

CIE UPDATE

The Center for Institutional Effectiveness

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Backward Design

Backward Design is an approach to designing curriculum in which the course designer sets learning objectives before choosing course content or means of assessment (Grant Wiggins, Jay Tighe and Dee Fink). Once the objectives are defined, course content comes into play. The instructor examines assignments to determine whether content is included for the sake of content or because it helps students achieve the established learning outcomes.

Backward design can also help break silos among different disciplines and focus on common desired outcomes such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills. According to Hart Research findings (2015), ninety-one percent of employers say critical thinking, communication, and problem solving abilities are more important than a potential employee's undergraduate major. The same study reveals a discrepancy between employers and students in terms of preparedness across these outcomes. Students feel they are better prepared whereas employers give them low scores on their preparedness. Using Backward Design, instructors across disciplines can create course materials that help students achieve these common goals.

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey mentions "To begin with an end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you are going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction." Backward Design creates a means for faculty to do this.

There is No I in Assessment; or Why We Should Practice What We Preach

The indoctrination to the culture of teamwork begins in elementary school where students are first provided with "cooperative learning" experiences, where the teamwork skills of compromise, listening, empathy, and sharing ideas are emphasized as students learn to work together for a common goal.

To be able to function effectively as a member of a team is consistently listed as the #1 skill employers are looking for in today's employees. Skills that demonstrate proficiency in a team structure are displayed through positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, collaboration, effective communication and the ability to come to consensus.

Therefore, unless you are a long distance truck driver or a novelist, you likely work for an entity that values and even requires working as a team. In higher education, we are usually a member of a department and division.



Assessment Team

Back row (left to right): Jill Rivera, Ilene Kleinman, Gail Fernandez, Maureen Ellis-Davis, Melissa Krieger. Front row (left to right): Joanna Campbell, Amarjit Kaur, Yun Kim.


Just as there is No I in Assessment, there is No I in Team – and as the saying goes, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

However, when it comes to assessment, do we practice what we preach? Reality often gets in the way — conflicting schedules, multiple meetings and commitments — before you know it, getting everyone in the same room becomes a hassle and one person is elected, volunteers, or receives release time to take on assessment solo.

Middle States is not a fan of the solo assessment effort. They have standards, 7 of them to be exact, and these standards are in place to guide institutions in the process of self-review and improvement. They ensure that assessment efforts are approached with clarity, collaboration, inclusion, cooperation and with a dissemination of knowledge.

Every single Middle States standard demands or benefits from the element of teamwork, beginning with Standard 1, "Mission and Goals," which is to be "developed through appropriate collaborative participation by all who facilitate or are otherwise responsible for institutional development and improvement." Clearly not a solo endeavor.

In Standards 2 – 7, we find the institution's obligation of transparency through the sharing of data across the institution. For example, consider the partnership between academic and educational support areas necessary to identify and assess the effectiveness of outreach and services in Support of the Student Experience (Standard 4). Key indicators of student success must be shared institutionally to facilitate accurate planning,



identify professional development opportunities, and improve academic programs and services. The requirement of Standard 3, that student learning experiences be “designed, delivered, and assessed by qualified professionals” is another example of an endeavor that requires multiple hands on deck.

Assessment and audit results are a key element of the financial planning and budgeting process (Standard 6). The alignment or misalignment between an institution’s resources and the institution’s mission is demonstrated through periodic assessment which is then shared with stakeholders.

Collaboration and the sharing of outcomes are the most important elements in improving and fostering an institutional culture of assessment. They enhance the assessment experience, the quality of the data, institutional improvement and overall satisfaction for students, faculty, staff and administration.

Across departments, there are those with distinct knowledge sets, experiences and strengths and when we put those assets together, they produce something more than the individuals could alone. There is no **I** in assessment – when we work as a team, when we learn as a team, we can learn to **LOVE** assessment.

The Influence of Scholarly Teaching and Learning (SOTL)

Faculty who present workshops in the *SOTL* laboratory or write an article for the *SOTL* journal provide insight for adjuncts and full time faculty. A sense of belonging at the workplace and a collegial environment is facilitated through guidance and information shared at workshops, and through faculty-written scholarly articles that showcase our interests and expertise, while positively influencing the academic climate of our college.

The value of the innovative *SOTL* initiative at Bergen is reflected in classrooms across the campus. For faculty who take advantage of the opportunities that *SOTL* provides, self-reflection on our professional interests leads to clarity and re-connection with what we do in the classroom. Having a venue to share what we know with our peers, leads to renewed confidence in the instructional choices we make: from how to best present course material and assess our students’ progress, to how we can guide and support student success.

SOTL provides us with an opportunity to teach and write about the topics we are passionate about. Breathing new life into what we love to do can renew our connection to and positively impact the lives of our students. To find out more about *SOTL*: (<https://bergen.edu/faculty-staff/citl/faculty-services-for-teaching-learning/sotl/>).

Spring 2018 Conference Presentations and Publications

Community College Connections – Building Relationships through Assessment and Data

Rachel Lerner Colucci, Jesse Jacondin, and Ian Wolf
ASCA Annual Conference [Association of Student Conduct Administrators], Jacksonville, FL
February 2018

Assessment Fellows Program: Ambassadors of a High Performance Culture (Poster Session)

From A – Z: An Assessment Toolbox (Poster Session)
Joanna Campbell
2018 Innovations Conference, National Harbor, MD
March 2018

Learning Systems Paradigm Workshop

Natasha Jankowski
February 2018
Bergen Community College

Bergen Community College: An Assessment Fellows Program Model (article)

Gail Fernandez, Jill Rivera, Joanna Campbell
Member Spotlight: December 2017
League for Innovation in the Community College

Assessment Resources

University of San Diego

<http://www.sandiego.edu/outcomes/student-learning/learning-and-assessment/learning-outcomes/>

Southern Connecticut State University

<http://southernct.edu/assessment-and-planning/assessment-process.html>

Contact CIE (The Center for Institutional Effectiveness)

Yun K. Kim, Ph.D.
Vice President of
Institutional Effectiveness
yunkim@bergen.edu

Gail Fernandez
Interim Dean of Assessment
gfernandez@bergen.edu

Tonia McKoy, Ed.D.
Managing Director of Center for
Institutional Effectiveness
tmckoy@bergen.edu

Jesse Jacondin
Research Analyst
jjacondin@bergen.edu

Madeline Trimble
Senior Research Associate
mtrimble@bergen.edu

Monica Rodriguez
Research Assistant
mrodriguez3@bergen.edu

Ruth Ann Heck
Administrative Assistant
rheck@bergen.edu

Affiliated Staff:

Joanna Campbell
jjcampbell@bergen.edu

Maureen Ellis-Davis
mellisdavis@bergen.edu

Amarjit Kaur
akaur@bergen.edu

Ilene Kleinman
ikleinman@bergen.edu

Melissa Krieger
mkrieger@bergen.edu

Jill Rivera
jrivera@bergen.edu