



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 Comprehensive Institutions

Written specifically for administrators, faculty, and staff in comprehensive institutions who are involved with student assessment on their campuses, *Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Comprehensive 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 comprehensive 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 Comprehensive Institutions

**by Marvin Peterson,
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and Derek Vaughan**

NCPI Technical Report #5-09

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.

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Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Comprehensive Institutions. By Marvin Peterson, Marne Einarson, Catherine Augustine, and Derek Vaughan. NCPI Technical Report #5-09. 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 comprehensive 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 comprehensive 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, comprehensive 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, capstone courses, and interviews with withdrawing students.</p>	<p>Supplement traditional methods of collecting student assessment data with alternative methods.</p>	<p>These alternative approaches can increase faculty participation in assessment efforts and help institutions to assess students’ higher-order skills, such as application of facts, synthesis, and evaluation. In addition, the more extensive an array of assessment methods used by an institution, the more likely it is that the collected information will have a positive effect on the institution.</p>
<p>Most comprehensive institutions emphasize the collection of student assessment data that includes basic college-readiness, general and major-specific competencies, academic intentions, academic progress, post-enrollment outcomes, and institutional satisfaction. Comprehensive institutions collect less extensive information on their students’ higher order competencies, vocational and professional skills, and personal growth and affective development.</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 students’ cognitive and affective growth, but the more data institutions collect, the more likely they are to use and be positively affected by assessment information.</p>

PROMOTING STUDENT ASSESSMENT

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT
<p>Comprehensive institutions offer professional development on student assessment to their faculty and academic administrators. These policies 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>Comprehensive institutions should consider increasing their use of professional development and should offer a greater variety of professional development opportunities.</p>	<p>Offering a variety of professional development opportunities can improve the level of faculty and administrative involvement in and support for student assessment. Comprehensive institutions that offer more extensive professional development on assessment to their faculty and academic administrators are more likely to use assessment information in educational and faculty-related decisions, and to report that assessment information has had a positive impact on faculty.</p>
<p>More than half of comprehensive institutions report that they provide regular workshops on student assessment for academic and student affairs administrators and have a faculty governance committee that addresses assessment issues.</p>	<p>Review the nature and number of institution-wide activities used to promote internal involvement in and support for assessment. Where necessary, expand the type of activities offered.</p>	<p>Offering such assessment-related activities demonstrates leadership support for assessment. In addition, offering a greater number of administrative and governance activities promoting assessment is a positive predictor of the extensiveness of comprehensive institutions' data collection efforts.</p>
<p>While most comprehensive institutions regularly distribute reports to traditional internal constituents such as faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs professionals, few comprehensive institutions regularly distribute reports to a broader range of constituents.</p>	<p>Examine institutional patterns of assessment report distribution, and if necessary, widen it to include students, the general public, and employers.</p>	<p>Comprehensive institutions that distribute assessment reports to a wide array of internal and external constituents make greater use of assessment information in educational decisions and report more positive faculty and external impacts from student assessment.</p>
<p>At comprehensive institutions, academic affairs and student affairs administrators and chief executive officers are perceived as being very supportive of assessment, while trustees, faculty and students are viewed as being comparatively less supportive.</p>	<p>Periodically measure the degree of internal support for student assessment.</p>	<p>Such measurements may be a useful means to gauge the effectiveness of efforts to promote assessment and to encourage more extensive assessment activity. The perceived degree of administrator and faculty support is positively related to the extent of student assessment approaches adopted by comprehensive institutions.</p>

SUPPORTING STUDENT ASSESSMENT

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT
<p>Half of the comprehensive 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 are more likely to use assessment information in educational decisions and are more likely to experience faculty impacts from assessment.</p>
<p>Comprehensive institutions report that accreditation mandates and improving undergraduate programs are both very important purposes for engaging in assessment.</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—are more likely to use assessment information for institutional decisions and to improve their external relationships.</p>
<p>Fewer than half of comprehensive 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>Examine the capabilities of existing systems, and where necessary and possible, expand and improve the use of computerized student information systems.</p>	<p>The use of databases that link assessment information to other organizational data can facilitate the study of the connections between students' performance and their institutional interactions, and can improve the management of student assessment data.</p>
<p>Most comprehensive institutions have some type of planning group for student assessment. Typically, these groups are staffed by faculty, academic administrators, and institutional researchers. Comprehensive institutions less often report involving students in assessment planning processes.</p>	<p>Review and reconsider internal patterns of structuring and involving various groups in planning and coordinating assessment efforts.</p>	<p>Student representation in assessment planning processes increases the likelihood of understanding how students feel about assessment and encourages student participation in assessment activities.</p>



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