

LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDE FOR EQUITY-MINDED
PRACTICE

by

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ABSTRACT

Equity gaps persist as a critical challenge in post-secondary education, affecting student success metrics such as completion, persistence, and course success rates across diverse demographic groups. These disparities signal a systemic issue within the learning structure, highlighting the inefficacy of existing policies, processes, and instructional practices in serving all students equitably. Community colleges, as pivotal gateways for low-income and minority students to higher education, play a crucial role in addressing these gaps. Despite the urgency to address equity, a gap exists between the importance placed on equity by education leaders and the limited use of assessment data for this purpose.

This product dissertation, *The Learning Outcomes Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice*, aims to empower community college leaders in identifying and addressing equity gaps through the examination of their learning outcomes assessment procedures. The research questions guiding the development of the Guide focus on tools, frameworks, strategies, and steps necessary for institutions to bridge the gap between their current state and an aspired practice rooted in research. Creating inclusive learning environments necessitates continuously interrogating teaching and learning policies and practices. The Guide provides a roadmap to navigate these complexities by synthesizing research-based assessment practices, Total Quality Frameworks such as the Baldrige Education Framework and the NILOA Excellence in Assessment framework, with student learning theory and equity theory.

KEY WORDS: student learning assessment, equity, total quality improvement

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CONCERNS WITH EQUITY IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION

President Harry S Truman's Commission on Higher Education (1947) substantially changed the post-secondary landscape by establishing community colleges as a means to provide universal access to high quality and affordable post-secondary education in local communities. The recommendations of the commission focused on increasing access and enrollment in higher education by eliminating enrollment barriers based on race, religion, gender, and socioeconomic status. Today, community colleges serve diverse student groups across the nation. In fall 2021, approximately 19 million students were enrolled in a post-secondary institution, and approximately 27% of those students were enrolled in a community college (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2023).

Community colleges serve as an important access point to post-secondary education for low-income students and students belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups. In fall 2021, 42% of Hispanic undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges, compared with 22% of Asian/Pacific Islander undergraduates, and 42% of Black undergraduates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Approximately 67% of undergraduates whose families earned less than \$50,000 annually were enrolled in a community college in 2016 (Community College Research Center, 2022). Students from rural areas also rely heavily on community colleges for access to a post-secondary education with 65% of rural high school graduates enrolling in a community college in Illinois (IBHE, 2023), for example. Non-traditional aged students over 25

years old also look to community colleges to gain skills or upskill comprising 32% of community college enrollment, nationally (Wellington and Morse, 2023).

Access without success does not embody the spirit of the Truman Commission's report, nor does it serve our local communities well when students are not successful in completing their goals. Gaps in achievement are pervasive in community colleges across multiple academic milestones such as credit hour accumulation, completion of a college-level mathematics course, and associate degrees awarded. The benefit of achieving these milestones is particularly great among African American and Latinx students in transferring to four-year institutions and completion of a bachelor's degree, with African American students seven times more likely to achieve a bachelor's degree and Latinx students 10 times more likely to achieve a bachelor's degree than their peers who did not achieve these same milestones (Community College Research Center, 2020). However, opportunity gaps in these achievements are greatest among students from underrepresented populations.

Equity gaps can be described as disparities in student success metrics such as completion, persistence, and course success rates across different race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, and ability intersectionalities. The existence of an equity gap is a signal that the underlying learning structure of policies, processes, and instructional practice does not serve all students effectively (McNair, Bensimon, Malcolm-Piqueux, 2020). As a primary conduit to post-secondary education for so many student groups, it is incumbent upon community colleges to hold themselves accountable to cultivating equitable, quality learning experiences for all constituents that result in employment with a living wage or prepare students to be successful in completing their bachelor's degree. Cultivating inclusive learning environments for a diverse

student population requires an institution to continually interrogate its teaching and learning policies and practices to identify opportunities to improve learning for all student groups (Achieving the Dream, 2020).

Community colleges are not alone in addressing equity issues. Non-profit organizations committed to the community college mission are engaged in this national dialogue and provide colleges with research and support in addressing equity gaps. For example, the Achieving the Dream (AtD) organization is a network of more than 300 community colleges across the country working to eliminate the equity challenges each institution faces (Achieving the Dream, 2023). The Center for Urban Education (CUE), now merged with the University of Southern California Race and Equity Center, has produced high quality tools and resources based on research that higher education leaders use to advance racial equity on campuses (USC Race and Equity Center, 2023). And, the Association of American Colleges & Universities has also been a leader in offering evidence-based practical guidance to post-secondary institutions for achieving equitable outcomes (AAC&U, 2023).

Additionally, substantial funding from organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and Aspen Institute is made available through grants with a focus on closing equity gaps among student groups (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2023; Lumina Foundation, 2023; The Aspen Institute, 2023). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation works to “create a world where every person has the opportunity to live a healthy, productive life” (2023, para. 1). Post-secondary education is a priority for the Foundation in the U.S. In its consolidated financial statements dated December 31, 2022, and 2021, the strategic priority for the U.S. program “is on ensuring that all students – especially Black, Latino, and low-income

students – have an opportunity to earn a degree or credential that prepares them for a successful career and life” (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2022, p. 6). During this time period, the Foundation awarded over \$600,000,00 in grants to the U.S. program. In 2022, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation turned their focus internally and published a DEI Commitment statement and developed their first diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategic framework, laying out their plans for achieving transformational outcomes (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2023). In addition to their mission statement, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation posits that the following two questions are just as important: “How do our own processes, behaviors, and culture limit the impact we can make in the world? And how can we do better?” (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2021, p. 1). The Lumina Foundation places achieving racial equity and the heart of their work and funding to ensure 60% of adults will have a college degree, certificate, industry certification, or other credential of value by 2025 (Lumina Foundation, 2023); the Foundation also funds initiatives globally to foster racial equity in education. Finally, the Aspen Institute is also a global organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. The Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program (CEP) aims to identify and replicate practices and policies that significantly improve student outcomes and works to achieve high levels of success for all students, especially for students of color and low-income students (Aspen Institute, 2023).

State and federal accreditation agencies, established to set the benchmarks for rigor and quality that community colleges must meet to receive state and federal funding, also prioritize evidence of equitable success outcomes in their accreditation criteria for assuring academic standards. And state and federal grant funding prioritizes proposals centered on

closing equity gaps between different student groups. Accreditation standards have evolved away from merely expecting institutions to draft an assessment plan to an expectation that evidence of student learning will be collected and used to improve student learning, and overall institutional performance (Provezis, 2010).

ADVANCING EQUITY THROUGH THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Kuh et al. defines assessment as the systematic “gathering and use of evidence of student learning in decision-making and in strengthening institutional performance and public accountability” (Kuh et al., 2015, p. 2). Through the assessment of student learning, institutions have the opportunity to interrogate their own assumptions, practices, and systems to improve student learning and close opportunity gaps between different student groups in achieving academic milestones that enable long-term success (Montenegro & Henning, 2022). Generating quality learning experiences for all students requires that attention be paid to developing equitable learning outcomes, delivering instruction equitably, and designing assessments that are equitable (Achieving the Dream, 2020).

The scholarship on equity and assessment of student learning is growing. Research highlights the need for equity *in* assessment, as well as equity *through* assessment (Bheda, 2022). Equity in assessment relates to the methods and tools used for assessment and ensuring they are equitable by design; equity through assessment cannot be achieved without equitable assessments but encompasses the broader effort to advance social justice (Bheda, 2022). As research and policy prioritize the need for equitable learning systems, community colleges must critically reflect on their own practices and systems and take action to leverage assessment to increase equity in their organizations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING IS UNDERUTILIZED AS A TOOL TO CLOSE EQUITY GAPS

Unfortunately, assessment of student learning is not widely used as a tool to close equity gaps. In a study conducted by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) provosts were surveyed about their assessment practices. While equity was listed as a primary reason for assessment, assessment data were rarely used to address equity gaps in learning (Jankowski et al., 2018).

A constellation of factors likely contribute to the underutilization of assessment of student learning outcomes to close equity gaps, including the perception that assessment of student learning is an exercise for compliance purposes only, the lack of trust held by faculty that assessment data will not be used for performance evaluation purposes, and finally, the organizational commitment necessary to restructure and renew an organization's assessment culture and practices to focus equity (Ewell, 2009; Provezis, 2010; Skolnik, 2010).

There is a long-standing perception in community colleges that student learning assessment is performed solely as an exercise in collecting evidence for purposes of compliance (Ewell, 2009). In an examination of how regional accrediting groups make judgements about institutional quality, Provezis found that chief academic officers indicated regional and specialized accreditation standards were the main drivers of outcomes assessment initiatives on their campuses (2010). Oftentimes, assessment of student learning can be a mandated exercise that reinforces a perceived power dynamic between administration and faculty (Skolnik, 2010). This undermines a culture of inquiry that fosters innovation in identifying ways to improve student learning (Skolnik, 2010). Making the shift away from a culture of compliance to one of continuous quality improvement takes strong institutional commitment, shared

leadership with faculty, and time to rewire the systems of an institution (Montenegro and Henning, 2022).

Equity gaps are an indicator that the system is not built to serve all groups. While the education system is evolving, the residual effects of systemic racism or power, sorting, and gatekeeping are still detectable in our policies and processes today (Thomas, 2011). To do equity work well, we must individually and collectively reflect on our own privilege and positionality and the impact that has on how we approach this work (McNair, et al. 2020).

Finally, the institutional effort involved in renewing assessment practices to center equity is daunting. It can be difficult for an organization to know where to begin and how to best organize themselves to audit and interrogate their own practices, identify areas of opportunity to redefine or renew current practices, and build support and buy-in from stakeholders to be successful making the shift to impactful use of student learning assessment (Kezar, 2018; McNair et al., 2020; Jankowski & Lundquist, 2022).

The problem for many community college leaders is not that they don't strive for equitable student learning outcomes, rather it is community college administrators who will be challenged with how to transform their current practices into an evidence-based system (Kezar, 2018). The system will leverage evidence of student learning by identifying practices that will improve student learning outcomes across different student groups and close equity gaps.

PROJECT FOCUS AND PURPOSE: INSTITUTIONAL GUIDE FOR STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

Equity gaps in student learning are pervasive and begs the question "How can we do better?" The purpose of this product dissertation is to provide a guide, grounded in proven process improvement frameworks, for community college leaders to conduct a self-assessment

of their organization's systems of assessment. The goal is to strengthen equitable assessment of student learning and develop strategies to close equity gaps through the assessment of student learning.

Generally speaking, an organizational self-assessment is the process by which an organization analyzes and evaluates the organization's capacity to meet its own goals and identify opportunities to achieve long-term success. Through this process, areas of concern are identified, and action plans are created to address concerns (Kezar, 2018). Community college leaders naturally focus on key student success performance metrics and can underestimate the importance of also putting energy and resources into identifying and measuring the effectiveness of results-oriented processes, that is, processes that can be sustained and adapted to a changing environment, as well as withstand the challenges of inevitable obstacles such as time pressures, resource scarcity, and competing priorities (Senge, 2006).

This Guide synthesizes research and practical application to serve as a tool for community colleges leaders at all levels of the organization to use in interrogating, organizing, and renewing their existing assessment of student learning outcomes processes to address equity gaps. This product does not espouse quick hits or a list of specific tactics that can be implemented to "fix" an organization's assessment program. Rather, the Guide synthesizes learning organization theory as articulated by researchers such as Peter Senge and Barry Sugarman to facilitate change management, coupled with the tenets of equity-mindedness as described by the Center for Urban Education, and various quality improvement frameworks such as the Baldrige Excellence Framework and the National Institute of Learning Outcomes (NILOA) Assessment Excellence in Assessment Framework, to provide a guided roadmap for

organizations to use to develop their own approach to bridging the gap between their aspirations of leveraging assessment to close equity gaps and their present reality.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education (BEFE) serves as the foundation for the Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice. Passed into law in 1987, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act was created to stimulate quality improvement and productivity in American companies. As part of this law, the Malcolm Bridge National Quality Award Program (MBNAQP) was created to recognize businesses that attained performance excellence based on criteria assessed by independent examiners. The Act also stipulated that detailed information be made publicly available on how winning organizations were able to “change their cultures and achieve eminence” (Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act, 1987, p. 2). Over time, variations of the award have been created that are tailored to different industry sectors. In 1999, for example, the Education Framework was introduced. The Education Framework has evolved over the last 23 years to keep pace with emerging critical issues. Interwoven into the criteria are topics including diversity, equity, and inclusion; resilience and safety; digitization and technology; innovation; cybersecurity; and societal responsibility and global sustainability.

This Guide is also informed with research-based best practices in the assessment of student learning outcomes. The National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment’s (NILOA) Excellence in Assessment criteria is a set of guidelines for evaluating and improving the quality of assessment practices in higher education institutions. By following the NILOA criteria, institutions can improve the effectiveness of their assessment practices and better understand the impact of their programs and services on student learning and success.

