

# CIE UPDATE

The Center for Institutional Effectiveness

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## A Meta-Analysis of Assessment Reports: How and Why?

Four years ago, the Vice-President of Institutional Effectiveness and the assessment fellows started to examine our assessment reports as part of an annual meta-analysis. This yearly review serves a multitude of purposes: It assures quality of assessment plans; it encourages consistency of reports across the college; it creates transparency and accountability so that everyone knows what is expected. Perhaps most importantly, it signals to faculty and staff that their work is valued.

At the end of each two year cycle, the fellows and vice-president meet to review that cycle's assessment projects. The assessment fellows present the reports completed by their assessment liaisons and answer questions the other fellows may have. Using a holistic summative rubric, each assessment report is evaluated. Of significance is whether the project is meaningful for the program, that faculty/staff dialog occurs, and that there is evidence of a well-planned and executed assessment. Upon completion of the meta-analysis, the fellows meet with their liaisons to explain the scoring. A meta-analysis report is then written and the results are shared with the college community. Exemplary reports are celebrated at department meetings and with the Learning Assessment Committee. They are also posted on the CIE webpage and presented at the monthly Board of Trustees meeting. The meta-analysis is helping Bergen grow a culture that focuses on student learning outcomes and institutional success. ■

## New Middle States Standards Focus on Continuous Improvement

Middle States accreditation ensures that an institution's academic programs meet acceptable standards of quality and are committed to continuous quality improvement. Being accredited expresses confidence in an institution's mission and goals, performance, and resources. Institutions undergo rigorous review before accreditation is granted and are evaluated regularly to affirm compliance with standards and policies. Accreditation fosters program accountability to the public and demonstrates engagement in peer review and improvement.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) recently revised its Standards of Excellence for Accreditation based on input from member institutions as well as concerns related to making accreditation less onerous and more useful to its members. The new standards were endorsed in 2014 and all institutions will use the new standards for accreditation beginning in the 2017-18 academic year. The previous set of standards was fourteen in number, whereas the new standards are grouped into seven. An accredited institution of higher education must

have an appropriate mission (Standard 1), live it with integrity (Standard 2), enhance the student learning experience (Standard 3), support the overall student experience (Standard 4), assess its own educational effectiveness (Standard 5), engage in planning to strengthen its resources to ensure institutional improvement (Standard 6), and be characterized by effective governance, leadership, and administration (Standard 7).

While the number of standards has decreased, this change does not reflect a decision by Middle States to lessen its commitment to supporting institutional self-assessment and quality improvement. Instead, restructuring has eliminated redundancies. The sometimes lengthy contextual statements, fundamental elements, and optional analyses have been replaced. Four guiding principles provided the foundation for the revised standards: mission-centric, the student learning experience, continuous improvement, and supporting innovation. In addition, the new standards emphasize functions rather than specific structures, recognizing that there are many different models for educational and operational excellence. Throughout the new standards, there is a strong focus on the student learning experience and ongoing processes for institutional effectiveness assessment.

The process of accreditation gives the education institution an opportunity to reflect on its accomplishments and contribute to the discussion about what it wants for its future. ■

## The Simple Road to Fair Assessment

Learning outcomes can be viewed much in the same way as the rules of the road, with classroom instruction and activities as the GPS that facilitate student learning. Student assessments are the steps to take toward learning and retention. With this metaphor in mind, rubrics for assessing students' work are as important as guardrails on narrow roads. That leaves the classroom instructor as the vehicle, intentionally guiding and supporting students along their paths.

The effort and time it initially takes to create a rubric, pays off in the form of a simplified grading process, where the grades given to students reflect their abilities and skills acquired for meeting the assignment objectives. Developing a rubric for each assignment gives instructors greater control over exactly what they wish to assess. Assignment-specific rubrics help to eliminate the "halo effect", where a student who is a high quality participant during past class discussions and has done well on previous assessments, can lead an instructor to automatically grade this student higher throughout the semester. The rules of the road apply to creating rubrics that provide the support necessary to fairly assess students on predetermined learning outcomes. ■



## Assessing Administrative and Educational Support (AES) Projects

In addition to assessing student learning outcomes, the assessment of the Administrative and Educational Support (AES) units plays a vital role in building operational excellence for student success. Assessment of AES units can be used to improve efficiency, prioritize resources, demonstrate what a unit has accomplished or help with fact-based decision-making.

