AALHE

Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education

Intersection
January 2015

Update from the AALHE Board

By Eric Riedel, AALHE President

At the December 12, 2014 meeting, the AALHE Board formally adopted the 2015 strategic objectives. These objectives will guide budget and activity planning in the year ahead. They were originally drafted at the June 2014 board meeting and subsequently refined with help from board members (special thanks to the wordsmithing assistance of Catherine Wehlburg and Bob Pacheco). The items listed below provide focus and guidance for the organization, and in particular to planning and assessment of committee work.

2015 AALHE Strategic Objectives

1. Secure fiscal, human, technological and facilities resources to assure the viability of the organization.
2. Provide professional development for advanced assessment practitioners in a variety of ways including face-to-face, virtual, print, and other.
3. Provide methods to further develop the next generation of assessment professionals, including graduate students, using a variety of techniques and presentation methods.
4. Expand the community of assessment practitioners with augmented opportunities and venues for dialogue and reflection on practice.
5. Lead and advocate for good and ethical assessment practices to external stakeholders including becoming a stronger voice at the local, national, and international levels for assessment in higher education.

Board committees have been busy in many other ways in the past six months. The conference and events planning committee began their work early and strong. After careful consideration of different possible themes, the board endorsed the theme of "Actionable Assessment." The member development committee has considered and recommended different ways to promote the association to new members. One action already taken has been to begin a Google AdWords campaign using common assessment search words to direct web searches back to the AALHE website. The member services committee has continued to look at ways of providing professional resources to members. Some notable accomplishments were the publication of conference proceedings last summer, the addition of two Twitter chats, and the ongoing webinar series. There were also two board task forces that completed projects in the last six months. The first was the Website Redesign Task Force, which worked to move AALHE information to a more stable website platform, providing resources to members as well as a membership database. The second was the By-Laws Revision Task Force.

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Among the changes made to the by-laws were to provide some clarifications in preparation for the transition to an elected board and some changes to the committee structure. The Strategic Planning and Budget Committee was replaced by the Finance Committee with the board itself assuming greater responsibility for strategic planning. The Grants Subcommittee was folded into a newly created External Relations Committee. Finally, board member terms were lengthened to five years to provide for greater continuity in leadership.

Thanks to many contributors (both board members and regular members) who have worked on 2014 activities and accomplishments. These efforts help AALHE to grow and mature as a professional association with a unique contribution to higher education.

AALHE 2015 Conference News

By Tara Rose, President-Elect and Chair of the Conference & Events Committee

The AALHE Conference, *Actionable Assessment*, will be held from noon on Monday, June 1 to noon on Wednesday, June 3, 2015. Proposals are being accepted until February 6, 2015. If you haven't done so already, please submit your proposal soon. Visit http://www.aalhe.org/events/annual-conference/2015-aalhe-conference/ for more information.

For those of you who would rather knock out two conferences in one week – the 2015 conference is your year! The AALHE Board of Directors would like to share some exciting news with you. AALHE is honored to be partnering with ExamSoft at this year's annual conference. ExamSoft, an assessment management solution, expressed interest in affiliating their first annual users' conference with AALHE. ExamSoft has envisioned a users' conference that not only accomplishes the typical goals of a technology conference but also connects users to the best practices of assessment. The ExamSoft User's Conference will begin immediately following the AALHE Conference and will run from noon, Wednesday, June 3 – 5pm to Thursday, June 4. ExamSoft is offering an exceptional discount to their Users' Conference for those who also attend the AALHE conference. Both conferences will be at the Hilton Downtown, Lexington, Kentucky. We are very excited about this excellent opportunity, the benefits AALHE and its members will receive, and look forward to with collaborating with ExamSoft over the next few months.

The following comes from Kenneth Knotts, President of Marketing at ExamSoft Worldwide, Inc.:

Actions speak louder than words. Back in 2011, a client first suggested we attend the AALHE Annual Meeting. We exhibited the following year, and it was apparent then and it remains true today that AALHE and its members foster an environment of action and change. AALHE's 2015 theme of "Actionable Assessment" reinforces why we sought to partner with the conference. Many of those who use our software to impact student outcomes already attend the AALHE conference, and we could think of no better a place and time to launch our first user conference, which will take place in Lexington immediately following AALHE proceedings. It is a mission of ExamSoft to help foster client involvement in the grander assessment community, and we feel AALHE is exemplary in its ability to connect the best minds in the field together so they might share actionable strategies amongst themselves, for the benefit of higher education as a whole.

