

COMMISSION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Thursday, August 8, 2013

PUBLIC SQUARE A:

Approaches Recognized by the Voluntary System of Accountability To Assess Learning Outcomes

Background

This dialog represents the second of a three-part discussion of the *Quality* section of the Commission's strategic plan, *Reaching Higher, Achieving More* (RHAM). Consideration of the *Quality* section of RHAM began at the June meeting, when the Commission had an opportunity to discuss various assessment-related projects and initiatives of the Association of American Colleges and University (AAC&U). The Commission heard from three public campuses that were involved in these AAC&U efforts – IUPUI, Ivy Tech Indianapolis, and Purdue University North Central. Dr. Carol Geary Schneider, President of AAC&U, also made a presentation to the Commission at its June meeting.

The second installment of this three-part discussion focuses on the approaches recognized by the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) to assess learning outcomes. The VSA is referenced in the *Quality* section of RHAM as one way of using comparable assessments to gauge student learning. A panel will explore the approaches recognized by VSA and will include:

- Alex C. McCormick, Director, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- Don Sprowl, Assistant Provost for Institutional Research and Accreditation, Indiana Wesleyan University
- Richard "Biff" Williams, Provost, Indiana State University

The final installment of the three-part discussion of the *Quality* section of RHAM will occur at the September Commission meeting.

Supporting Document

- (1) Panelist Bios
- (2) A Glossary of Terminology Associated with the Voluntary System of Accountability

Alexander C. McCormick, Ph.D.

Alexander C. McCormick is an Associate Professor of Education at Indiana University Bloomington, where he teaches in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program. He also directs the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), housed at IU's Center for Postsecondary Research. Since its inception in 2000, more than 1,500 bachelor's-granting colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada have used NSSE to assess the extent, to which undergraduates engage in and are exposed to effective educational practices. Through this work, McCormick aims to enrich the national discourse about quality and accountability in higher education, while also providing institutions with tools to diagnose and improve undergraduate teaching and learning. His research interests center around assessment, accountability, and evidence-based improvement in higher education.

Before coming to Indiana, McCormick served as a senior scholar at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, an Educational Research and Policy Center. In that role, he led a major overhaul of the Foundation's widely-used classification of U.S. colleges and universities. He holds a bachelor's degree in French from Dartmouth College, and a Ph.D. in education and sociology from Stanford University.

Don Sprowl, Ph.D.

Dr. Don Sprowl is Assistant Provost for Institutional Research and Accreditation at Indiana Wesleyan University. In this capacity he provides support across the institution for both the assessment of student learning and evaluation of institutional effectiveness. He is the architect of the Academic Quality Index, a collection of measures designed to assess the quality of all aspects of the IWU academic program. Prior to coming to IWU seven years ago, Dr. Sprowl served as Professor of Geophysics at the University of Kansas and Professor of Physics and Earth Science at Louisiana College. He has a bachelor's degree in Physics from Houghton College and a PhD in Geophysics from the University of Minnesota.

Richard "Biff" Williams, Ph.D.

Richard "Biff" Williams is Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Indiana State University. He is also the founding Dean of the College of Nursing, Health and Human Services at ISU. He received his bachelor's degree from Weber State University in Utah, a master of science in athletic training from Indiana State, and a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from New Mexico State University. Prior to being named dean at Indiana State in 2008, he served for 10 years in numerous capacities at the University of Northern Iowa, including Associate Dean of the College of Education and founding Chair of the Division of Athletic Training, where he developed three athletic training education programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. He has also published numerous articles, manuscripts, and abstracts, has presented at national conferences and garnered several external grants. At Indiana State, Williams has led the development of six new degree programs designed to address the state's critical shortage of healthcare workers.

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CAAP (Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency): CAAP is the standardized, nationally normed assessment program from ACT that enables postsecondary institutions to assess, evaluate, and enhance student learning outcomes and general education program outcomes.

