



Are there real advantages to developing and implementing student assessment programs and policies? What steps can colleges and universities take to collect and use student assessment data in a way that most benefits students, faculty, and the institution as a whole?

Improving Student Assessment at Associate of Arts Institutions

Written specifically for administrators, faculty, and staff in associate of arts institutions who are involved with student assessment on their campuses, *Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Associate of Arts Institutions* draws upon the results of a national survey of nearly 1,400 colleges and universities to provide institutions with important tools they need to successfully collect

and use student assessment data: (1) a self-inventory mechanism that institutions can use to examine and evaluate their own student assessment process and functions, and (2) a national profile of what associate of arts and other institutions around the country are currently doing to support and promote the use of student assessment. Together, these tools will allow individual institutions to acquire insight into the activities that their own and other institutions are already performing, those which merit greater attention, and those which can make a difference in improving institutional performance.

Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Associate of Arts Institutions

**by Marvin Peterson,
Catherine Augustine,
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and Derek Vaughan**

NCPI Technical Report #5-07

Inside this brochure you'll find a summary of some of the most important findings and recommendations presented in this report. To download a free copy of the complete report, please visit our website, <http://ncpi.stanford.edu>. To purchase a bound copy, please send a check or money order for \$10.00 to the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, Stanford University School of Education, 520 Galvez Mall, 508 CERAS, Stanford, CA 94305-3084. All orders must be prepaid. Price includes shipping.

The report described herein was supported in part by the Educational Research and Development Center program, agreement number R309A60001, CFDA 84.309A, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the U.S. Department of Education.

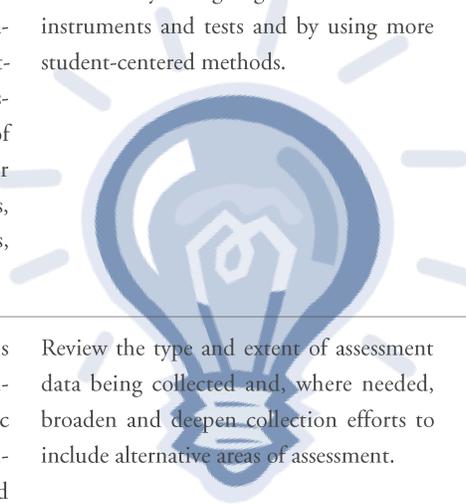
Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Associate of Arts Institutions. By Marvin Peterson, Catherine Augustine, Marne Einarson, and Derek Vaughan. NCPI Technical Report #5-07. 1999.

The past decade has witnessed an increased call for student assessment in higher education, driven by accreditation self-studies, state mandates, academic administrators, faculty groups, institutional researchers, and program review officers. Despite this growing demand from both internal and external sources, NCPI research has found that most associate of arts institutions are not using student assessment data to its full potential—for example, to make academic decisions—and that the student assessment data they collect has only a limited impact.

The tables below present a number of NCPI recommendations that researchers believe will lead to significant increases in associate of arts institutions’ use of and benefit from student assessment information. These findings and recommendations fall into three main areas: The Nature of Assessment, Promoting Assessment, and Supporting Assessment.

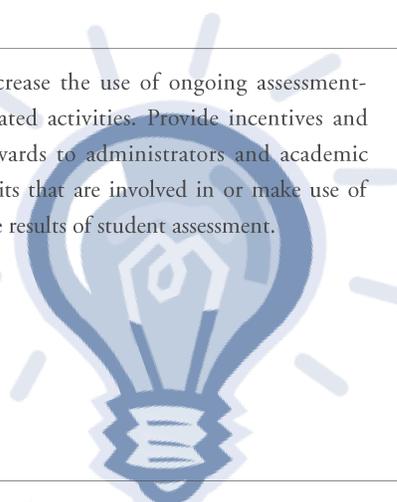
THE NATURE OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT
<p>When collecting student assessment data, associate of arts institutions tend to use tests and other written instruments, although some units or departments also make use of less traditional assessment methods such as observations of student performance, student portfolios or comprehensive projects, capstone courses, student interviews, employer interviews, and alumni interviews.</p>	<p>Employ more extensive data collection methods by using a greater number of instruments and tests and by using more student-centered methods.</p>	<p>These alternative approaches can increase faculty participation in assessment efforts and can help institutions to gather student assessment data that is not accessible via more conventional tests and surveys. Institutions that employ a wider variety of assessment instruments are also more likely to use this data to make educational decisions and to report that the data has impacted faculty.</p>
<p>Most associate of arts institutions emphasize the collection of student assessment data that includes basic college-readiness skills, academic intentions, academic progress, satisfaction, and post-college outcomes. Associate of arts institutions collect less extensive information on their students’ higher order skills, general education competence, competence in the major, vocational skills, personal and affective development, and involvement with the institution.</p>	<p>Review the type and extent of assessment data being collected and, where needed, broaden and deepen collection efforts to include alternative areas of assessment.</p>	<p>Not only will collecting a wider array of data provide a richer understanding of student growth, but the more data institutions collect, the more likely they are to use this assessment data in making educational decisions.</p>