Continual organizational learning and agility is a core concept of the Baldrige Excellence Framework. As articulated in the BEFE, organizational learning is a continuous process of improving existing processes as well as innovation leading to new goals, approaches, or programs. Learning is daily work that includes soliciting input from all levels of the organization including faculty, staff, and students. Learning includes benchmarking, sharing best-practices, and reviewing the performance of other institutions' programs, such as the assessment of student learning (Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, 2022).

Adopting proven strategies of high-performing learning organizations in leading your institution through a self-assessment of your institution's assessment program is critical to your success. This Guide would not be complete without threading the tenets of learning organization theory and change management theory throughout. For this purpose, Peter Senge's learning organization theory is leveraged extensively throughout the Guide.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Closing equity gaps in student learning involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers and challenges that disproportionately affect certain groups of students and contribute to inequities in learning outcomes. Leveraging an effective performance excellence system such as the Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, infused with performance excellence principles identified by the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, will provide community colleges with a means to identify opportunities to improve their practice of learning outcomes assessment and help to identify and understand equity gaps to inform efforts to address them. The Guide is designed based on the principles of evidence-based change

management and assessment practices. It is intended to be a flexible resource to meet the needs of individual community colleges in improving student success.

The following primary research questions guided the research, development, and implementation of the Guide:

What tools can a community college leader use to navigate from their current state of assessment of student learning to an aspired practice rooted in research, uniquely suited to their needs?

- What frameworks can an institution use in a self-review to identify opportunities of improvement in their assessment of learning outcomes processes to close equity gaps in student success?
- How can an institution develop a strategy that is uniquely suited to their institution's context and needs to leverage the assessment of student learning to close equity gaps?
- How can an institution bridge the gap between strategy and execution successfully to develop an effective learning outcomes assessment system in their organization?

CONCLUSION

Chapter One included an overview of the gaps in achievement that are pervasive in community colleges today. While many community colleges have centered equity in their mission, vision, and strategic goals, there is less evidence of systematic and holistic change to internal processes to close equity gaps. The purpose of this product dissertation is to provide a guide for community college leaders to self-assess their approach to the assessment of student learning to identify how to design and implement a systematic and holistic process to better serve all students and close equity gaps.

Many of the most vulnerable community college students are not served well by the structures that community colleges work within. Gaps in persistence and achievement across various student groups signal underlying structural issues within the learning system. The

positive impact of a post-secondary education for underrepresented groups is undeniable; therefore, it is imperative that community colleges prioritize ensuring the effectiveness of their processes in measuring student progress towards curricular and co-curricular learning outcomes across all student groups to continuously inform improvements to instructional practice.

Chapter Two is a literature review of select research on key aspects of an organizational self-assessment to design and implement a systematic and holistic system focused on closing equity gaps in student success through the assessment of student learning. Chapter Three details the methodology for developing the Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice. The Guide synthesizes learning organization theory as articulated by researchers such as Peter Senge and Barry Sugarman to facilitate change management with the tenets of equity-mindedness as described by the Center for Urban Education, and various quality improvement frameworks such as the Baldrige Excellence Framework and the National Institute of Learning Outcomes (NILOA) Assessment Excellence in Assessment Framework to provide a Guided roadmap for organizations to use to develop their own approach to bridging the gap between their aspirations of leveraging assessment to close equity gaps and their present reality. The Guide is a stand-alone resource included in Chapter Four. Following the Guide, Chapter Five provides a summary and considerations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This literature review describes select research on key aspects of an organizational self-assessment to design and implement a systematic and holistic system focused on closing equity gaps in student success through the assessment of student learning. Closing equity gaps in student learning involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers and challenges that disproportionately affect different groups of students and contribute to inequities in learning outcomes. The literature reveals that there is significant value to an organization in intentionally reflecting on current practice to improve performance.

A relatively robust body of research exists regarding Total Quality Management (TQM) systems and the effectiveness of various models and frameworks related to TQM. There is also substantial research on the value of institutional self-reflection and organizational learning. TQM models can serve as a roadmap for organizations as they learn where their opportunities of improvement are and provide a focus for change. Similarly, there is significant research regarding evidence-based instruction and constructive alignment between learning outcomes, instruction, and the assessment of student learning. Comparatively, there is less research in how community college leaders can synthesize these frameworks with best practices in assessment of student learning to collectively and effectively transform their assessment system from its current state to one that improves learning for all student groups and reduces equity gaps.

The literature on organizational self-evaluation to improve process performance related to student learning can be grouped into the following categories:

- Total Quality Management Implementation Frameworks
- Leading Transformation
- Student Learning Outcomes Assessment
- Equity-minded Practice

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORKS

The modern quality movement was born out of the need for organizations to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a systems-based approach to continuous improvement and systemic change, informed by all levels of the organization through collective problem solving and evidence-based decisions. W. Edwards Demming, Peter Senge, and Russel Ackoff are three primary thought leaders in the contemporary TQM space. W. Edwards Deming is arguably the most influential authority on TQM. Deming pioneered statistical quality control methods and authored several books, most notably *The Deming Cycle* (1993). The Deming Cycle, or Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model, is used widely to illustrate the stages of quality management and continual improvement of processes (The Deming Institute, 2023). Peter Senge (1990), a senior lecturer at the MIT Slone School of Management and founder of the Society for Organizational Learning, authored *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Senge's research builds on Deming's principles of continuous quality improvement. His extensive research of high-performing corporations substantiated the importance of "seeing the whole," which is seeing the interrelationships and patterns between processes, people, and technology, and not simply

individual parts. Senge's research also emphasizes the importance of organizational learning and details three core learning capabilities: fostering aspiration, developing reflective conversation, and understanding complexity. His research revealed that teams that became great did not start-off great, rather they learned how to produce extraordinary results together. Russel Ackoff, emeritus professor of Management Science in the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, centered his research in the field of operations, systems thinking, and management science. Ackoff (1999) posits that reliance on quick fixes and panaceas is in sharp contrast to organizational transformation and attributes failure to achieve transformation to a failure to "whole the parts." The research of Deming, Senge, and Ackoff all point to the importance of a holistic systemic approach that centers the customer in achieving transformational change.

Various TQM frameworks have been developed within the United States and globally. Alanazi (2020) distinguishes five types of TQM implementation frameworks based on previous literature:

1. Those based on experts and consultants (e.g., Crosby, 1980; Deming, 1982, Juran & Gryna, 1993)
2. Standardized models such as the ISO 9000:2000 series (e.g., Kartha, 2004; Rao Tummala & Tang, 1996)
3. Models based on the critical factors of TQM (e.g., Dow et al., 1999; Flynn et al., 1994; Saraph, et al., 1989)
4. Models proposed by academics such as Kanji's Excellence Framework (Kanji & Wallace, 2000), Oakland's Total Organizational Excellence Framework (Oakland, 2001); and the UMIST quality improvement framework (Dale et al., 2007)
5. Quality awards and business excellence models (BEMs), such as the Deming Award, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA), and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework, developed to assist organizations in preparing for the MBNQA, provides the foundation on which The Learning Outcomes Assessment Review Guide for Equity-Minded Practice is based.

MALCOLM BALDRIGE NATIONAL QUALITY AWARD

Passed into law in 1987, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act was created to stimulate quality improvement and productivity in American companies. As part of this law, the Malcolm Bridge National Quality Award Program (MBNAQP) was created to recognize businesses that attained performance excellence based on criteria assessed by independent examiners. The Act also stipulated that detailed information be made publicly available on how winning organizations were able to change their cultures and achieve eminence (Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act, 1987).

The Baldrige Excellence Framework serves as an integrated framework to identify, understand, and manage organizational performance. The framework is comprised of seven groups of criteria with a set of questions that describe how to run an organization effectively, regardless of the size or sector. These criteria are the foundation for integrating key performance and operational requirements within a results-oriented framework that creates a basis for action, feedback, and ongoing success (Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, 2021).

In 2003, Evan and Jack validated the linkages between key external results and internal performance metrics of the Baldrige criteria through quantitative study. Their findings provide evidence of validity for the Baldrige model, demonstrating that its examination/self-assessment process that seeks to improve internal management practices leads to improvements in

external results. Miller and Parast (2019) studied the MBQNA applicant's quality scores, made available by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), for years 1990–2006 to examine the quality improvements applicants exhibited after their first application. Their findings indicate that organizations with the lowest levels of quality performance benefited the most from applying for the MBNQA. Miller and Parast attribute this to the “audit effect” and the impact of performance feedback from outside entities that motivates them to undertake improvement initiatives. The application process itself was also determined to be valuable because it provided organizations with a requisite level of quality knowledge to implement improvements.

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award is well respected, and many organizations have adopted the criteria as their TQM model. Setiawan and Purba (2021) reviewed 50 journals on the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) from various countries and found that 48% of researchers use the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (MBCPE) to measure organizational performance. Setiawan and Purba also compared the MBNQA with other quality awards such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and the Deming Prize to demonstrate the synergies and differences in these BEMs.

Over time, variations of the award have been created that are tailored to different industry sectors. In 1999, the Education Framework was introduced. The Education Framework has evolved over the last 20 years to keep pace with emerging critical issues. Interwoven into the criteria are topics including diversity, equity, and inclusion; resilience and safety; digitization and technology; innovation; cybersecurity; and societal responsibility and global sustainability.

Through the 2020 award cycle, six higher education organizations received the National Quality Award. Aligned with Miller and Parasat's study, data from the Baldrige Foundation show that organizations realize the benefits of improved performance before they win the award by conducting the self-study and continue to innovate and strive for performance excellence afterward. For example, Howard Community College (MD) outperformed its peer community colleges with more than 100% growth rate for associate degrees awarded for over 10 years. Alamo Colleges District (TX) increased its four-year student graduation rate by 150% in recent years to become the best in the state of Texas. For student completion/retention and job placement after graduation, Tri County Tech (SC) maintained rates in the top 25% nationally for eight fiscal years (Baldrige Foundation Journal of Performance Excellence, 2022-23).

EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT AWARD

Co-sponsored by the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the Excellence in Assessment (EIA) program was created to acknowledge higher education institutions that have achieved a high standard of intentional integration of institutional-level learning outcomes assessment. Established in 2016, the EIA is a set of seven criteria for evaluating and improving the quality of assessment practices in higher education institutions. Kenize and Baker (2019) describe EIA designated institutions as models of exemplary assessment practice that offer examples of a range of innovative approaches to assessment in their review of Excellence in Assessment Designees.

Research suggests the EIA has shown itself to be an effective tool for higher education institutions in improving their assessment practices. Pham (2021) studied the reliability of the

EIA rubric via a survey across different types of higher education institutions (public and non-profit private institutions) and institutions with different funding sources (research and comprehensive). The findings of this study indicated the EIA rubric is appropriate for use in the EIA evaluation and designation process. Robinson et al. (2017) conducted a self-study for improvement in their assessment practices using the EIA designation rubric to conduct a gap analysis. The authors of the study declared the gap analysis was invaluable for the Office of Assessment and Accreditation at the University of South Carolina Charlotte because it brought neglected issues to the forefront that needed to be addressed. The intentional, targeted improvements made as a result of the gap analysis are documented in a subsequent article published by Robinson et al. in 2019.

LEADING TRANSFORMATION

Total Quality Management frameworks, such as Baldrige and EA, provide organizations with a detailed description of the components of an effective TQM system. The gap between research and research-based practice can be a wide chasm for many organizations to cross. Navigating the distance between the current state of the organization and establishing the systems that will enable the desired state of the organization requires effective leadership. Transformational leadership theory has particular relevance for organizational change leadership. Developed as a theory for understanding political and organizational leadership, the behaviors described by transformational leadership theory have been thoroughly researched in educational settings within multiple cultural and geographic contexts around the world (Dumdum, Lowe, and Avolio, 2013). Kouzes and Posner (1987) posit that transformational leadership raises individuals to a higher level of motivation and sense of belonging. This sense

of belonging is particularly important in tumultuous times. Kouzes and Posner's research is grounded in empirical evidence: they conducted extensive interviews with leaders from various industry sectors and gathered data on leadership behaviors and outcomes. Their research findings consistently showed that exemplary leaders engaged in five practices: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. Collins' (2001) research study *Good to Great* is a seminal work in the field of business and leadership and examined the characteristics and strategies that enable companies to transition from being good companies to achieving and sustaining greatness over a long period. A comprehensive study of 11 companies was conducted, and several key principles were identified that underlie their transition. First among these principles is what Collins coined "Level 5 Leadership." The characteristics of an exemplary leader described by Kouzes and Posner are evident in Collins' analysis of a Level 5 Leader.