The theme for our conference this year is "I Love Assessment," and we hope attendees will include those who love assessment, believe in change, and think actions speak louder than words. While this will be a user conference, our sessions will include best practices and insights that will serve all attendees, clients or not. Please visit www.assessmentconference.com for more information.

Facilitation Skills: A Key to Successful Program Assessment

By Monica Stitt-Bergh

A definition of program-level student learning outcomes assessment that I find useful is the following: assessment is a set of tools that faculty can use to collaboratively develop and maintain a coherent, effective curriculum that evolves to meet changes in students and society. When I speak this definition, I stress *collaboratively*, *effective curriculum*, and *evolves* because they encapsulate what I want my faculty colleagues to understand. These three are not easy to accomplish.

To help bring my definition of assessment to life, I incorporate facilitation skills in workshops that I offer for faculty who are assessment leaders/coordinators in their department or program (e.g., general education). My goal is to help them lead fruitful meetings about assessment because that increases the likelihood that their colleagues will see the benefits that assessment offers and increase participation in meaningful assessment activities. The following tactics provide assessment coordinators/leaders with a strong base in facilitation skills:

Create an action-oriented agenda with a desired product (outcome) and process. When meeting an outcome is a product that goes beyond information sharing, assessment activities gain traction and there is forward movement. Some examples are given in the table below.

Desired Meeting Outcome		Process
finalize student learning outcomes list	by	evaluating draft student learning outcomes
narrow a list of commercial tests to a best option	by	evaluating alternatives and "dot voting"
understand curriculum coherence and identify gaps	by	creating and analyzing a curriculum map
create an action plan based on results from an evaluation of student projects	by	brainstorming a list of possible actions and doing a pre-mortem analysis

Decide how to decide. A conversation about how decisions will be made is often overlooked and when disagreement occurs, a single voice can derail progress. I recommend the *consensus* method because it requires a participatory process that usually produces a superior decision that has widespread acceptance and support for implementation. Consensus has been reached when everyone agrees the deliberation process has been fair, transparent, everyone has had a say, good information was used to make the final decision, and everyone is willing to support—but not necessarily agree with—the final decision. The goal is unity, not 100% agreement.

Other decision-making options include (a) *85/15 rule*—85% agreement is enough to pass; (b) s*uper majority*—2/3 vote needed to pass; (c) s*imple majority*— 51% agreement is enough to pass. A simple majority is usually not a good option because a 51/49 vote typically hinders implementation.

Make contributions visible. Record ideas using markers and large flip chart paper or a computer and projector. When everyone sees the conversation unfold, the group can build momentum and everyone feels involved. When a contribution does not pertain to the meeting outcome, the idea can be recorded in a separate location for future consideration and thus not sidetrack the conversation. This recording may or may not become the meeting minutes.

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Facilitation Skills: A Key to Successful Program Assessment

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Redirect–after validation. Many good ideas emerge during a conversation but not all will help the group accomplish its desired outcome. In combination with the "make contributions visible" tactic, the lead person and others can redirect back to the issue at hand using response like these:

> "It seems like that idea is focused on too many details right now. Can we put it under 'future' and move back the larger question at hand?"

> "John, could you help me understand how what you are saying is connected to what we are talking about?"

> "Sarah, that seems very important but tangential to our focus today. Can we put that in the 'parking lot' as something to discuss at a future meeting?"

Reserve the last 5-10 minutes to summarize, communicate praise for accomplishments, and state commitments/actions/next steps. Regardless of whether the outcomes were achieved, end the discussion with enough time to wrap up. Briefly summarize with an eye toward highlighting the day's accomplishments and then detail what happens next and include the names of any responsible parties.

For more information and ideas, the following may be useful:

- Facilitation script for a curriculum mapping session—used in a curriculum mapping workshop for assessment coordinators: participants role-played a department meeting during the workshop and one participant facilitated the session. www.manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment/workshops/pdf/facilitating_decisionmaking_handouts_2013-10.pdf

- Brilhard, J.K. & Galanes, G.J. (1989). *Effective Group Discussion*. 6th Ed. Dubuque, IA: Brown.

- King, J.A. & Stevahn, L. (2013). *Interactive Evaluation Practice: Mastering the Interpersonal Dynamics of Program Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Sanaghan, P. & Gabriel, P.A. (2011). *Collaborative Leadership in Action: A Field Guide for Creating Meetings That Make a Difference*. Amherst: HRD Press.