PROMOTING STUDENT ASSESSMENT

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT
<p>Associate of arts institutions do offer professional development on student assessment to their faculty and academic administrators. Their professional development policies, however, are more likely to involve activities that do not significantly affect time in the classroom than those that involve greater expenditure of administrative and faculty time.</p>	<p>Review and consider increasing the array of professional development opportunities on student assessment that are offered to academic personnel. Provide faculty with adequate time to learn about and develop new assessment techniques.</p>	<p>An increase in the number and type of assessment-related professional development opportunities can promote a higher level of faculty and administrative involvement in student assessment. Institutions that offer extensive professional development are more likely to use their student assessment information to make decisions regarding faculty and this information is more likely to have an impact on their faculty.</p>
<p>Approximately half of associate of arts respondents report that they offer annual forums on student assessment, provide regular workshops for academic and student affairs administrators, and have a faculty governance committee that regularly addresses assessment issues. However, associate of arts institutions seldom offer incentives or rewards to encourage faculty and administrators to engage in assessment activities.</p>	<p>Increase the use of ongoing assessment-related activities. Provide incentives and rewards to administrators and academic units that are involved in or make use of the results of student assessment.</p>	<p>Not only will offering such activities demonstrate support for assessment, but institutions that offer more administrative and governance activities also collect more student assessment data and report that these data have an impact on both faculty and their external relationships.</p>
<p>While most associate of arts institutions regularly distribute reports to traditional internal constituents such as faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs professionals, few associate of arts institutions regularly distribute these reports to a broader range of constituents.</p>	<p>Distribute student assessment reports to a wide range of constituents, including students, the general public, and employers.</p>	<p>The greater the number of constituents who receive student assessment reports, the more likely the institution is to use student assessment data to make educational decisions.</p>
<p>Associate of arts institutions responding to the survey described only academic affairs administrators as being very supportive of student assessment. Even the chief executive officer was described, on average, as being only somewhat supportive of student assessment.</p>	<p>Periodically measure the degrees of internal support for student assessment.</p>	<p>Such measurements may be a useful means for associate of arts institutions to gauge the effectiveness of efforts to promote assessment. Internal support is critical--without it there may be difficulties in promoting and funding assessment, as well as in encouraging and rewarding those faculty who do engage in it.</p>



SUPPORTING STUDENT ASSESSMENT

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT
<p>Half of the associate of arts institutions surveyed have evaluated their plan or policy for student assessment.</p>	<p>Institute mechanisms to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of assessment plans and policies.</p>	<p>Internal monitoring allows institutions to better understand whether assessment plans are meeting their objectives and whether the effort is benefiting the institution. In addition, institutions that conduct such evaluations report that faculty have been impacted by student assessment.</p>
<p>Associate of arts institutions report that accreditation mandates and improving undergraduate education are both very important purposes for engaging in assessment. This finding indicates that institutions are both aware of external demands and purposefully engage in student assessment to improve internal processes.</p>	<p>Maintain a commitment to student assessment as a means to foster internal institutional improvement.</p>	<p>Institutions that conduct assessment for the purpose of internal improvement—and not only in response to external demands—collect more assessment data and report that they use this data to make educational decisions.</p>
<p>Fewer than half of associate of arts institutions report that they have a computerized student information system that tracks students from application through graduation. Even fewer have a system that includes student performance indicators or an integrated database.</p>	<p>Expand and improve the use of computerized student information systems.</p>	<p>Institutions that have computerized systems to support and manage the assessment process use their student assessment information to make educational decisions that often result in a positive impact on faculty and students. In addition, the use of relational databases that link student assessment information to other organizational data can facilitate the study of the connections between students' performance and their institutional interactions.</p>
<p>Most associate of arts institutions have some type of planning group for student assessment. Typically, these groups are chaired by an academic affairs administrator and are staffed by faculty, student affairs administrators, and institutional researchers. However, only one-third of these planning groups has a student representative.</p>	<p>Obtain wide input on student assessment issues, and consider involving students in assessment planning groups.</p>	<p>Student representation increases the likelihood of understanding how students feel about assessment. Once institutions understand how students view assessment, they can overcome student objections to participating in assessment activities.</p>



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