LEADING TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In their literature review, Dopson et al. (2018) noted that research centered on transformational leadership in the higher education space is significantly smaller than for other industry sectors. However, findings consistently show that transformational leadership produces positive results within educational settings especially when measuring its impact on organizational innovation, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, employee satisfaction, and perceptions of leadership's effectiveness (Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006). In a mixed methods study of the influence of transformational leadership in TQM, Argia and Ismail (2013) also found transformational leadership significantly influenced TQM performance and had better outcomes. Sipe's (2020) comparative phenomenological case

study analysis of two community colleges uncovered several key findings related to transformational leadership; for example, it confirmed a link between transformational leadership and a culture of innovation. It also demonstrated that transformational leadership and innovative institutional identity must be sufficiently strong to mitigate the negative effects of bureaucracy on innovation and design thinking.

LEADING TRANSFORMATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Now, more than at any other time in the history of community colleges, is transformation and strong transformational leadership necessary. Tarker (2019) observed that much of the current literature describes community colleges as dynamic workplaces that need to undergo significant changes to survive in a more uncertain higher education environment (Eddy et al. 2015; Phelan, 2016). This finding is supported by the language used in the American Association of Community College's (AACC) leadership competencies framework (2018), which emphasizes that leaders need to be open to continual change. Levine and Van Pelt (2021) echo this sentiment in their description of the historical context of higher education and the need for post-secondary education to evolve with the emerging knowledge economy. Kezar, Director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education, is a prolific contributor to the scholarship on change in higher education. Her studies identified leadership as one of the most critical factors in creating change (Kezar, 2018). Leadership is also important for innovation and organizational learning and for implementing and sustaining these efforts over time.

A focus on student success and teaching and learning excellence amid the ever-widening challenges faced by community colleges is essential for community college leaders today. In a literature review focused on determining the internal reasons why community

colleges struggle to create and sustain organizational change, Miller and Harrington (2023) identified several key causes, including contextual challenges such as organizational structure and processes, awareness and motivation, and change management process challenges. They also cited a lack of professional development for leaders in change management as a significant obstacle to developing and sustaining an effective organizational change effort. Bhusal (2018) conducted in-depth interviews and field observations in a study to determine the influence of educational leadership on quality enhancements in community colleges. Their findings hint at varied and insufficient attempts of leaders to address the growing needs of the colleges studied. Community college leaders are encouraged to plan and implement farsighted strategies to ensure ongoing quality assurance.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

Student learning outcomes identify what a student will know or be able to do as a result of successfully completing a program, a course, or a unit of instruction. Goucher College (2023) in Maryland provides the following comprehensive statement on their website emphasizing the critical importance of student learning outcomes:

Integrating student learning goals and outcomes at the course and program levels serve the following purposes:

- **Increased student awareness of their own learning**
Explicitly stated learning goals give students a way to think and talk about what they have learned. They make it easier for students to “know what they know” and give students a language to communicate what they know to others. Such awareness is considered central to learning that lasts.
- **Frameworks for course design and redesign**
Faculty often find that it is much easier to plan a course when they begin with where they hope their students will end. Another place to begin planning or revising a course is where faculty know students will face difficulty in the course. Identifying

student learning goals helps faculty structure their courses, identify pedagogical strategies, and design assignments, tests, projects, class discussion, and other course elements to help students meet those goals.

Course-based learning goals also serve as criteria that faculty can use both to assess students' progress and to direct course revision, helping faculty to incorporate the skills, methodology, and thinking that the major values into their classes. Finally, course-based learning goals also identify for programs the values and practices of the faculty delivering the program curricula. In so doing, course-based goals inform program learning goals.

- **A method for program planning**
Program learning goals help faculty plan the curriculum, assess coherence and sequencing, and evaluate the learning of majors. In addition, they signal the program's disciplinary identity and provide a common language that students, faculty, and staff share. This common language can facilitate communication and build bridges among various program services for students, such as advising and instruction.
- **A map for curricular assessment and change**
Use of learning goals helps programs think about curriculum. When learning goals are defined, programs can determine the courses that address each goal. Curricular maps can reveal desired and undesired redundancies, overlaps, and gaps in programs for majors.
- **A method for institutional assessment**
Course-based and program learning goals and their assessment demonstrate how learning goals are translated through the lenses and curricula of the disciplines those units represent. Furthermore, they can show larger units within the institution how the parts relate to the whole.
- **Improved academic advising**
Learning goals for each course are an important first step toward clearly communicating expectations to students, assisting them, and their advisors, in matching courses and majors with student interests and capabilities.
- **Evidence for accreditation**
Accrediting agencies have modified their requirements to include student learning goals and evidence that assessment of student learning relative to those goals is used in curricular improvement. (Goucher College, 2023)

CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

Constructivist theory lies at the very heart of the modern understanding of the human learning process. Developed by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1973), constructivist theory refers to knowledge construction that occurs when people study and think. In other words, knowledge changes when students discover something new and add new information to their knowledge systems (Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck & Taylor, 2002). Once viewed as entirely the student’s responsibility to absorb information transmitted them from an instructor, learning is now considered a shared responsibility between the student, the teacher, and the institution of higher education (Cechova et al., 2019). Gao (2023) describes the practical application of constructivist theory in educational practice as positioning and enabling the student “to be architects, designers, and discoverers’ in the learning process, instead of passive participants” (pg. 90).

Student-centered learning focuses on learner activity, in contrast to instructor control and coverage of academic content (Cannon, 2000). When students are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge they find it more meaningful (McCombs & Whistler, (1997). Huba and Freed (2000) distinguishes between the nuances of the teacher-centered and learner-centered paradigms as follows:

Table 1. Teacher-centered paradigm and learner-centered paradigm

TEACHER-CENTERED PARADIGM	LEARNER-CENTERED PARADIGM
Knowledge is transmitted from professor to students	Students construct knowledge through gathering and synthesizing information and integrating it with the general skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking, problem solving and so on
Students passively receive information	Students are actively involved

TEACHER-CENTERED PARADIGM	LEARNER-CENTERED PARADIGM
Emphasis is on acquisition of knowledge outside the context in which it will be used	Emphasis is on using and communicating knowledge effectively to address enduring and emerging issues and problems in real-life contexts
Professor's roles is to be primary information giver and primary evaluator	Professor's role is to coach and facilitate. Professor and students evaluate learning together
Teaching and assessing are separate	Teaching and assessing are intertwined
Assessment is used to monitor learning	Assessment is used to promote and diagnose learning
Emphasis is on right answers	Emphasis is on generating better questions and learning from errors
Desired learning is assessed indirectly through the use of objectively scored tests	Desired learning is assessed directly through papers, projects, performances, portfolios, and the like
Focus is on a single discipline	Approach is compatible with interdisciplinary investigation
Culture is competitive and individualistic	Culture is cooperative, collaborative, and supportive
Only students are viewed as learners	Professor and students learn together

In the 1990s, the rhetoric and practice of student learning assessment began to evolve. A greater focus was placed on student-centered learning and the need to tie course content to student learning outcomes that develop knowledge, skills, and abilities that are transferable beyond one specific learning environment and were based on measurable evidence (Boud & Falchikov, 2005). Today, effective pedagogy includes both learner-centered teaching and assessment. In a pragmatic guide written to assist faculty in developing and implementing assessment programs that focus faculty attention on student learning, Allen (2004) provides a table that distinguishes the differences between teaching-centered and learning-centered instruction.

Table 2. Teaching-centered versus learning-centered instruction

CONCEPT	TEACHER-CENTERED	LEARNER-CENTERED
Teaching goals	Cover the discipline	Students learn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to use the discipline • How to integrate disciplines to solve complex problems • An array of core learning objectives
Organization of the curriculum	Courses in catalog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesive program with systematically created opportunities to synthesize, practice, and develop increasingly complex ideas, skills, and values
Course structure	Faculty cover topics	Students master learning objectives
How students learn	Listening Reading Independent learning, often in competition for grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students construct knowledge by integrating new learning into what they already know • Learning is viewed as a cognitive and social act
Pedagogy	Based on delivery of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on engagement of students
Course delivery	Lecture Assignments and exams for summative purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active learning • Assignments for formative purposes • Collaborative learning • Community service learning • Cooperative learning • Online, asynchronous, self-directed learning • Problem-based learning
Course grading	Faculty as gatekeepers Normal distribution expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades indicate mastery of learning objectives
Faculty role	Sage on stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designer of learning environments
Effective teaching	Teach (present information) well and those who can, will learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage students in their learning • Help all students master learning objectives • Use classroom assessment to improve courses • Use program assessment to improve programs

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

Biggs (1996) provided a framework that leverages constructivism as not just a focal awareness but as a practical tool in instructional design. Biggs describes “constructive alignment” as a marriage between constructivism used as a framework to guide decision-making in instructional design and establishing student learning outcomes and “performances of understanding” to systematically align teaching methods and assessment of student learning. Biggs posits that when curriculum and assessment methods are aligned, the results of instruction are massively improved. A key concept of constructive alignment is that learning objectives are defined and then the assessment tasks and the activities that can best optimize the achievement of the intended learning outcomes are determined. Fink (2013) incorporated constructive alignment in his model of integrated course design intended to create significant learning, active learning, and educative assessment. An important feature of this model of course design is that the learning goals, the feedback and assessment, and the teaching and learning activities must be integrated and support each other. He invites faculty to reflect on their own approach to instruction and provides the following key recommendations for creating significant student-centered learning experiences: set more ambitious learning goals, enlarge the kinds of learning activities used, create rich learning experiences, provide multiple opportunities for in-depth reflection on the learning process, find alternative ways to introduce students to the content of the course, create a coherent and meaningful course structure, and select or create a dynamic instructional strategy (pp. 168-169).

The conceptual framework of constructive alignment is effective at all levels of instructional design from unit to course to program. Abdullah and Tarchouna (2017) conducted

a descriptive and observational analysis to understand constructive alignment in practice. Their study highlights the tight relationship between learning outcomes and learning-outcome based curricula and posits that an appropriately aligned curriculum can facilitate and optimize the successful achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Lawrence's (2023) study on the application of constructive alignment theory highlights how the tenets of constructive alignment can be implemented to enhance the quality of teaching, and deep student learning in a curriculum unit. He emphasizes that the basic foundation of constructive alignment is that in a good teaching system, the curriculum is designed so that the learning activities and assessment tasks are aligned with the learning outcomes in the course (p. 481).

EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICE

Institutional transformation requires examining how our institution's norms, systems, and practices continue to reproduce the conditions that "frustrate the efforts to achieve equity and justice" beyond diversity and inclusion (Stewart, 2016, 16:48). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) posits that equity work must specifically examine racial equity because of its unique historical circumstances and its relevance today (McNair et al, 2020). In a policy brief drafted by Gupton (2023), analysis reveals that the regressive higher education reform agenda to silence discourse on racial justice in business, government, and education is designed to end any discussion of structural inequality.

Theoretical frameworks inform practitioners in embedding equity into their practice. Singer-Freeman, Bastone, and Montenegro (2022) highlight the following six distinct theories that can support efforts to increase equity in higher education:

1. **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**. CRT is a social movement framework that attributes racism to inherent structural systems in society that maintain white supremacy (Bell,

1987). Singer-Freeman et al. posit that learning outcomes may reflect dominant cultural values, ignoring values of the oppressed; measures of learning may assume prior culturally specific knowledge; and interpretations of findings may be limited by narrow definitions of achievement (p. 98).

2. **Socially Just Assessment.** The social justice framework involves implementation of policies that increase equality that take into consideration power, privilege, and identity (Henning & Lundquist, 2018). To mitigate bias in assessment, Heiser et al. (2017) contends it is essential to consider positionality at every stage of assessment. Singer-Freeman et al. (2022) extends the consideration of power to students from marginalized groups suggesting that student agency “improves the quality of assessment, signals respect for those who are assessed, and creates learning opportunities” (p. 99).
3. **Implicit Bias.** Systemic racism influences personal bias. Recognizing that implicit bias is unavoidable, faculty can mitigate bias by using grading techniques that focus on content rather than style.
4. **Culture of Inquiry.** A culture of inquiry puts the responsibility of creating a system that cultivates successful students on the organization. It requires that an organization practice self-reflection and critical data analysis of equity outcomes across different student groups.
5. **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.** Culturally responsive pedagogy stresses the importance of cultivating a sense of belonging and confidence in students in their ability to succeed at an institution (Gay, 2010). From an assessment perspective, it is important that the material in assessments be accessible to all students.
6. **Culturally Relevant Assessment.** Culturally relevant assessment is an outgrowth of culturally responsive pedagogy. Assessments should be intentionally created that minimize stereotype threat and provide an opportunity for students to select ways to demonstrate their knowledge that is congruent with their experience.