Just like academic units, AES units have formal assessment procedures in place to measure processes and to use the results to identify challenges and opportunities that enhance student learning outcomes. As AES units begin to think about assessing their units, two questions to consider are: What do we do? How well are we doing it? The answers to these questions can be followed up with: How can we improve what we are doing? How does it lead to improving the student learning experience and to the development and growth of students? The data gathered from the assessment projects provide evidence of the effectiveness of the unit or the need for change. For examples of AES unit assessments, check the PDF document at <https://oira.unc.edu/files/2017/03/Admin-Outcomes-Assessment-Report-Example.pdf>. ■

## 19th Annual League for Innovation in Community Colleges Conference

The CIE Fellows were active participants in the 19th annual League for Innovation in Community Colleges Conference, held this year in San Francisco from March 12th to 15th. Through our three presentations, we shared some of our experiences with others in various stages of their assessment journeys. Our workshop, *From A to Z: An Assessment Toolkit*, had in mind those who are in earlier stages of their assessment undertakings and may not yet be certain about effective ways to begin the process. *The Assessment Fellows: Ambassadors of a High Performance Culture* allowed us to describe and discuss the development of the CIE Assessment Fellows Program, particularly the role it plays in creating a culture of accountability and high achievement at our college. The third presentation, *Transformational Change Amid Competing Interests*, used the case study method to discuss shared governance disagreements over student success initiatives and related curriculum matters.

Participation in The League's conference allowed us to share our experiences with a national audience while also learning much from others. It further provided us evidence that assessment is not an activity periodically undertaken to mollify accreditors, but has become an ongoing activity, regularly engaged in nationwide by faculty, staff and administrators alike to ensure student success. Conference sessions emphasized for us the extent to which our own college's activities are consistent with trends in the nation's community colleges. Furthering our understanding of the growing attention to curriculum alignment, forming identifiable pathways to program completion, and engaging in discussions and activities that can boost our abilities to offer students opportunities for experiential learning and learning communities were all session topics at the conference that made attending the event worthwhile. ■

## Betsy DeVos: Our New Education Secretary

President Trump's choice of Betsy DeVos, a philanthropist and generous donor to many conservative causes, to be his secretary of education has aroused controversy. The critics, including teachers' unions and civil-rights activists, have focused on her support for charter schools and vouchers, her family's backing for antigay causes, and her lack of familiarity with public education. Her supporters herald her position on school choice, her rejection of a common core curriculum and her possible willingness to loosen federal standards for accreditors.

From higher education's perspective, the most important question about Ms. DeVos's vision may be: How will she use the Education Department to hold higher education accountable, (especially the for-profit sector) for student outcomes, as President Obama's education secretaries have done? Her position will soon become relevant to California community colleges that are accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, which reaffirmed the Community College of San Francisco's accreditation after a half-decade battle.

Susan Dynarski, a professor of Education, Public Policy, and Economics at the University of Michigan, has argued on Twitter that the selection of Ms. DeVos signals an imbalance between two necessary, but competing forces — autonomy and accountability. Too little autonomy stifles innovation, Ms. Dynarski wrote. Too little accountability may lead to the proliferation of bad decisions that are not in the best interest of students.

"I worry, a LOT, that this administration is going to scale back much-needed oversight" of postsecondary education, "especially the for-profit sector," she tweeted. "If for-profit colleges are left to regulate themselves, we will see ballooning student debt, ballooning defaults, and students' lives ruined."

<http://www.chronicle.com/specialreport/The-Turbulent-Nomination-of/89>  
<http://www.chronicle.com/article/What-Does-Betsy-DeVos-Have-in/238514?cid=cp89>  
<http://www.newsweek.com/seven-things-know-about-education-pick-betsy-devos-525945> ■

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