

Learning Outcomes Assessment Newsletter

Office Of Quality Assurance
Carleton University

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Issue 4

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Newsletter. This week we present information on building a culture of evidence. We welcome you to share your thoughts and experiences in the comments section at the end.

What is a Culture of Evidence?

We often hear that for assessment practices to really take hold in post-secondary education institutions need to have a "culture of evidence." But what does that really mean? What does it look like, and how can we achieve it?

The University of Georgia Libraries Assessment Steering Committee views evidence culture as environments in which "decisions are based on facts, research and analysis... where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders." In other words, where there is a culture of evidence, faculty are constantly asking questions about how their programs can better serve students' learning goals; where program and curricular decisions are based on data and systematic observations rather than on hunches and suspicions.

Others see "cultures of evidence" in the emotional response faculty have to assessment. In this view, evidence cultures are present when faculties actually care about the assessment of learning outcomes. As [Daniel Ennis](#) has stated, a true culture of evidence exists when faculty care to know about the results they produce. That is, when faculty are "not just doing assessment but *liking* it."

Culture of Evidence Checklist

Building a culture of evidence goes beyond changing the opinions and attitudes of faculty and students. There needs to be tangible supports and resources in place. Wendy Weiner from the American Association of University Professors presents the following [15 criteria](#) for a culture of evidence. Check off which ones you think your department (and Carleton as a whole) already have in place, and which ones you could build toward.

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|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clear general education goals | <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive program review |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Common use of assessment-related terms | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment of co-curricular activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty ownership of the assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment of overall institutional effectiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On-going professional development | <input type="checkbox"/> Informational forums about assessment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative encouragement of assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion of assessment in plans and budgets |
| Practical assessment plans | <input type="checkbox"/> Celebration of successes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsiveness of proposals to new assessment endeavors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student learning outcomes for all courses and programs | |

6 Ways to Involve Faculty in Program-Level Assessment

Faculty engagement is essential for building a culture of evidence in your department or school. In a report for the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, [Pat Hutchings](#) outlines the following six ways in which evidence-based decision-making can be made easier for faculty.

1. Build Assessment around the Regular, Ongoing Work of Teaching and Learning

Allow faculty members natural questions and curiosities about the program and the learning of its students guide the questions asked and answered through assessment. Embedding program assessments within regular course work will save faculty time and effort.

2. Make a Place for Assessment in Faculty Development

Make assessment central to professional development through the encouragement of new and innovative teaching techniques that are then evaluated to determine their success and effectiveness.

3. Build Assessment into the Preparation of Graduate Students

Today's graduate students are tomorrow's faculty members and campus leaders. Giving graduate students an opportunity to engage in assessment activities can help them develop an evidence-based mindset they will carry with them for the rest of their careers.

4. Reframe the Work of Assessment as Scholarship

Engaging with assessment can be more than service to the program or institution – it can be a form of scholarship itself. Investigating problems and finding solutions is the task of all academics, regardless of discipline. Consider applying the unique tools of your field of study to the assessment student learning to make this work more meaningful.

5. Create Campus Spaces and Occasions for Constructive Assessment Conversation and Action

Meet with faculty in other departments to discuss how assessments are being implemented throughout the university. Sharing information, challenges and solutions among people from other program may give you new insights you would not thought of otherwise.

6. Involve Students in Assessment

Student self-assessment of learning outcomes can reduce faculty workload and also offers an opportunity for students to monitor and direct their own development. Student-led assessment tools, such as [e-portfolios](#), also offer students an opportunity for reflection that can contribute to and reinforce classroom learning.