There exists a rich portfolio of scholarly work centered on equity in higher education, and many community colleges center equity in their mission and purpose statements. A consistent thread throughout the research is the consensus that equity gaps in achievement are the result of racist structural systems. The Center for Urban Education (CUE) has worked to bring equity-mindedness to institutions of higher education through socially conscious research, tools, and learning institutes. The CUE defines equity as two dimensional. One axis

represents institutional accountability that is realized by achievement of racial parity in student outcomes. The second axis delineates an institution's understanding of the "omnipresence of whiteness at the institutional and practice levels" (Bensimon, 2018, p. 97). Achieving the Dream (AtD) is a non-governmental reform movement for student success that supports colleges in becoming catalysts for equitable, antiracist, and economically vibrant communities (Achieving the Dream, 2023). In their equity statement, AtD attributes achievement gaps to structural inequities that are often the result of historic and systemic social injustices (Achieving the Dream, 2020). While equity is a concern in higher education, Jankowski et al (2018) found in a National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) survey of provosts regarding institution-level assessment practice that equity was listed as important to assessment work. However, assessment data were rarely used to address equity gaps in learning.

CONCLUSION

The literature reveals that there is significant value to an organization in intentionally reflecting on current practice to improve performance. Research also suggests that transformational leadership is essential to guiding an organization through self-reflection and learning to construct evidence-based systems to enable student success for all student groups. A focus on student success and teaching and learning excellence amid the ever-widening challenges faced by community colleges is essential for community college leaders today.

The student population attending community college is diversifying, but students of color are not completing at the same levels as their white peers. It is incumbent upon community colleges to reflect on their practice and policies to identify and dismantle structural barriers to student success. Higher education has been among the most contested spaces in the

regressive backlash against racial justice. By centering equity in student learning assessment, more inclusive, evidence-based learning environments can be cultivated.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

WHY AN ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDE FOR EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICE IS NEEDED

The assessment of student learning has often been viewed as a perfunctory task to fulfill accreditation requirements. Changing organizational culture to one that values assessment as a means to improve student learning and close equity gaps can be a challenging undertaking and requires strong leadership. The purpose of the Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice is to assist community college leaders in conducting a self-review to improve and adjust current assessment practices. The result will be an effective and inclusive process that ensures that equity is central in student learning assessment. An organizational self-assessment is the process by which an organization analyzes and evaluates the organization's capacity to meet its own goals. Through this process, areas of concern are identified, and action plans are created to address deficits. In addition to monitoring key student success metrics, community college leaders must also put energy and resources into identifying and measuring the effectiveness of results-oriented processes, that is, those processes that can be sustained and adapted to a changing environment and can withstand the challenges of inevitable obstacles including time pressures, resource scarcity, and competing priorities.

While various quality improvement frameworks exist, few resources integrate the systems approach of total quality management with evidence-based assessment practices. Additionally, while frameworks detail the "what" of a total quality management system, they do not provide guidance on how to lead an organization in intentionally reflecting on current

assessment practice to improve an infrastructure meant to improve student learning. The Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice is meant to provide both the structural framework to develop a comprehensive assessment system, as well as guide administrators in leading their organization in reflection on their current practice to improve student learning for all students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the development of the Guide:

What tools can a community college leader use to navigate from their current state of assessment of student learning to an aspired practice rooted in research, uniquely suited to their needs?

- What frameworks can an institution use in a self-review to identify opportunities of improvement in their assessment of learning outcomes processes to close equity gaps in student success?
- How can an institution develop a strategy that is uniquely suited to their institution's context and needs to leverage the assessment of student learning to close equity gaps?
- How can an institution bridge the gap between strategy and execution successfully to develop an effective learning outcomes assessment system in their organization?

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE GUIDE

This Guide was developed by synthesizing two evidence-based total quality management frameworks, while integrating leadership and equity theory, into a practical roadmap for institutions to conduct an equity-centered assessment gap analysis. Closing equity gaps in student learning involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers and challenges that disproportionately affect certain groups of students and contribute to inequities in learning outcomes. Leveraging an effective performance excellence system, such as the Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, integrated with performance excellence principles

identified by the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, will provide community colleges with a means to identify opportunities to improve their practice of learning outcomes assessment and help to identify and understand equity gaps to inform efforts to address them.

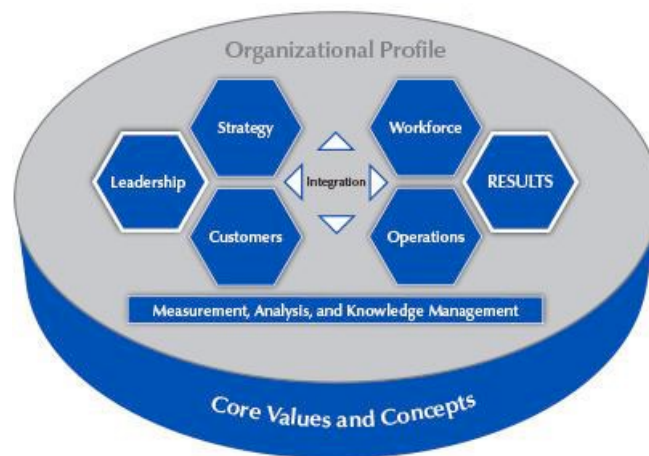
The Learning Outcomes Assessment Review Guide for Equity Minded Practice is comprised of seven components that generally align with the Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education and provide the conceptual framework for the Guide. Each section provides a narrative synthesizing key information as well as guidance on practical application of that component. The Guide concludes with additional information resources. The key elements of the Guide are detailed below and include the Malcom Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education (BEFE), the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment Excellence Framework, organizational learning, and prompts focused on equity to inform institutional dialogue and self-reflection.

MALCOLM BALDRIGE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION (BEFE)

The BEFE (see Figure 1) is a performance system consisting of seven integrated categories. The leadership triad emphasizes the importance of leadership's focus on strategy and students (customers). The results triad includes the organization's workforce-focused processes, key operational processes, and the performance results that those processes yield. Integrated within the BEFE is a set of core values and concepts that are embedded in high-performing organizations (Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, 2020). In general, the Excellence Framework is designed to help organizations determine where they are positioned in the continuum of learning and process maturity. As an organization's systems mature, processes are more repeatable and are regularly evaluated for improvement, and learning is

shared. At its most evolved state, a fully integrated approach is evident when the organization seeks and achieves efficiencies across units through analysis, innovation, and sharing of information and knowledge. Research supports the linkages between the categories of the Baldrige model, as well as the use of this model to perform an organizational self-assessment to strengthen processes (Evans and Jack, 2003).

Figure 1. Baldrige Excellence Framework



Note. Baldrige Excellence Framework consists of seven integrated categories in the center of the figure. These categories define processes and the results to be achieved. The Organizational Profile sets the context for the organization. The system foundation (Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management) is critical to effective management. The basis of the BEFE is a set of Core Values and Concepts that are embedded in high performing organizations. From Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2023. National Institute of Standards and Technology. <https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/how-baldrige-works>

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

This Guide is also informed with research-based best practices in the assessment of student learning outcomes. The National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) Excellence in Assessment criteria is a set of Guidelines for evaluating and improving the quality of assessment practices in higher education institutions (2021). By following the NILOA criteria, institutions can improve the effectiveness of their assessment practices and better understand

the impact of their programs and services on student learning and success. The Excellence in Assessment criteria are organized into the following dimensions (NILOA, 2021):

1. **Groups & Individuals Engaged in Assessment Activities:** This dimension focuses on the diversity of institutional representatives regularly participating in assessment activities.
2. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Student Learning Outcomes Statements:** This dimension addresses the integration and availability of clearly stated learning outcomes statements that detail the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, or habits of mind that students are expected to acquire.
3. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Institution-level Assessment Plan:** This dimension measures the extent to which an institution has a comprehensive assessment plan with alignment between institution-level assessment and program and unit-level assessment plans, with regular review from stakeholders.
4. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Institution-level Assessment Resources:** This dimension covers centralized assessment resources availability and use, faculty and staff development, and institutional policies and procedures supporting assessment activities.
5. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Institution-level Assessment Activities:** This dimension measures the extent to which an institution makes assessment plans, results and processes available to stakeholders.
6. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Institution-level Evidence of Student Learning:** This dimension is focused on the use of assessment results at all levels of the institution to Guide decision-making to improve student learning and communicating those changes both to internal and external institutional audiences.
7. **Reflection and Growth/Improvement Plan:** this dimension measures an institution's level self-reflection in identifying strengths and weaknesses of its assessment practice and plans for growth and improvement. (NILOA, 2021).

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Team learning enables cultural shifts by employing a collaborative process that helps teams work together to define goals and develop a strategy to achieve them. Team learning emphasizes the importance of collective learning, where members of a team learn from one another, rather than just relying on individual learning (Senge, 2006).

Continual organizational learning and agility is a core concept of the Baldrige Excellence Framework. As articulated in the BEFE, organizational learning is a continuous process of improving existing processes as well as innovation leading to new goals, approaches, or programs. Learning is daily work that includes soliciting input from all levels of the organization including faculty, staff, and students. Learning includes benchmarking, sharing best-practices, and reviewing the performance of other institutions' programs, such as the assessment of student learning (Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, 2022).

Adopting proven strategies of high-performing learning organizations in leading an institution through a self-assessment of the institution's assessment program is critical to success. This Guide would not be complete without threading the tenets of learning organization theory and change management theory throughout. For this purpose, Peter Senge's learning organization theory is leveraged extensively throughout the Guide. Senge's model is focused on the idea that organizations are complex systems that are constantly adapting and evolving in response to their internal and external environments (Senge, 2006). According to this model, there are five key disciplines that are essential for managing organizational change effectively:

1. **Personal Mastery:** This involves developing the skills, knowledge, and mindset necessary to understand and influence the systems in which we operate.
2. **Mental Models:** This involves examining the underlying assumptions and beliefs that shape our thinking and behavior and unlearning how to challenge and change them when necessary.
3. **Shared Vision:** This involves creating a shared understanding of the purpose and goals and aligning the actions of all stakeholders towards those goals.
4. **Team Learning:** This involves creating an environment where teams can collaborate, share knowledge, and continuously learn and improve together.

5. **Systems Thinking:** This involves understanding the interconnectedness of all parts of the organization and the impact that changes in one area can have on other parts of the system. (Senge, 2006).

By cultivating these disciplines that align directly with the BEFE, and applying them in a coordinated and systematic way, organizations can more effectively manage change and navigate the challenges and opportunities of a constantly changing environment. Corporations such as Honeywell, Toyota Motor Company, and USA Today are examples of companies that are recognized as true learning organizations (Wilhelm, 2017). The Honeywell corporation is constantly identifying opportunities to improve quality by applying Six-Sigma approaches (Wilhelm, 2017). The Toyota Motor Company uses lean manufacturing and continuous improvement to continuously improve products and processes (Wilhelm, 2017). And USA Today kept reinventing publishing technology to distribute information electronically (Wilhelm, 2017). What is common to these companies is their culture of continuous learning that allows them to evolve ahead of their competition.

PROMPTS TO INFORM INSTITUTIONAL DIALOGUE

Closing equity gaps in student learning involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers and challenges that disproportionately affect certain groups of students and contribute to inequities in learning outcomes. To identify and address these barriers, institutions must reflect on their own practice and challenge their assumptions. In every stage of the Guide, provocative questions are provided from leading sources such as the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) and the Center for Urban Education to assist organizations in reframing racialized gaps in performance as a function of the institution's teaching and learning systems, rather than as a deficit of the student. Example questions include *Are equity gaps*

regarding student learning closing? Is evidence of student learning shared? and Who is and who is not participating in the assessment of student learning?

GUIDE DESIGN

The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Review Guide for Equity Minded Practice is comprised of the following components: Leadership & Facilitating Transformation, Learner-Centered Focus, Facing Reality & Evidence-Informed Dialogue, Strategic Planning, Action Plans, Communication, and Monitoring Progress. Each section provides a narrative synthesizing key information as well as guidance on practical application of that component. The Guide concludes with additional information resources. It is a separate document embedded within this dissertation and includes a list of references that is independent of the dissertation references. The following table provides a high-level view of the Guide sections and their alignment with the Baldrige categories and the NILOA criteria.

Table 3: Assessment Review Guide for Equity-Minded Practice - Integration of Performance Frameworks

ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDE	BALDRIDGE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK CATEGORIES	NILOA EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
Leadership & Facilitating Transformation	Leadership	Groups & Individuals Engaged in Assessment
Learner-Centered Focus	Customers	Student Learning Outcomes Statements
Facing Reality & Evidence-Informed Dialogue	Measurement, Analysis, Knowledge Management	Use of Evidence of Student Learning
Strategic Planning	Strategy	Institution-level Assessment Plan
Action Plans	Workforce Operations	Institution-level Assessment Resources and Assessment Activity
Communication	Workforce Operations	Student Learning Outcomes Statements

ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDE	BALDRIDGE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK CATEGORIES	NILOA EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
Monitoring progress	Results	Institution-level Evidence of Student Learning

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This Guide synthesizes research and practical application to serve as a tool for community colleges leaders at all levels of the organization to use in interrogating, organizing, and renewing their existing assessment of student learning outcomes processes to address equity gaps. This product does not espouse quick hits or a list of specific tactics that can be implemented to “fix” an organization’s assessment program. Rather, the Guide synthesizes learning organization theory as articulated by researchers, such as Peter Senge and Barry Sugarman, to facilitate change management with the tenets of equity-mindedness as described by the Center for Urban Education, and various quality improvement frameworks, such as the Baldrige Excellence Framework and the National Institute of Learning Outcomes (NILOA) Assessment Excellence in Assessment Framework, to provide a guided roadmap for organizations to use to develop their own approach to bridging the gap between their aspirations of leveraging assessment to close equity gaps and their present reality.