Webinar on the DQP

Join us for another important webinar, this time by Dr. Paul Gaston, Trustees Professor at Kent State University. – "What the Degree Qualifications Profile *IS* – and What it *ISN'T"* to be held on February 13, 2015 from 1:00 – 2:30pm EST.

Released on October 8, 2014, the DQP has been revised in the light of its use by more than 400 institutions and associations. One priority of the revision has been to make the DQP more useful for assessment of learning outcomes. A fundamental principle of the DQP, that learning outcomes statements must be explicit in terms of how students demonstrate what they have learned, is now expressed even more emphatically. This webinar will offer an overview for participants with little knowledge of the DQP before focusing on changes from the "beta" version (2011-14) evident in the current publication. There will be ample opportunity for questions.

To register for this event, navigate to http://www.aalhe.org/events/#id=110&wid=1201&cid=1011 and select Dr. Gaston's webinar. You will be prompted to enter the quantity (select "1") and click on the "proceed" but-

Assessing the Assessment of Assessment

By David Onder

Assessment has been in place as a formal process at Western Carolina University since 1987. Over the years, the level of focus has ebbed and flowed, often increasing as our reaffirmation approached with our institutional accrediting body. While this is not necessarily bad, it is not the climate we wish to promote on our campus. So last year we began to put into place a committee to ensure ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes. With the creation of this new committee and with an expanded focus of student learning outcomes assessment, administrators overseeing assessment decided to conduct an extensive review of the entire assessment process at the university. Using a tool created by the New Leadership Alliance called *Assuring Quality: An Institutional Self-Assessment Tool for Excellent Practice in Student Learning Outcomes Assessment* (2012), a group of faculty, staff, and administrators began the journey of assessing the assessment of assessment on campus.

The purpose of this exercise was not to complete a series of checkboxes (in fact, there are no checkboxes to check).   The purpose was "to guide conversation and self-examination leading to improvement" (Assuring Quality, 2012, p. 2) on our campus. This tool breaks down the assessment process into twenty-nine criteria, looking at institutional assessment as well as academic program and co-curricular assessment. According to the New Leadership Alliance (p. 5), "meeting all of the stated criteria demonstrates excellent student learning outcomes assessment practice."

We hope to complete this exercise by the end of the calendar year, allowing us to move into planning and implementing changes to our assessment processes in the spring, but along the way we have learned a few things from which others might learn. First, review the criteria carefully for an effective starting point. Some criteria are much easier to deal with than others, especially early on. We started with the first item but found we were bogged down in process and not in discussions. We decided to move on to the second item which allowed us to see success in the process. Consider starting where your team will be on familiar ground. Second, remember later criteria build upon earlier ones. Sometimes, skipping ahead can be confusing, which then results in losing rather than saving time. Be sure to plan the review ahead of time, considering how each of the criteria are connected to later criteria. Finally, there are many criteria, and each is divided into multiple (sometimes quite a few) sub-criteria, so it helps to break them up. Our work early on was done together so everyone understood the process and goal. After some time, since the criteria are grouped into overall sections and by institutional, academic, and co-curricular items, and since our committee is made up of administrators, faculty, co-curricular staff (almost all with prior experience in student learning outcomes assessment), we broke the criteria into their natural groupings and allowed the subgroups to do the work. In addition to reducing workload for everyone, it also made more sense to the subgroups as they then focused on the areas relevant to them. In the end, remember this is a guide intended to generate discussion and improvement. Do not allow the guide to dictate what you do or why you do what you do without thorough discussion.

The Assuring Quality self-assessment tool by the New Leadership Alliance is a very comprehensive set of criteria. It has been a worthwhile exercise for our campus and while we have a long history of assessment, this exercise will allow us to grow a more mature and robust process that hopefully permeates the entire campus culture. Only time will tell. You can be assured of one thing – in a few years, we will repeat this process of assessing the assessment of assessment to ensure we are continuing to make progress.

See also:
New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability (2012). *Assuring Quality: An Institutional Self-Assessment Tool for Excellent Practice in Student Learning Outcomes Assessment*.

David Onder is Director of Assessment at Western Carolina University, and can be reached at dmonder@wcu.edu.