CAAP can be used to:

- Satisfy accreditation and accountability reporting requirements
- Measure students' achievement levels on a group and individual basis
- Compare students' achievement levels with national user norms
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of general education programs
- Document the performance gain of students' achievement levels over time
- Analyze what interventions may be necessary to enhance results
- Determine student eligibility for upper-division studies
- Advise individual students how to achieve academic success
- Measure student learning outcomes for Voluntary System of Accountability (Critical Thinking & Writing Essay)

CAAP offers six independent test modules, actual testing time is 40 minutes, for which institutions may select from which best reflect their mission and the goals and curricula of their general education programs. Those six modules are:

1. Reading
2. Writing Skills
3. Writing Essay
4. Mathematics
5. Science
6. Critical Thinking

CLA+ (Collegiate Learning Assessment): CLA+ , formerly known as CLA, measures critical-thinking, problem solving, scientific and quantitative reasoning, writing, and the ability to critique and make arguments. Institutions use CLA+ results to evaluate students' strengths and areas requiring further attention, sometimes publishing results to demonstrate that they have, indeed, graduated students with the skills needed to succeed beyond college. Student themselves use CLA+ results as a credential, illustrating to prospective employers and graduate schools their talents as 21st century thinkers.

ETS Proficiency Profile (Educational Testing Service): measures proficiency in critical thinking, reading, writing and mathematics in the context of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, as well as, academic skills developed, as opposed to subject knowledge taught, in general education courses. In addition to a total score, proficiency classifications (proficient, marginal or not proficient) measure how well students have mastered each level of proficiency within the three skill areas.

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The ETS Proficiency Profile test helps to:

- measure the effectiveness of general education programs to meet requirements for accreditation and accountability initiatives and performance funding
- evaluate and inform teaching and learning with actionable score reports that can be used to pinpoint strengths and areas of improvement
- gauge program effectiveness by providing comparative data on more than 500 institutions and over 550,000 students nationwide
- create greater flexibility in testing programs by adding up to 50 locally authored questions and using both paper-and-pencil and online formats, as well as choosing to use proctored (both on- and off-campus) and non-proctored versions

NSSE (*National Survey of Student Engagement*): The NSSE survey, developed at Indiana University Bloomington, was launched in 2000 and updated in 2013, assesses the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development.

The questionnaire collects information in five categories:

1. Participation in dozens of educationally purposeful activities,
2. Institutional requirements and the challenging nature of coursework,
3. Perceptions of the college environment,
4. Estimates of educational and personal growth since starting college, and
5. Background and demographic information.

VALUE Rubrics (*Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education*): diverse teams of faculty and other academic and student affairs professionals from a wide range of institutions drafted and revised institutional-level rubrics (and related materials) to correspond with the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Essential Learning Outcomes. Each VALUE rubric (listed below) contains the most broadly shared criteria or core characteristics considered to be critical for judging the quality of student work in a particular outcome area.

VALUE Rubrics:

Intellectual and Practical Skills

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Written communication
- Oral communication
- Reading
- Quantitative literacy

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- Information literacy
- Teamwork
- Problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibility

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
- Global Learning

Integrative and Applied Learning

- Integrative and applied learning

VSA (Voluntary System of Accountability Program): The VSA Program was created in 2007 through a partnership between the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). Development funding was provided by the Lumina Foundation; ongoing operations administered through the APLU offices and supported through annual participant dues. Oversight for the VSA is provided by a VSA Board made up of senior officials from APLU and AASCU institutions. As of winter 2013, 282 institutions participate in the VSA. It is a vehicle for public four-year universities to report comparable information about the undergraduate student experience.

VSA has three primary objectives.

1. To provide a consumer information tool for colleges and universities to communicate with policy makers, state official, students, families, and the general public using clear, accessible, and comparable information on the undergraduate student experience through the College Portrait website (www.collegeportraits.org).
2. To provide a mechanism for public institutions to demonstrate accountability and transparency, particularly in the areas of access, cost, student progress, and student outcomes.
3. To support institutions in the measurement and reporting of educational outcomes and facilitate identification and implementation of effective practices as part of institutional improvement efforts.

VSA's College Portrait: The College Portrait is a source of basic, comparable information from over 300 public colleges and universities presented in a common, user-friendly format. The collected information is placed onto a website which is designed to be a tool for prospective students and their families during the college search process as well as a resource for high school guidance counselors, community college advisors, state policy-makers ... or anyone interested in learning more about public colleges and universities.

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Each institution's College Portrait has a variety of information including the characteristics of students and faculty, admissions requirements, popular majors, average class sizes, campus safety, the future plans of graduates, and much more. Every College Portrait provides cost of attendance and financial aid information and an interactive tool for users to more specifically estimate their own costs at a particular institution. And only on a College Portrait can users find a snapshot of student experiences on campus and the expected learning gains of students in critical thinking and written communication.

The VSA and College Portrait are sponsored by two nonprofit organizations in Washington DC – the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). More than 80 higher education leaders from 70 public institutions were involved in developing the College Portrait.