CHAPTER FOUR: LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDE FOR EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

While many community colleges have equity centered in their mission, vision, and strategic goals, there is less evidence of systematic and holistic change to internal structures to close equity gaps in student success rates. It can be overwhelming for community college leaders to put research into practice and to navigate the process of identifying systemic strategies to move their organization to increased effectiveness based on identified strengths and areas in need of change. Leadership must begin where their institutions are; rarely is there an opportunity to start from scratch in building the optimal assessment program.

The purpose of this Guide is to assist community colleges leaders in conducting a self-review that will define a roadmap informing improvements and adjustments to current practice to establish a more effective and inclusive process that centers equity in student learning assessment. An organizational self-assessment is the process by which an organization analyzes and evaluates the organization's capacity to meet its own goals. Through this process, areas of concern are identified, and action plans are created to address deficits (Kezar, 2018).

Community college leaders focus on key student success performance metrics but also must put energy and resources into identifying and measuring the effectiveness of results-oriented processes; that is, processes that can be sustained and adapted to a changing environment and

withstand the challenges of inevitable obstacles such as time pressures, resource scarcity, and competing priorities.

WHAT IS AN ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDE FOR EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICE?

This Guide synthesizes research and practical application to serve as a tool for community colleges leaders at all levels of the organization to use in interrogating, organizing, and renewing their existing assessment of student learning outcomes processes to address equity gaps. This product does not espouse quick hits or a list of specific tactics that can be implemented to “fix” an organization’s assessment program. Rather, the Guide synthesizes learning organization theory as articulated by researchers including Peter Senge and Barry Sugarman to facilitate change management with the tenets of equity-mindedness as described by the Center for Urban Education, and various quality improvement frameworks such as the Baldrige Excellence Framework and the National Institute of Learning Outcomes (NILOA) Assessment Excellence in Assessment Framework, to provide a guided roadmap for organizations to use to develop their own approach to bridging the gap between their aspirations of leveraging assessment to close equity gaps and their present reality.

OVERVIEW OF BALDRIGE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION

The Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education (BEFE) serves as the foundation for the Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice. Passed into law in 1987, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act was created to stimulate quality improvement and productivity in American companies. As part of this law, the Malcolm Bridge National Quality Award Program (MBNAQP) was created to recognize businesses that attained performance excellence based on criteria assessed by independent examiners. The Act also stipulated that

detailed information be made publicly available on how winning organizations were able to “change their cultures and achieve eminence” (Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act, 1987, p. 2). Over time, variations of the award have been created that are tailored to different industry sectors. In 1999, the Education Framework was introduced. The Education Framework has evolved over the last 23 years to keep pace with emerging critical issues. Interwoven into the criteria are topics including diversity, equity, and inclusion; resilience and safety; digitization and technology; innovation; cybersecurity; and societal responsibility and global sustainability.

The BEFE is a performance system consisting of seven integrated categories. The Leadership Triad emphasizes the importance of leadership’s focus on strategy and students (customers). The Results Triad includes the organization’s workforce-focused processes, key operational processes, and the performance results that those processes yield. Integrated within the BEFE is a set of core values and concepts that are embedded in high-performing organizations (Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, 2020). In general, the Excellence Framework is designed to help organizations determine where they are positioned in the continuum of learning and process maturity. As an organization’s systems mature, processes are more repeatable and are regularly evaluated for improvement, and learning is shared. At its most evolved state, a fully integrated approach is evident when the organization seeks and achieves efficiencies across units through analysis, innovation, and sharing of information and knowledge. The Assessment Review Guide assists institutions in examining all aspects of its assessment of student learning processes and policies to identify opportunities to strengthen their process and center equity, resulting in increased student success.

Empirical research by Evans & Jack (2003) supports the positive relationships between internal management practices and organizational performance. Research on the linkages between the categories of the Baldrige Excellence Framework provide evidence of the validity of the Baldrige model, as well as the use of this model to perform an organizational self-assessment to strengthen high-performance management processes.

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

This Guide is also informed with research-based best practices in the assessment of student learning outcomes. The National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) Excellence in Assessment criteria is a set of Guidelines for evaluating and improving the quality of assessment practices in higher education institutions. By following the NILOA criteria, institutions can improve the effectiveness of their assessment practices and better understand the impact of their programs and services on student learning and success. The Excellence in Assessment criteria are organized into the following dimensions:

1. **Groups & Individuals Engaged in Assessment Activities:** This dimension focuses on the diversity of institutional representatives regularly participating in assessment activities.
2. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Student Learning Outcomes Statements:** This dimension addresses the integration and availability of clearly stated learning outcomes statements that detail the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, or habits of mind that students are expected to acquire.
3. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Institution-level Assessment Plan:** This dimension measures the extent to which an institution has a comprehensive assessment plan with alignment between institution-level assessment and program and unit-level assessment plans, with regular review from stakeholders.
4. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Institution-level Assessment Resources:** This dimension covers centralized assessment resources availability and use, faculty and

staff development, and institutional policies and procedures supporting assessment activities.

5. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Institution-level Assessment Activities:** This dimension measures the extent to which an institution makes assessment plans, results and processes available to stakeholders.
6. **NILOA Transparency Framework – Institution-level Evidence of Student Learning:** This dimension is focused on using assessment results at all levels of the institution to guide decision-making to improve student learning and communicating those changes both to internal and external institutional audiences.
7. **Reflection and Growth/Improvement Plan:** This dimension measures an institution’s level self-reflection in identifying strengths and weaknesses of its assessment practice and plans for growth and improvement.

INCORPORATING ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING THEORY

Continual organizational learning and agility is a core concept of the Baldrige Excellence Framework. As articulated in the BEFE, organizational learning is a continuous process of improving existing processes as well as innovation leading to new goals, approaches, or programs. Learning is daily work that includes soliciting input from all levels of the organization, including faculty, staff, and students. Learning includes benchmarking, sharing best-practices, and reviewing the performance of other institutions’ programs, such as the assessment of student learning (Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, 2022).

Adopting proven strategies of high-performing learning organizations in leading your institution through a self-assessment of your institution’s assessment program is critical to your success. This Guide would not be complete without threading the tenets of learning organization theory and change management theory throughout. For this purpose, Peter Senge’s learning organization theory is leveraged extensively throughout the Guide. Senge’s model is focused on the idea that organizations are complex systems that are constantly adapting and evolving in response to their internal and external environments (Senge, 2006).

According to Senge's model, there are five key disciplines that are essential for managing organizational change effectively:

1. **Personal Mastery:** This involves developing the skills, knowledge, and mindset necessary to understand and influence the systems in which we operate.
2. **Mental Models:** This involves examining the underlying assumptions and beliefs that shape our thinking and behavior and unlearning how to challenge and change them when necessary.
3. **Shared Vision:** This involves creating a shared understanding of the purpose and goals and aligning the actions of all stakeholders towards those goals.
4. **Team Learning:** This involves creating an environment where teams can collaborate, share knowledge, and continuously learn and improve together.
5. **Systems Thinking:** This involves understanding the interconnectedness of all parts of the organization and the impact that changes in one area can have on other parts of the system.

By cultivating these disciplines which align directly with the BEFE, and applying them in a coordinated and systematic way, organizations can more effectively manage change and navigate the challenges and opportunities of a constantly changing environment.

INTEGRATION OF PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY CENTERED LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

Closing equity gaps in student learning involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers and challenges that disproportionately affect certain groups of students and contribute to inequities in learning outcomes. In fact, leveraging an effective performance excellence system such as the Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education, integrated with performance excellence principles identified by the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, will provide community colleges with a means to identify opportunities to improve their practice of learning outcomes assessment and help to identify and understand equity gaps to inform efforts to address them.

The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Review Guide for Equity Minded Practice is comprised of seven components that generally align with the Baldrige Excellence Framework for Education and provide the conceptual framework for the Guide. Each section provides a narrative synthesizing key information as well as guidance on practical application of that component. The Guide concludes with additional information resources.

Table 4: Assessment Review Guide for Equity-Minded Practice — Integration of Performance Frameworks

ASSESSMENT REVIEW GUIDE	BALDRIGE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK CATEGORIES	NILOA EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
Leadership & Facilitating Transformation	Leadership	Groups & Individuals Engaged in Assessment
Learner-Centered Focus	Customers	Student Learning Outcomes Statements
Facing Reality & Evidence-Informed Dialogue	Measurement, Analysis, Knowledge Management	Use of Evidence of Student Learning
Strategic Planning	Strategy	Institution-level Assessment Plan
Action Plans	Workforce Operations	Institution-level Assessment Resources and Assessment Activity
Communication	Workforce Operations	Student Learning Outcomes Statements
Monitoring progress	Results	Institution-level Evidence of Student Learning

FOR WHOM IS THIS GUIDE WRITTEN?

The Assessment Review Guide for Equity Minded Practice is a universal resource intended for use by faculty and staff for all types of community college leaders interested in self-assessing the organization’s effectiveness in leveraging the assessment of student learning to close equity gaps. The Guide is designed based on the principles of evidence-based change management and assessment practices. It is intended to be a flexible resource to meet the

needs of individual community colleges striving to improve student success based on equity gaps identified by the institution.

Upon completion of this effort, community colleges will have learned about the strengths and weakness of their own assessment system. A “blueprint” for what an effective assessment system unique to their institution’s needs will be drafted, and action plans implemented to realize the vision for assessment. Measures for holding the institution accountable to an effective system will also be addressed.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Guide is meant to facilitate the transition from identifying and defining evidenced-based assessment of student learning practice to implementation of those practices as a holistic system. The sections of the Guide are organized in the same order as the Excellence Baldrige Framework and generally build upon one another. However, depending on your institution’s circumstances, the starting point for your journey may be somewhere along the continuum. To provide orientation for the Guide, the simple graphic below provides a visual representation of each of the sections of the Guide. At the beginning of each section, the appropriate arrow graphic will be outlined in red in the graphic (see complete graphic, Figure 2).

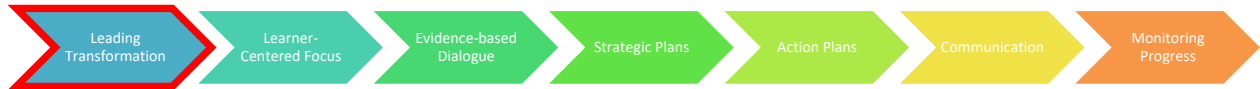
Figure 2. Assessment Review Guide for Equity-Minded Practice – Visual Representation of Sections



SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND FACILITATING TRANSFORMATION

LEADERSHIP FOCUS

Figure 3. Focus 1: Leading Transformation



A learning organization is one that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future (Senge, 2006). The speed of change has accelerated exponentially over recent years because of technological advancements, globalization, and shifts in societal values and expectations. This perpetual and pervasive state of change requires effective leadership equipped to navigate this unprecedented rate of change, and lead organizations to learn to change with change itself (Chima & Gutman, 2020). Learning organizations that continually evolve and expand their capacity to evolve will thrive in this new reality.

As community college leaders, we too need to evolve, learn, and adapt and lead our organizations in doing the same. In constantly changing environments there can be a collective feeling of disorientation or unsafety. It is for this reason that individuals serving in leadership roles must attend to the psychological safety of their organization. Leaders must be trustworthy, sincere, and humble. An effective leader is not one with all the answers, but rather one that has earned the respect and trust of their team (Maxwell, 2018).

Leaders are responsible for setting up conditions that enable the team to produce a successful outcome. Kouzes & Posner (2019) state that you become most powerful when you empower others. The goal is not only to move the organization's agenda forward, but to cultivate a team that will rise to the next challenge and to the challenge after that. A strong

leader takes the long view and places the development of their team as high a priority as working toward the institution's goals. Senge (2006) describes core learning capabilities for teams as including aspiration or a shared vision, understanding complexity or the interrelatedness of the environment, and reflective conversation and dialogue. To do this effectively, leaders must be inclusive and strive to empower and support individuals with diverse opinions and experiences.

Fostering and sustaining a learning culture are the primary roles of any leader embarking upon an effort to re-energize their approach to student learning assessment with a focus on closing equity gaps. To that end, the following practices highlight the core capabilities of a highly sustainable learning organizations that a leader must attend to as they lead their team through the process of transforming its current assessment program (Burkett, 2017).