Converting to Faculty-Driven Management of Assessment

By Josie Welsh

In 2009, responding to a perceived need for immediate assessment data, the administration of Arkansas State University implemented a standardized assessment of critical thinking to first-year students. Baseline results presented at an annual faculty conference were met with yawns and viewed as part of the necessary box-checking for compliance with accreditation standards. The Provost responded to faculty disengagement with assessment by creating a university-wide assessment council responsible for the selection of assessment instruments. Four years later, the council denied a request by the assessment office to purchase exams for the follow-up administration of the multiple-choice, standardized test, citing a lack of interest in the baseline findings. As an alternative, the group recommended a shift to the NSF-inspired critical thinking assessment test (CAT) developed by Stein and colleagues at Tennessee Technological University. Although several group members were wary of the scientific nature of the sample questions, the council voted unanimously to administer the essay exam. A primary goal of the relatively inexpensive CAT exam was to encourage faculty conversation over students' written solutions to the scenarios and motivate faculty to modify instruction based on those discussions. The CAT authors encourage institutions to incentivize faculty participation in the grading of exams through a sustainable train-the-trainer model. Faculty leaders trained by Tennessee Tech conducted grading sessions with their peers; savings from the low cost instrument were reallocated to faculty, all of whom received stipends for their participation.

Within one year, approximately 10% of faculty members representing all colleges attended training workshops, graded exams, and participated in discussions over results. Noting specific strengths and weaknesses of majors, faculty shared changes they were making in classroom instruction. For example, one biology professor increased his use of graphs in every course and directed students to be more cautious when drawing conclusions from the data presented. Another professor wanted to design her own "CAT" questions. In response, the Provost supported three faculty members to take part in the inaugural workshop for CAT analog development sponsored again by Stein and colleagues. These faculty members returned to the university and worked with the teaching and learning center staff to co-sponsor a local analog development workshop.

Not all faculty were enamored with the CAT exam. Several graders found the instrument to be "too science oriented" and not relevant to their students. These concerns led the makers of the CAT to expand their analog development to domains outside of science. Tennessee Tech now invites institutions to participate in an online system through which faculty can submit field-specific essay questions for review. Once analogs are honed and approved by the test developers, the items become part of a test bank that faculty can use to assess critical thinking skills in their students. Faculty at Arkansas State have created critical thinking analogs that present the Globe Theater, a roll of the dice, and recorded social interactions among gamers as novel data that students must analyze to solve a problem. The decision to forego an assessment instrument that was administered "top down" and allow a participatory model of decision making to guide the assessment process continues to foster dynamic, organic, and meaningful assessment of critical thinking.

For many faculty members, the new assessments led to changes in classroom instruction. Some adopted everyday critical thinking techniques such as "think, pair, share," and Socratic questioning. Others revamped entire assignments to mirror problem-based inquiry modeled by the CAT questions. A professor of political science concluded, "In the end, I think we did good work both understanding more clearly, not the value, but the necessity of what we do, how we can link that to what we do in the classroom, and how what we do can shape our thinking, not just the thinking of our students."

Josie Welsh was Director of Assessment at Arkansas State University until 2014. She is now Director of Assessment at Bucknell University. She can be reached at j.welsh@bucknell.edu

Q&A with Trudy Banta

by David Eubanks

Trudy Banta is Professor of Education and Senior Advisor to the Chancellor for Academic Planning and Evaluation at Indiana-Purdue University Indianapolis. I met Trudy through the Assessment Institute, which she organizes, and the Assessment UPdate, which she edits. We corresponded by email. The second half of the interview will appear next issue.

Q: From your vantage point, you see many aspects of the assessment world. What challenges would you say we are currently meeting, and what remains to be done?

A: Our most significant challenge over the years has been to engage faculty in outcomes assessment—without faculty embracing assessment to guide improvements in their own classrooms, outcomes assessment cannot improve student learning. Today more faculty than ever before are embracing assessment, thanks in large part to the fact that with the 2014 action of the American Bar Association, now virtually every accrediting agency has finally complied with Secretary of Education Bill Bennett's 1988 Executive Order, later strengthened in the 1992 and subsequent renewals of the Higher Education Act, specifying that any accreditation agency would need to include the assessment of student learning in its standards in order to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

As I have traveled to other campuses and participated in national meetings, I have been encouraged by the increasing numbers of faculty I have encountered who have accepted outcomes assessment as an essential component of their teaching, and are now seeking help in writing measurable learning outcomes for their courses and curricula; developing and using electronic portfolios, rubrics, and other methods to assess student work; and interpreting assessment findings and *using* them to improve curricula, instruction, and student learning. Providing professional development for individual faculty and for faculty in the same or related disciplines is a *huge* priority on every campus if we, as assessment professionals, are to capture and benefit from this momentum.

