSULB Assessment Talent Bank (also on the PARC web page)

Contact members of the Program Assessment and Review Council

Contact the Faculty Center for Professional Development
VISION FOR EXCELLENCE

DIVISION OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH
2005 - 2006

CORE VALUES
OPPORTUNITY
DIVERSITY
EXCELLENCE

CORE PURPOSE
TO GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH HIGHLY VALUED DEGREES
CSULB faculty researchers make significant contributions to the development of new knowledge and regional programs and planning for the future.

Creative activities and research interests of CSULB faculty are engaged in teaching and research, and the expertise and research interests of faculty are widely recognized.

CSULB is recognized for the rich diversity of its student body and the accommodation and support that enhance the highly collaborative climate that encourages creativity and collaboration in research, creative activities, and teaching.

CSULB graduates are highly skilled for successful careers in various fields.

The University's commitment to enhance the highly collaborative climate that encourages creativity and collaboration in research, creative activities, and teaching is among the highest.

The average graduation rate is among the highest.

CSULB faculty are widely recognized for their outstanding teaching, research, and creative activities.

Because of the student-centered philosophy of CSULB, faculty and staff receive the advising and mentoring they need to achieve their dreams.

CSULB provides opportunities for lifelong learning and expanding student learning.

CSULB students have many opportunities to gain a love of ideas and a commitment to being an outstanding teaching-research-university.

CSULB students have many opportunities to gain a love of ideas and a commitment to being an outstanding teaching-research-university.
Research/technology parks in the Greater Long Beach area include a high proportion of small companies spun off from campus-originated faculty-staff-student research projects.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CSULB faculty, staff, and students are intensely involved in community service and partnerships with community agencies and non-profits, schools, and local government agencies.

One of the fastest growing areas of campus activity is the business and technology "incubator" program; whereby faculty-staff-student research teams work together to bring ideas developed through external funding into the marketplace.

All students have the opportunity and necessary financial support to earn credit toward degree through internships with area companies and community organizations.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

The variety and scope of the University's international curricular offerings are continuously broadened and deepened.

Through a wide variety of curricular and extracurricular stratagems, all CSULB students are significantly exposed to a global perspective and many will develop multi-lingual abilities.

Faculty and staff are significantly supported in internationally-related teaching and research.

The international strengths of the University are promoted and communicated, both internally and externally.

www.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/provost/vision

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

The United States is fast approaching universal participation in higher education. Recognizing the transformative importance of this development, the Association of American Colleges and Universities launched Greater Expectations: The Commitment to Quality as a Nation Goes to College. As part of that initiative, a national panel of top education, private sector, public policy, and community leaders spent the past two years analyzing higher education in the United States today. The report, Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College, details their findings and recommendations.

The report calls for a dramatic reorganization of undergraduate education to ensure that all college aspirants receive not just access to college, but an education of lasting value. The panel offers a new vision that will promote the kind of learning students need to meet emerging challenges in the workplace, in a diverse democracy, and in an interconnected world. The report also proposes a series of specific actions and collaborations to raise substantially the quality of student learning in college.

The panel concludes that change is urgently needed. Even as college attendance is rising, the performance of too many students is faltering. Public policies have focused on getting students into college, but not on what they are expected to accomplish once there. The result is that the college experience is a revolving door for millions of students, while the college years are poorly spent by many others.

Broad, meaningful reform in higher education is long overdue. The near-universal demand for higher learning in the United States creates new urgency, opportunity, and responsibility to revitalize the practice of undergraduate education.

Some colleges and universities already are making the kinds of learning-centered changes the report recommends. The panel studied pace-setting reforms on campuses across the country, and worked in partnership with a set of competitively selected
"Greater Expectations" colleges, community colleges, and universities representing both private and public education.

These campus examples of Greater Expectations in action give reason for hope that Americans can, and will, create a new national commitment to educational excellence for every college student.

**College in the Twenty-First Century**

College attendance has grown so rapidly over the past four decades that now 75 percent of high school graduates get some postsecondary education within two years of receiving their diplomas. Older adults, also, have enrolled in increasing numbers. A college degree has in many ways become what a high school diploma became 100 years ago—the path to a successful career and to knowledgeable citizenship.

Students are flocking to college because the world is complex, turbulent, and more reliant on knowledge than ever before. But educational practices invented when higher education served only the few are increasingly disconnected from the needs of contemporary students.

Today's college students come from an extraordinarily diverse array of national, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. They bring great vitality to campus, but also place significant new demands on faculty knowledge and skill.

Students also attend college today in very different ways. A rapidly rising majority pursues the degree by attending two or more institutions. Part-time enrollment and distance learning are now common. Many students navigate this new terrain without clear direction or educational maps, collecting credits haphazardly as they go.

Preparation for higher learning has not kept pace with access. Less than one-half of students who enter college directly from high school complete even a minimally defined college preparatory program. Only 40 percent of school teachers hold the high expectations for performance that would ready students for college-level work. Once in college, 53 percent of all students must take remedial courses. Those students requiring the most remedial work are the least likely to persist and graduate.