Lead with Culture of Continuous Learning

A high-performing learning culture cannot exist without leaders who communicate and emulate the value of learning. They must not only foster active learning in the team by inspiring creative problem solving and encouraging expression of diverse viewpoints, but also be active learners themselves. As a leader, you must be willing to learn along with the team and not always be the subject matter expert.

Execute Well

Translating a strategy into practice is often where organizations struggle. Oftentimes, pilot initiatives are perceived as less risky than a full implementation but often are not scalable and sustainable. The best approach is to phase in the implementation of a strategy and review

progress, reflect, and make any necessary adjustments. Incorporating reflection and agility into the execution of a strategy is a learning-based approach that increases the likelihood that the strategy will be successful.

Plan and Prioritize Student Success

Plan and prioritize student success outcomes throughout the process. As new processes or organizational structures are identified, it is important to measure not only the efficiency of the process (i.e., participation rates, costs, etc.), but also the overall effectiveness of the assessment system. If the assessment system is not effective in using evidence of student learning to improve student learning, then the overall system is not effective, no matter how efficient it may be.

Actively Build Trust

Fostering a learning and innovative mindset within a team begins with trust. As a leader, establishing trust in a team provides a safe space that nurtures fluid thinking, focuses on finding the right solution for the organization, challenges assumptions, and acknowledges that risk and failure are part of the process.

LEARNING-BASED APPROACH TO CHANGE

Leading your organization through the process of transforming current assessment processes into a holistic program that focuses on equity and informs action to improve student learning requires leadership that engages various stakeholders from across the institution to collaborate and co-create an approach uniquely fitted to the organization. The traditional approach to change management is often viewed as a top-down process where change is

imposed on employees by management. However, a learning-based approach can lead to more effective and sustainable change.

The learning-based approach emphasizes the importance of employee participation and engagement in the process. It is a bottom-up approach where employees are encouraged to be active participants in identifying the need for change, generating ideas for change, and implementing change. In this approach, employees are viewed as learners who are capable of generating new knowledge and insights, rather than just passive recipients of information and directives (Sugarman, 2001).

Sugarman notes that this approach is particularly effective in situations where the problem is complex and requires multiple perspectives and expertise to solve, such as in shifting the assessment of student learning from a compliance task to one that informs opportunities to improve student learning for all student groups. It is important to engage employees who have direct experience with the problem and who can provide unique insights that may not be available to management. For example, including thought partners from faculty in different disciplines with different levels of assessment expertise will provide an important perspective from individuals on the front lines of student learning assessment. Engaging individuals from the student services and the DEI office in the conversation will provide a more holistic view of the student experience than if only faculty were involved in the conversation. And, seeking the perspective of those directly responsible for faculty professional development will provide another perspective that will be important in defining a system that takes into account the breadth of faculty support needs.

The learning-based approach is based on four key principles: active participation, reflection, collaboration, and experimentation.

Active Participation

Active participation involves engaging employees in the change process as active learners. This means involving them in all aspects of the change process, including identifying the need for change, generating ideas, and implementing change. Employees are encouraged to share their experiences, insights, and knowledge, and to take ownership of the change process.

Reflection

Reflection is a critical component of the learning-based approach. It involves taking time to reflect on the change process, to identify what is working well and what needs improvement. Reflection allows employees to identify areas where they can improve and learn from their experiences.

Collaboration

Collaboration is essential in the learning-based approach. It involves working together to generate new knowledge and insights that can help solve complex problems. Collaboration also helps to build trust and relationships between employees, which can lead to greater cooperation and teamwork.

Experimentation

Experimentation involves trying new approaches and testing new ideas. It is a critical component of the learning-based approach, as it allows employees to test their ideas and to

learn from their successes and failures. Experimentation also helps to build confidence and enthusiasm among employees, which can lead to greater commitment to the change process.

The learning-based approach also has implications for leadership. According to Sugarman, leaders need to be facilitators of the learning process, rather than just directors of change. Leaders need to create an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and perspectives, and where they feel supported in trying new approaches. This requires a shift in leadership style from a more directive approach to a more facilitative approach.

ESTABLISHING AN ASSESSMENT STRATEGY TEAM (AST)

To begin the process of defining a roadmap for your organization to use to develop its own approach to bridging the gap between the aspirations of leveraging assessment to close equity gaps and your present reality, it is important to begin with assembling a “core learning team,” or assessment strategy team. What makes this type of team different from other work groups is that its purpose is to create new work processes that will enable your organization to achieve significantly better results through the changes made in how people work together to assess student learning with a focus on closing equity gaps (Sugarman, 2001). The objective of the assessment strategy team is to create a new assessment model that can be replicated broadly throughout the organization and yields increased student success for all student groups.

The Assessment Strategy Team should be comprised of representatives participating regularly in assessment activities at your institution. The NILOA Excellence in Assessment rubric provides the following list of representatives that are expected to be engaged in assessment

regularly at an institution and provides a good list from which to establish and assessment strategy team.

Assessment Strategy Team Representatives
(adopted from NILOA Excellence Framework)

- Senior Leadership such as a member the President's or Chancellor's cabinet.
- Personnel responsible for the oversight of institution and program assessment activities (may be a committee).
- Personnel responsible for the oversight of institution and program accreditation activities.
- Tenured/tenure track faculty from a variety of departments and/or faculty representing a faculty governing body.
- Adjunct and/or part-time faculty from a variety of departments and/or representing an adjunct and/or part-time faculty governing body.
- Non-instructional staff responsible for student support, such as advisors, student service personnel, the library, and institutional research.
- Students from a variety of majors and years, and/or representing a student governing body.

The Assessment Strategy Team serves as a reflective leadership group that collaboratively will develop a shared assessment vision and strategy for the organization in leveraging student assessment to close equity gaps. This group should engage with other stakeholders in the institution such as Human Resources and the Business and Finance offices to gather information and additional perspectives.

Inviting Individuals to Serve on the Assessment Strategy Team

Simon Sinek has studied the concept of innovation and its diffusion extensively. According to Sinek (2015), innovation is not just about developing new products or

technologies, it is about creating a culture of innovation that allows people to think differently, experiment, and take risks.

Sinek described the diffusion of innovation phenomenon in terms of a bell curve, which represents the spread of new ideas through a population. The curve is divided into five categories of adopters: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Sinek, 2015).

Innovators are the first to adopt new ideas. They are the risk-takers, creative thinkers, and have a high tolerance for uncertainty. Early adopters are the second group to adopt new ideas, technologies, or products. They are opinion leaders who have strong influence on others, and they tend to adopt new ideas before the majority of people.

The early and late majority are the largest groups in the curve, and they tend to adopt new ideas once they see that they have been accepted by the innovators and early adopters. Finally, the laggards are the last group to adopt new ideas, and laggards are often resistant to change.

It is important to invite people, especially faculty, to be part of the process of renewing your assessment program, rather than selecting individuals to serve. It is critical to have the right people on board who share the same values and vision. Sinek posits that inviting people to serve is critical because it creates a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their work. When people feel like they are part of something greater than themselves and are contributing to a cause or mission that is meaningful, such as improving student learning, they are more motivated, engaged, and productive.

An approach to consider in assembling an Assessment Strategy Team would be to hold an informational session outlining the purpose of the team. At the conclusion of the information session, attendees would be invited to apply or express their interest in serving on the team. In this way, the AST is established with people committed to co-creating new and innovative ways to improve student learning and close equity gaps. They will feel they are part of something greater than themselves and are contributing to a cause or mission that is meaningful, and will be more motivated, engaged, and productive.

Facilitating Team Learning

Team learning is a collaborative process in which team members share their knowledge and skills to achieve common goals. It is an essential aspect of a healthy organizational culture and can help improve team performance, productivity, and innovation. However, team learning does not happen by chance; it requires a leader who can facilitate and guide the process. Effective team learning requires a leader that creates a safe learning environment, encourages collaborative learning, provides resources for learning, sets learning goals, and fosters continuous learning.

Inserted throughout this Guide are prompts that can be used to facilitate conversation with the AST on different topics in alignment with each phase of the process in reviewing your institution's assessment strategies, policies, and procedures. Additionally, a curated list of links to resources are provided in the Resources section of this Guide to provide information on topics ranging from leading transformational change to topics in equity in teaching and learning.

In team learning, the team co-creates the objectives to be achieved and identifies the process for realizing those objectives. It is important as a facilitator to provide information and resources to inform the conversations, but not to approach the process with a pre-conceived idea of the answers with the goal of securing “buy-in.”

SECTION SUMMARY

- Leaders are responsible for setting up conditions that enable the team to produce a successful outcome.
- The primary role of any leader embarking upon an effort to re-energize their approach to the assessment of student learning with a focus on closing equity gaps is to foster and sustain a learning culture.
- It is important to begin with assembling a “core learning team,” or assessment strategy team (AST), to begin the process of defining a roadmap for your organization to use to develop its own approach to bridging the gap between the aspirations of leveraging assessment to close equity gaps and your present reality.
- Providing an invitation to serve on the assessment strategy team, rather than appointing people, is an effective method to establish the AST with individuals committed to co-creating new and innovative ways to improve student learning and close equity gaps.
- Effective team learning requires a leader that creates a safe learning environment, encourages collaborative learning, provides resources for learning, sets learning goals, and fosters continuous learning.

SECTION 2: LEARNER-CENTERED FOCUS

Figure 4. Focus 2: Learner-Centered Focus



The second prong of the BEFE leadership triad is focused on the customer, or student. In the context of learning outcomes assessment, the customer is the learner. Shugart (2016) emphasizes shifting the focus away from overall student performance to the experience of each student. The locus of action must be personal to each student, not to populations or cohorts. With this approach, each individual student is provided with the support they need, when they need it. Keeping this focus at the forefront of discussion as assessment processes are reviewed and evaluated is critical in reimagining an assessment system that aims to close equity gaps.

LEARNER-CENTERED TEACHING

Because learning occurs in the classroom with the teacher, researched-based teaching practices must be part of the discussion. Learner-centered teaching has informed practice in the field of education for decades. Several tools can be useful for establishing structure and integration of all learning activities. Rooted in the constructivist theory of learning, Biggs provides a comprehensive framework for designing and delivering effective instruction in higher education. Constructive Alignment (CA) emphasizes the importance of aligning teaching and assessment with learning outcomes, and of creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. The NILOA Transparency Framework – Student Learning Outcomes Statements excellence category also emphasizes the importance of the integration and availability of clearly stated learning outcomes statements that detail the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes,

competencies, or habits of mind that students are expected to acquire. Developing a system that supports and encourages learning-centered practices should be a primary discussion topic in redesigning your assessment of learning of outcomes efforts.

The perspective individual teachers have about teaching directly impacts learning. Teachers that see teaching as an act of knowledge transmission create learning environments that foster superficial understanding. While teachers that see teaching as facilitating students' learning with activities and assessments designed in alignment with learning outcomes create learning environments where students gain deeper understanding. Teachers' beliefs about teaching create teaching environments to which students adjust their approaches to learning, thus, adapting to the environment to which they are exposed. Transmission of knowledge results in superficial learning, whereas facilitated learning results in the student constructing deep understanding of a subject (Biggs, 2007). Acknowledging that not all faculty have a shared perspective about teaching, and how that may impact student learning, is another part of the institutions' learning system that should be reviewed and examined as part of this process so that the appropriate structures can be put into place to foster a learning-centered environment.

DEFINING & CENTERING EQUITY

Challenging assumptions about your organization's approach to securing equitable outcomes for students by critically examining teaching and learning assessment policies, practices, and structures through a lens that questions why inequities exist so that effective changes can be made is the fundamental purpose of this Guide. At this stage in the process, an assessment strategy team has been assembled with representation from faculty,

administrators, and students. The initial discussions should focus on coming to a shared meaning of equity that reflect your institution's context and values and committing to equity and inclusive excellence (McNair, 2020) through facilitated team learning. Questions the team may seek to answer are:

- How do we define equity?
- What are specific examples of how equity is a value for me and for our institution?
- How is or isn't equity evident in our decision-making processes?
- How does our understanding of equity manifest in our policies, processes, and actions?

The answers to these questions will form the basis of the goals and objectives of the AST in redefining the assessment practices at your institution. Goals aligned with the team's objectives focus the team's efforts on achieving specific outcomes. Regular feedback on the team's progress towards these goals will inform any necessary adjustments. They will also become the means by which the effectiveness of any new system is measured. Time spent on diving deep and articulating goals and objectives uniquely suited to the learning system needs of your organization is time well spent and should not be glossed over.