Advancing assessment also requires strong administrative support. That professional development I just described requires resources. And I appreciate the admonition of Charlie Blaich and others at the Wabash Center on Inquiry to include funds for *making improvements* based on assessment findings when budgeting for outcomes assessment. What better incentive could we find for engaging faculty than to offer them funds for change and innovation that they can support with assessment data?

Student affairs professionals on many campuses have adopted assessment strategies for their own work, and can offer expertise and opportunities for collaboration with faculty who seek to extend learning, and the assessment thereof, outside the confines of their classroom. Unfortunately, I am still finding too many campuses where academic and student affairs assessment leaders have not yet found each other. It takes the efforts of an entire campus to produce a graduate. We must find more ways to encourage collaboration between faculty and student affairs staff in outcomes assessment.

A final challenge we face is the imperative to cut the costs of higher education in order to reduce student debt. At the University of Wisconsin Madison, Penn State, and many other colleges and universities, including my own, assessment professionals have been leaders of process improvement strategies that have dramatically reduced cycle time and thus produced cost savings. At IUPUI use of activity-based costing has shaped decision-making that has resulted in unit consolidation and cost reduction. As with any form of evaluation, outcomes assessment can point us in more productive directions with respect to curricula and instructional methods that minimize costs. As assessment professionals we must be cautious not to promise more than we can deliver, but we may need to say more to our colleagues than we have to date about the potential of evaluative data to guide smart decisions by faculty and administrators.

Q&A with Trudy Banta *Continued from page 7*

Q: The leadership of learning outcomes assessment in higher education has become a profession, but still a young one. How do you see the profession evolving as it matures?

A: Outcomes assessment leaders generally are trained in other disciplines, and many return to that discipline after serving in an assessment leadership position. For these individuals, loyalty to their discipline remains paramount. They may never see themselves as 'assessment professionals.' Institutional research and planning are older professions, and some who have become assessment leaders have prepared themselves through advanced training for careers in these fields. Their first loyalty may be to established organizations like the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) and the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP). For student affairs professionals who find themselves leading assessment efforts, their first loyalty probably will remain with ACPA and NASPA, two organizations that have developed their own assessment resources.

In the early 1990s Peter Ewell, Pat Hutchings, Ted Marchese, Marcia Mentkowski, Sandy Astin, and I met several times, thanks to funding from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), to discuss the current status and future of outcomes assessment. At that time it seemed important to us to encourage the integration of assessment in every discipline rather than to establish assessment as its own distinct profession. We thought an annual national meeting would be helpful in advancing assessment work, helping us learn to use the burgeoning number and variety of technologies available to us, for instance, but a national association was not envisioned.

Now there does seem to be a need for a national organization like AALHE, but I believe it will remain relatively small until more individuals prepare themselves via advanced training to pursue careers in outcomes assessment. To date, loyalty to other disciplines has held sway over assessment professionals.

Q: At my first IUPUI Assessment Institute, you called for a Scholarship of Assessment. Are you satisfied that this is happening?

A: I do believe that a strong foundation for assessment scholarship is being established. I'm always surprised and pleased when I review the proposals for the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis each year and find several sophisticated studies in the mix. In part this is attributable to the fact that assessment itself is a more established field than ever: Five years ago 56 percent of those attending the Institute told us on a questionnaire that they had fewer than two years of experience with assessment; now only 31 percent say they are this new to assessment. It appears that assessment professionals are staying on the job longer, and this bodes well for carrying out assessment scholarship. In addition, we now have significant representation from research universities, where scholarship is expected of most faculty and many staff. Finally, federal and foundation funding organizations are requiring multi-institution applications AND well-planned evaluation components, both of which are critical if we plan to move from single-institution reports that do not look beyond the experience at hand.

Q: Nationally we have many thousands of small assessment projects going on simultaneously, without much communication between them. Wouldn't it be better if we could pool our resources and make better use of each other's results?

A: With the emphasis federal and foundation funders now place on applications by consortia of institutions and on strong evaluation components in proposals and final project reports, more institutions will pool their resources in studies that will benefit the field of assessment. And the involvement of assessment specialists at research universities will ensure that the findings of such studies will find their way into presentations at meetings and publications!

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this issue of *Intersection* at
intersection@aalhe.org