These far-reaching developments call for new approaches to educational quality. But needed reforms are hindered by the absence of broadly shared agreement about what students ought to accomplish in college.
Many students and parents see college primarily as the springboard to employment; they want job-related courses. Policy makers view college as a spur to regional economic growth, and they urge highly targeted workforce development. Business leaders seek graduates who can think analytically, communicate effectively, and solve problems in collaboration with diverse colleagues, clients, or customers. Faculty members want students to develop sophisticated intellectual skills and also to learn about science, society, the arts, and human culture. For the higher education community as a whole, college is a time when faculty and students can explore important issues in ways that respect a variety of viewpoints and deepen understanding.

A meaningful commitment to educational excellence begins with agreement about the most important goals for student learning. The National Panel report offers a contemporary and comprehensive vision for college learning—a vision that addresses the multiple hopes Americans hold for college education. Moreover, this vision engages the role that higher learning plays in creating a just democracy, cooperation among diverse peoples, and a sustainable world.

**Barriers to Quality from School to College**

The United States can take great pride in the progress it has made in giving more students access to college. But even this work remains both unfinished and insufficient. It is unfinished because access continues to be inequitable, especially for the poor and most minority groups. It is insufficient because many students do not succeed once in college and fail to gain the kind of powerful learning that equips them for a world in flux. Formidable barriers to excellence stand in their way.

Despite years of efforts to improve, secondary education in many school districts continues to be seriously deficient, resulting in students who are underprepared for college-level work. State-mandated tests—the centerpiece of the school reform agenda—often reflect a limited interpretation of learning, overemphasizing memorization of discrete facts at the expense of deeper understanding and its application. Faced with many pressures, including high stakes testing and financial constraints, schools place too little emphasis on the analytical, integrative, and practical skills graduates need.

There is also a disturbing misalignment between high school exit requirements and college entry expectations. Few colleges regularly share with secondary schools what incoming first year students should know and be able to do. "College" courses in high school (as well as remedial courses in
college) have proliferated, despite the absence of guiding principles about what characterizes college-level learning. Many colleges and universities have begun to encourage more in-depth, investigative, or research-based learning even in the first year, but high school and many advanced placement courses continue to feature broad surveys and superficial “coverage.” The senior year of high school, which ideally should emphasize the intellectual skills expected in college, is wasted for many students.

Once enrolled in college, students face other barriers to excellence. The fragmentation of the curriculum into a collection of independently “owned” courses is itself an impediment to student accomplishment, because the different courses students take, even on the same campus, are not expected to engage or build on one another. Few maps exist to help students plan or integrate their learning as they move in and out of separately organized courses, programs, and campuses. In the absence of shared learning goals and clear expectations, a college degree more frequently certifies completion of disconnected fragments than of a coherent plan for student accomplishment.

Other barriers to quality include professors trained and rewarded more for research than for teaching, a prestige hierarchy built on reputation and resources rather than on educational success, and a lack of meaningful or comparable measurements to assess student-learning outcomes.

Many college students now juggle multiple demands, including an increased financial burden, full- or part-time employment, and family obligations. College students typically spend less than half the time on their studies that faculty expect. All these conditions complicate efforts to achieve greater expectations for aspiring college graduates—especially if these new realities are not taken into account in a comprehensive reform of undergraduate education.

**The Learning Students Need for the Twenty-First Century**

These barriers to quality notwithstanding, there is hope on the horizon. College faculties across the country are beginning to adopt new practices that raise the level of student effort and achievement. The Greater Expectations National Panel report and its attendant Web site (www.greaterexpectations.org) highlight many such promising innovations.

The key to successful reform is a clear focus on the kinds of learning that students need for a complex world. The panel urges an invigorated and
practical liberal education as the most empowering form of learning for the twenty-first century. It makes strong recommendations about the knowledge and capacities all students should acquire—regardless of backgrounds, fields, or chosen higher education institutions.

The report further recommends that these goals for students' liberal education become the shared concern of both school and college. The transition from high school to college should be considered a joint responsibility of schools and higher education; it should be carefully planned. The learning outcomes needed in this new era can only be achieved when all parts of the educational experience address them.

Students will continue to pursue different specializations in college. But across all fields, the panel calls for higher education to help college students become INTENTIONAL LEARNERS who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives. To thrive in a complex world, these intentional learners should also become:

- **Empowered** through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills
- **Informed** by knowledge about the natural and social worlds and about forms of inquiry basic to these studies
- **Responsible** for their personal actions and for civic values.

**The empowered learner.** The intellectual and practical skills that students need are extensive, sophisticated, and expanding with the explosion of new technologies. As they progress through grades K-12 and the undergraduate years, and at successively more challenging levels, students should learn to:

- Effectively communicate orally, visually, in writing, and in a second language
- Understand and employ quantitative and qualitative analysis to solve problems
- Interpret and evaluate information from a variety of sources
- Understand and work within complex systems and with diverse groups
- Demonstrate intellectual agility and the ability to manage change
- Transform information into knowledge and knowledge into judgment and action.