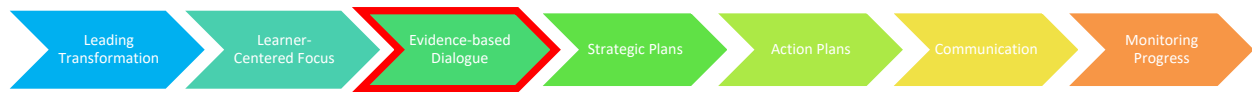
SECTION SUMMARY

- The fundamental purpose of this Guide is challenging assumptions about your organization's approach to securing equitable outcomes for students by critically examining teaching and learning assessment policies, practices, and structures through a lens that questions why inequities exist in order to change the environment to support the success of students.
- The focus of any new strategies must be personal to each student, not to populations or cohorts. With this approach, each individual student is provided with the support they need, when they need it.

- Acknowledging that not all faculty have a shared perspective about teaching and how that may impact student learning is another part of the institutions' learning system that should be reviewed and examined as part of this process so that the appropriate structures can be put into place to foster a learning-centered environment.
- Initial discussions with the AST should focus on coming to a shared meaning of equity that reflects your institution's context and values and committing to equity and inclusive excellence through facilitated team learning.

SECTION 3: FACING REALITY AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED DIALOGUE

Figure 5. Focus 3: Evidence-based Dialogue



In order to make progress toward what an organization aspires to, there must first be a realistic and deep understanding of the current state, and the processes and policies that produced the current state. Core learning teams such as the Assessment Strategy Team should begin with collaboratively reviewing and digesting data that describes the effectiveness of the current assessment practices to challenge and explore ideas for redefining their assessment processes in alignment with the institutions’ aspirations for their assessment program. Creating a productive and positive culture of collaborative inquiry fosters trust and strengthens team learning. Effective team learning can perpetuate itself as teams continually reflect on their experiences, develop new ideas, experiment with new approaches, and use what they’ve learned to inform modifications to the assessment process.

CHALLENGING MENTAL MODELS AND EQUITY-MINDEDNESS

Mental models are the beliefs, assumptions, and generalizations that individuals hold about the world, and that influence how they perceive, interpret, and respond to information and experiences (Senge, 2006). In teams that are collaborating to redefine an organization’s approach to learning outcomes assessment, differing mental models can have a significant impact on decision-making, problem-solving, and decisions on where to focus efforts to make the most impact. Mental models not only shape how individuals and teams perceive the world, but also in how they act and the approach they take. To overcome the limitations of mental

models, it is important for individuals and teams to engage in reflection and dialogue to surface and challenge their assumptions and beliefs. This can help to broaden perspectives, identify blind spots, and promote more effective decision-making and collaboration.

The Center for Urban Education (2023) coined the term “equity-mindedness” to refer to the mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes. These practitioners are willing to take personal and institutional responsibility for the success of their students and critically reassess their own practices. It also requires that practitioners are race-conscious and aware of the social and historical context of exclusionary practices in American Higher Education.

The Center for Urban Education further stipulates that in order to become equity-minded, various higher education practitioners must assess and acknowledge that their practices may not be working. It takes the practitioners understanding that the inequities are a dysfunction of the various structures, policies, and practices that they can control. “Equity-minded” practitioners question their own assumptions, recognize stereotypes that harm student success, and continually reassess their practice to create change.

A learning-based approach to identifying improvements to an institution’s practice of assessment begins with self-reflection and dialogue within a core learning team, such as the Assessment Strategy Team, to identify equity gaps in student learning and come to a shared understanding of the systemic issues inherent in the institution’s current approach to assessing student progress toward learning outcomes. To begin to understand the effectiveness of the institution’s current assessment system, the AST should begin with a deep dive of the data and critical, constructive, dialogue.

IDENTIFYING EQUITY GAPS

Asset-minded Thinking

The strength of an institution's assessment program is ultimately measured by the improvement of student learning for all student groups. Course success rates may be an appropriate place to start to determine where there is an opportunity for process improvement in the assessment of student learning outcomes, especially if there is little data available for dissection at the level of course learning outcomes. Course success rates are not a proxy for student learning assessment, however, because measures outside of learning affect course outcomes and are oftentimes calculated into final grades, such as credit for attendance.

Disaggregated data viewed through an equity lens can be a valuable tool in advancing equity at all levels of an institution. Data can reveal opportunity gaps for different student groups and describe the nature of those gaps. Without an equity lens that fosters asset-minded thinking, however, data can also be used to reinforce stereotypes and justify inertia in improving and redesigning the assessment of student learning system. It is important to reframe racialized gaps in performance as a function of the institution's teaching and learning systems rather than as a deficit in the student. As a means to better understand and discuss the health of the institution's assessment of learning outcomes system, the Assessment Strategy Team may begin with a review of all course success rates disaggregated by race and ethnicity and consider the following questions:

- What "gateway" courses are students of color underperforming in?
- In what courses is there wide variability in levels of course success for different student groups?
- What causes students of color to underperform in these courses?

- In what math courses do Latinx students perform or underperform?
- In what ways could a specific practice, program, or policy disadvantage minoritized students?

Accessible and Digestible Data

A commitment to providing tools that make data accessible and digestible will aid significantly in better understanding the results the current assessment system is yielding. Partnering with the institution's Institutional Research department is critical in organizing and presenting the institution's data. Data visualization tools are also extremely helpful in making the data digestible and meaningful. The institutional research department will also be helpful in providing insight into how to interpret the data. For example, this department can assist with data literacy skills, highlight areas where equity gaps may exist, and highlight other areas where an equity gap may not exist.

Collaborative Meaning-Making

Collaborative meaning-making is a highly effective approach to learning and problem-solving. It involves engaging individuals with diverse perspectives and responsibilities related to assessment in the process of constructing of a shared understanding of where there are opportunities to improve assessment processes.

When asking groups to analyze data as a team, it is important to set the stage for the group to construct its own meaning of the data and not simply absorb the information passively. The team needs the opportunity to actively engage with the information and integrate it into their existing understanding of the assessment process. Many strategies for facilitating collaborative meaning-making in the classroom can be leveraged for the Assessment Strategy Team. The Resources section of this Guide provides links to collaborative meaning-

making resources, as well as active collaboration strategies related to making meaning from data.

Interrogating the Assessment of Learning Outcomes System

In addition to analyzing student success data, it is important for the Assessment Strategy Team also to review data that provides insight into the saturation and efficiency of the current assessment process. Some of the key questions include the following:

- Who is participating in the assessment of student learning, who is not participating?
- What are the barriers to participation?
- What are the strengths of the current program?
- What are best practices in the assessment of student learning?
- Do all courses (or programs) have learning outcomes?
- Is there alignment between the different levels of learning outcomes (e.g., course, program, and institutional learning outcomes)?
- Is there alignment between course learning outcomes and instruction?
- Is there alignment and integration between course learning outcomes, instruction, and assessments (i.e., discussion posts, quizzes, tests, papers, etc.)?
- Is evidence of student learning collected?
- Is evidence of student learning shared?
- Who has access to the evidence?
- How has the evidence of student learning informed action to improve student learning?
- Do job descriptions adequately define expectations of assessment of student learning?
- Do faculty evaluations include equity-mindedness practice?
- Is the assessment of student learning resourced adequately?

- What is the student's perspective?

SECTION SUMMARY

- To gain a realistic and deep understanding of the current state of learning and assessment, the AST should begin with collaboratively reviewing and digesting data that describes the effectiveness of the current assessment practices to challenge and explore ideas for redefining their assessment processes in alignment with the institutions' aspirations for their assessment program.
- It is important to reframe racialized gaps in performance as a function of the institution's teaching and learning systems rather than as a deficit in the student.
- A commitment to providing tools that make data accessible and digestible, such as data dashboards, will aid significantly in better understanding the results the current assessment system is yielding.
- When asking groups to analyze data as a team, it is important to set the stage for the group to construct its own meaning of the data and not simply absorb the information passively. The team needs the opportunity to actively engage with the information and integrate it into their existing understanding of the assessment process.
- In addition to analyzing student success data, it is important for the Assessment Strategy Team also to review data that provides insight into the saturation and efficiency of the current assessment process.

SECTION 4: STRATEGIC PLANNING

Figure 6. Focus 4: Strategic Plans



The strategy category of the Malcolm Baldrige Excellence framework focuses on how an organization develops strategic objectives and action plans, implements them, changes them if circumstances require, and measures progress. This section of the Guide will focus on strategy development, specifically the process for developing a learning outcomes assessment strategy and defining strategic objectives or goals the plan is meant to enable, as well as identifying the measures of success. Strategy implementation will be covered in the following subsequent sections of the Guide: Operationalizing your Plan, Communication, and Monitoring Progress Holistically and Continuously.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS (SWOT) ANALYSIS

At this juncture in the process of developing a system that leverages the assessment of student learning to close equity gaps, the core learning team or AST has a solid understanding of the organization’s current assessment program and the results it yields. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis is an effective tool to delve into the issues underlying your institution’s assessment challenges to form strategic objectives in re-creating the assessment program at your institution.

A SWOT analysis is a common tool the core learning team can use to translate assessment strategy into specific institutional needs. This model categorizes environmental factors into internal and external factors as follows:

Internal Factors

- Identifies where the organization has current strengths to build upon. Examples of strengths related to assessment of student learning include faculty commitment to student success, and/or resources to support faculty professional development.
- Internal factors also highlight weaknesses in an organization's assessment program. For example, equity gaps in student learning may be present. Another example of a weakness would be a culture of compliance related to assessment instead of one that leverages the assessment of student learning to improve student learning.

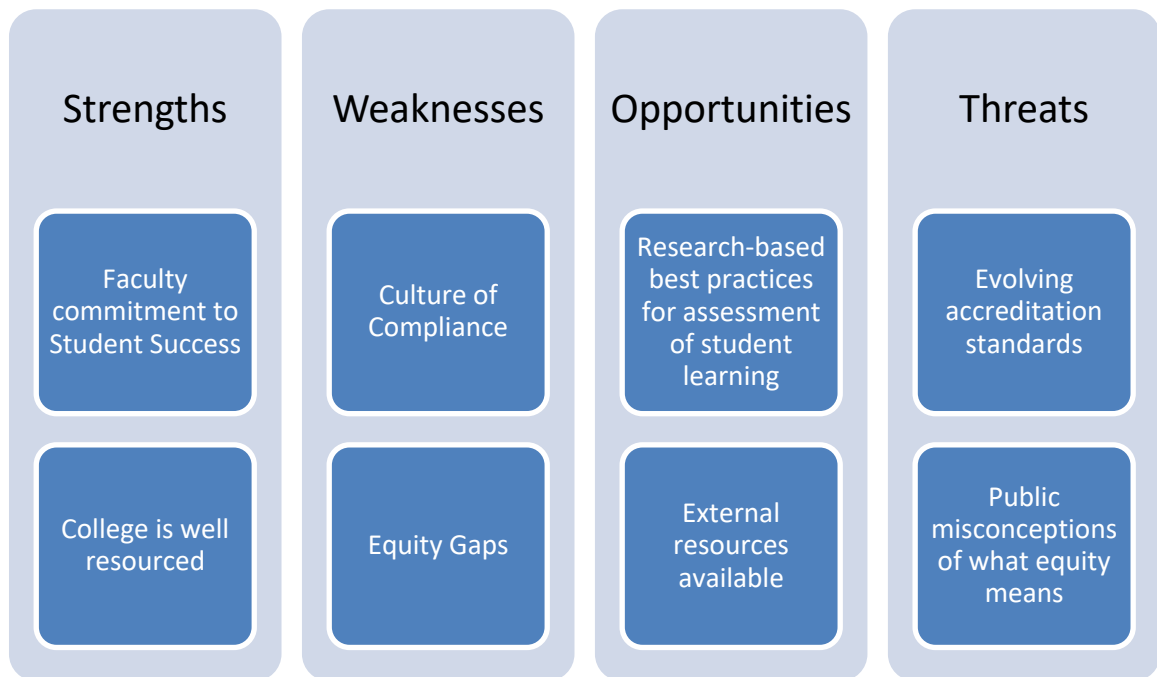
External Factors

- Identifying research-based best practices of effective assessment of student learning is an example of an external opportunity. By using research-based best practices, institutions can ensure they are investing their resources effectively and efficiently in strategies that have been shown to be effective in closing equity gaps and improving student learning outcomes.
- Threats to the assessment process external to the institution may include evolving accreditation standards, or political influence.

In addition to quantitative data to inform the SWOT analysis, it is important to consider and balance the needs of all key stakeholders. Information from internal stakeholders, primarily faculty and students, should be collected through a series of information-gathering techniques, such as listening sessions with different faculty and student groups. Once the purpose of the meeting is explained, a dialogue can center on what is valued in the current assessment process, what should be changed, and what they would add to the process. The information gathered should be categorized and themed to inform the strategic approach. Additionally, external information, such as evidence-based best practices and research, will also inform the conversation. The Association of Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AAHLE) and the National Association of Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) are very helpful resources to tap into current practices in assessment of student learning. Guidance included in the Malcolm Baldrige Excellence Framework suggests integration of data from all sources to generate

strategically relevant information is key. Based on this analysis, the AST will create a vision for the new assessment culture that will work for your institution and serves as a sort of gap analysis to determine what strategies are needed to realize that vision based on the current state of assessment.