**The informed learner.** While intellectual and practical skills are essential, so is a deeper understanding of the world students inherit, as human beings

...
and as contributing citizens. This knowledge extends beyond core concepts to include ways of investigating human society and the natural world. Both in school and college, students should have sustained opportunities to learn about:

- the human imagination, expression, and the products of many cultures
- the interrelations within and among global and cross-cultural communities
- means of modeling the natural, social, and technical worlds
- the values and histories underlying U.S. democracy.

*The responsible learner.* The integrity of a democratic society depends on citizens' sense of social responsibility and ethical judgment. To develop these qualities, education should foster:

- intellectual honesty
- responsibility for society's moral health and for social justice
- active participation as a citizen of a diverse democracy
- discernment of the ethical consequences of decisions and actions
- deep understanding of one's self and respect for the complex identities of others, their histories, and their cultures.

Taken together, these outcomes form the core of a twenty-first century liberal education—liberal not in any political sense, but in terms of liberating and opening the mind, and of preparing students for responsible action. The panel calls for a new national commitment to provide an excellent liberal education to all students, not just those attending elite institutions and not just those studying traditional arts and sciences disciplines. Professional studies—such as business, education, health sciences, technologies—should also be approached as liberal education.

In this spirit, the report urges an end to the traditional, artificial distinctions between liberal and practical education. Liberal education in all fields will have the strongest impact when studies look beyond the classroom to the world's major questions, asking students to apply their developing analytical skills and ethical judgment to significant problems in the world around them. By valuing cooperative as well as individual performance, diversity as a resource for learning, real solutions to unscripted problems, and creativity as well as critical thinking, this newly pragmatic liberal education will both prepare students for a dynamic economy and build civic capacity at home and abroad.
Principles of Good Practice in the New Academy

The Greater Expectations National Panel is optimistic about the future. Liberal education has historically adapted to the needs of a changing world, and innovative approaches can already be found on every kind of campus. The next step is to create from these isolated innovations a comprehensive movement for change across the higher education landscape. The report describes a learning-centered New Academy arising from such a movement.

In this New Academy, colleges and universities will model the purposeful action—the intentionality—they expect of their students. Faculty members will focus more centrally on goals for student learning in both courses and programs, not just on the subject matter taught or the number of credits earned. Leaders will use resources strategically to build a culture centered on learning. Within a broad array of distinctive institutional missions and roles, this learning-centered New Academy will exhibit a rich and desirable diversity of approaches to education. But there will also be a shared commitment to high standards, and new collaborations that create more purposeful educational environments allowing easier passage from one educational institution to another.

Reaching ambitious goals for learning requires integrating elements of the curriculum traditionally treated as separate—general education, the major, and electives—into a coherent program. This does not mean that students will take a common set of courses. But it will require new forms of advising and alignment, both in high school and college, to help each student create a plan of study leading to the essential outcomes of a twenty-first century education. There will be many alternative paths up the educational mountain. But every student needs a sense of direction, markers as well as knowledgeable guides, and navigational tools to support the journey.

Meeting these expectations for quality will focus new attention on the culminating year of college. Both institutions and departments should set standards for achievement of skills, knowledge, and responsibility, and require advanced work that demonstrates the expected outcomes. These culminating performances, which will vary with different fields of study, ought to provide evidence that students can integrate the many parts of their education. They can show how well students actually possess the intellectual, practical, and evaluative judgment and the sense of responsibility a college degree should represent.
Higher education will need to provide both existing and future faculty and school teachers with the necessary preparation to teach effectively in new, challenging environments. The academy must also offer incentives, professional development, support, and rewards for good teaching. Finally, at both the higher and secondary education levels, the nation must develop more sophisticated, nuanced ways of assessing student learning. To build such a culture of evidence, students and faculty need tools to assess all levels of learning and to mark student progress in achieving the goals of a twenty-first century education.

**Achieving Greater Expectations: A Shared Responsibility**

Achieving this vision will require concerted action among all stakeholders. Learning-centered reform cannot be accomplished by any one institution or even by the higher education sector alone. Collaboration with secondary school leaders will help ensure better preparation of all high school students for rigorous college learning. Collaboration among policy makers at the state and federal levels will focus public policy and resources on the quality of students' liberal education. Cooperation with accrediting agencies will further reinforce the national commitment to connect evidence of student accomplishment with judgments about educational quality.

The report of the Greater Expectations National Panel also presents a preliminary set of recommendations that engages many groups, including those in secondary and higher education, as well as policy makers, business leaders, boards of trustees, school boards, the media, college students, and their parents.

The Greater Expectations National Panel urges all citizens to take part in creating a society where learning is prized and everyone has access to an excellent education. Ultimately, the nation's future and its place in the world depend on a new vision for learning as the nation goes to college. ■