Figure 7. Example of a SWOT diagram for community college’s assessment program.



DEFINING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

Once the team defines what the desired capabilities a renewed assessment program suited to your institution should be, the team can begin the process of identifying any gaps that exist between the current program and the renewed program to inform key strategic objectives of the plan. The strategic objectives should address your strategic challenges (i.e., weaknesses and threats) and leverage strategic strengths and opportunities. Strategic objectives should focus on your specific challenges, advantages, and opportunities — those most important to

your ongoing success and to strengthening your overall performance and your success now and in the future.

Table 5: Example of Strategic Objectives to Renew Assessment of Student Learning to Close Equity Gaps

QUALITY INITIATIVE OBJECTIVE	DESCRIPTION OF OBJECTIVE
Objective 1	Reduce barriers to faculty participation in the assessment of student learning
Objective 2	Increase faculty participation in the assessment of student learning outcomes at the course and general education level.
Objective 3	Close equity gaps in course success rates among African American and Latinx students.
Objective 4	Shift faculty mindset regarding assessment from one of compliance to one of continuous quality improvement.

IDENTIFYING MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The new plans adopted to improve assessment need to somehow indicate through short-term and long-term measures that the approach is effective in improving student learning and closing equity gaps. It is important for the core learning team to consider how success will be defined as it is defining the actions plans. Ultimately, the core learning team strives to create and adopt a strategy that will achieve fundamental, long-term improvement in learning about student learning in order to improve learning across all student groups. Identifying intermediate measures of effectiveness in alignment with learning organization theory will provide the core team a means to chart the effectiveness of the strategy and make corrective adjustments, if necessary.

Phases of Learning Initiatives

Peter Senge (2006), in a research effort at the MIT Center for Organizational Learning, described organizational learning in three distinct phases and describes the types of learning and performance signals appropriate to each phase. Progression through each of the learning phases typically occurs in order and may take a few months to over a year to complete. The first stage of the model begins with the introduction of a new intervention and typically centers on skill development. Within the context of assessment of student learning outcomes, specific skills that may be developed are the integration of backward design and integration of course learning outcomes, instruction, and assessment of student learning. Performance signals for this stage of transformation may include the number of faculty that participated in professional development training and the ability to craft instructional and assessment activities in alignment with student learning outcomes. Surveys and informal assessment are means to capture this information.

In the second phase of organizational learning, the new skills are applied within the context of a process redesign. For example, if there is evidence that a pilot group or proof of concept is effective, at this stage, the measure of performance is that people are acting differently and approaching their work in a new way. An example of intermediate change in the transformation of student learning assessment is that faculty engaged in redefined processes are leveraging the assessment of student learning to identify a way to improve student learning. They find the new approach to assessment of student learning to be meaningful and actionable, and not just a compliance task. As a result, they engage in the process more and more and seek to share their success and impact with other faculty. Finally, the third phase of

organizational learning is the impact on the organization as a whole. As a result, improved student success metrics across all student groups will be evident. There is a marked shift from “business as usual” resulting in achievement of long-term goals related to student achievement.

The Balanced Scorecard

A Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is a tool to organize and present complex and interrelated data related to an initiative in a comprehensive manner to foster effective and efficient decision-making to inform improvement to action plans and processes. The BSC includes a combination of financial and nonfinancial measures of performance and is intended to guide strategy development, implementation, and communication. A balanced scorecard typically includes four perspectives: financial, customer or student, internal processes, and learning and growth. Both leading and lagging indicators are included in the scorecard that align with the objectives of the initiative to measure progress through each of the learning phases of your organization’s initiative. The balanced scorecard should be updated and reviewed on a regular basis by the core learning team. Provided below is an example of a balanced scorecard to monitor progress towards the objectives outlined in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Example Scorecard

BASIC BALANCED SCORECARD							
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:		Reduce barriers to faculty participation in the assessment of student learning.					
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:		Increase faculty participation in the assessment of student learning at the course and general education level.					
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:		Close equity gaps in course success rates among African American and Latinx students.					
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:		Shift faculty mindset regarding assessment from one of compliance to one of continuous quality improvement.					
	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	LEADING/ LAGGING	TARGETS			INITIATIVES/NOTES
				CURRENT	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	DATA SOURCE
FINANCIAL	Objectives 1, 2	Grant funding to support personnel and technology costs	LEADING	\$10,000.00	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00	Grant budget
	Objectives 1, 2, 4	Center for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning Staffing (FTE count)	LEADING	1	3	3	Human Resources staffing reports
	Objectives 1, 2, 4	Technical consulting for data visualization tool	LEADING	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	Assessment office budget
STUDENT AND STAKEHOLDER	Objective 3	Equity gaps in high-priority courses	LAGGING	AA/Latinx	AA/Latinx	AA/Latinx	Equity Gap Report
	Objective 3	Course 1	LAGGING	-55/-40%	-45/-30%	-20/-10%	Equity Gap Report
	Objective 3	Course 2	LAGGING	-26/-25%	-15/-15%	-10/-10%	
	Objective 3	Course 3	LAGGING	-35/0%	-25/0%	-10/0%	
	Objective 3	Course 4	LAGGING	-2/6%	0/6%	6/6%	
	Objective 3	Course 5	LAGGING	-15/5%	-15/5%	0/5%	
	Objective 3	Students meeting standard of achievement in general education learning outcomes	LAGGING	n/a	75%	80%	Student Learning Assessment Advisory Committee Report
	Objective 3	Overall Course Success Rate	LAGGING	73%	74%	75%	
	Objective 2	Full-time faculty engaged in assessment cohort	LEADING	70%	80%	90%	Assessment office reports
	Objective 2	Part-time faculty engaged in assessment cohort	LEADING	50%	65%	75%	Assessment office reports
INTERNAL PROCESSES	Objective 3	Number of high-priority courses	LEADING	10	20	30	The Assessment Strategy will identify 10 high-priority courses for inclusion in an assessment cohort by analyzing Equity Gap Reports compiled by the Assessment of Student Learning office.
	Objective 2, 3	Number of course assessment plans aligned to one or more general education outcomes	LEADING	100%	100%	100%	Learning Improvement Report created for every high-priority course assessed.
	Objective 3	Number of high-priority course assessment reports that identify and implement interventions to improve student learning	LEADING	n/a	95%	95%	Learning Improvement Report created for every high-priority course assessed.
ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING	Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4	Number of professional development workshops created and implemented	LEADING	3	5	5	Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
	Objectives 1, 3, 4	Number of faculty participating in ACUE high-impact interention workshops	LEADING	6	17	25	Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
	Objective 4	Faculty that agree or strongly agree that participation in the assessment initiative changed their mindset in a postive way regarding the assessment of student learning.	LAGGING	n/a	90%	95%	Pre and Post surveys will be administered to all faculty engaged with the strategic initiative to measure movement towards a culture of assessment that is not viewed as perfunctory.

Getting the Full Picture with Qualitative Data

Qualitative and quantitative data can provide complementary insights when used together to measure the effectiveness of an assessment of student learning system. It is important to establish a means to solicit and collect qualitative information from all assessment stakeholders to inform action plans and to identify the need for action plan adjustments. The following describes several common approaches that might be considered for collecting

qualitative data from students, faculty, and deans regarding the effectiveness a change initiative:

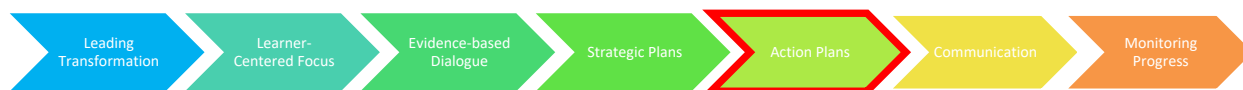
- **Focus Groups.** Focus groups are a common method for collecting qualitative data by bringing together a group of individuals that have been impacted by the change initiative and conducting a structured conversation to gather feedback and insights.
- **Interviews.** One-on-one interviews provide an opportunity for deeper dialogue resulting in more nuanced feedback and qualitative data.
- **Observations.** Observations in which faculty observe how other faculty engage with the initiative can be very impactful, not only in collecting feedback, but also in increasing adoption of the initiative.
- **Surveys.** Surveys can also be used to collect qualitative data by asking open-ended questions that allow participants to share their experiences and opinions in their own words.

SECTION SUMMARY

- A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threat (SWOT) analysis is an effective tool to delve into the issues underlying your institution's assessment challenges to form strategic objectives in re-creating the assessment program at your institution.
- Strategic objectives should focus on your specific challenges, advantages, and opportunities — those most important to your ongoing success and to strengthening your overall performance and your success now and in the future.
- Ultimately, the core learning team strives to create and adopt a strategy that will achieve fundamental, long-term improvement in learning about student learning in order to improve learning across all student groups. Identifying intermediate measures of effectiveness in alignment with learning organization theory will provide the core team a means to chart the effectiveness of the strategy and make corrective adjustments, if necessary.
- A Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is a useful tool to organize and present complex and interrelated data related to an initiative in a comprehensive manner to foster effective and efficient decision-making to inform improvement to action plans and processes.
- Qualitative and quantitative data can provide complementary insights when used together to measure the effectiveness of an assessment of student learning system.

SECTION 5: ACTION PLANS

Figure 9. Focus 5: Action Plans



Renewing your institution’s assessment practices to foster an equitable teaching and learning environment that is inclusive for all requires an organization to construct a strategy that is uniquely suited to their needs and environment. At this stage in the Guide, you’ve facilitated discussions with a core learning team to gain a firm understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing your institution, and you have come to consensus on a shared vision. However, vision without systems thinking results in no deep understanding of the forces required to move from here to there (Senge, 2006). Armed with a realistic picture of the current state of your organization’s assessment system and having articulated the aspirational goals and objectives that you are trying to achieve, it is time to develop an action plan to realize those assessment goals and objectives through coordinated action between structural, process (behavioral), and attitudinal change (Karp & Fletcher, 2014).

The gap between research and research-based practice can be a wide chasm and daunting for many organizations to navigate. To facilitate bridging this gap, this section of the Guide is informed by the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment’s (NILOA) Excellence in Assessment (2021) criteria. It is a set of guidelines for evaluating and improving the quality of assessment practices in higher education institutions. These criteria should be used to inform the processes needed to support equity-minded practice for both the individual assessment practitioner, as well as the organization. To be effective, efforts to leverage the

assessment of student learning to close equity gaps must be sustained across all stages of the assessment cycle. The following section provides useful information for the core learning team to discuss and consider when developing short-term and long-term action plans for each phase of the learning outcomes assessment cycle.

To increase equity, action plans should focus on your institution's readiness to educate the diverse student groups you serve rather than on the preparedness of students to thrive (Smit, 2012). Equity-minded assessment processes involve "questioning processes, biases, assumptions, within ourselves, others, and the processes followed" (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020, p. 13). Consequently, development of an assessment system with an equity lens should encourage and support assessment practitioners in doing the following (Montenegro & Henning, 2022, p. 7):

- Check biases and ask reflective questions regarding assumptions and positions of privilege.
- Use multiple sources of evidence in assessing student learning.
- Include student perspectives and act.
- Increase transparency in assessment results and actions.
- Ensure collected data can be meaningfully disaggregated and interrogated.
- Make changes based on evidence that address issues of equity and are context-specific (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020, p. 13).

GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED IN ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

Designing a system that intentionally provides the time and space for individuals and groups to engage in self-reflection regarding student learning is essential in fostering a culture of inquiry and that is not mired in compliance-oriented tasks. This dimension of the NILOA Excellence Framework focuses on the diversity of institutional representatives regularly

participating in assessment activities. The core learning team, or AST, is well positioned to serve as the thought leaders in identifying short-term and long-term action plans to implement your assessment strategy.

Involving students in the interrogation and renewal of your assessment system is a powerful tool. It can provide a different perspective and can help you examine ways in which norms, policies, and approaches promote certain ways of knowing, and diminish the value of other methods. Engaging students from marginalized groups to improve the quality of the assessment process signals respect for those who are assessed and creates learning opportunities for not only the student, but all who are engaged in the process (Singer-Freeman, Bastone, Montenegro, 2022).

In addition to engaging students, faculty, your Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, and academic administrators, it is important to seek input from your Institutional Research (IR) department. IR professionals are ideal collaborators in defining and implementing processes to support equity-minded assessment that leads to organizational learning about the state of equity at your institution broadly, as well as at the course-level (Dyer-Barr, Baxter, Zamani-Gallaher, 2022). IR departments are engaged in measuring key performance indicators to monitor progress and inform strategic decisions to promote institutional effectiveness and continuous improvement. Renewing an organization's assessment strategy is in alignment with these objectives and make the IR department an obvious partner in this effort.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES STATEMENTS

This dimension of the NILOA Excellence Framework addresses the integration and availability of clearly stated learning outcomes statements that detail the expected knowledge,

skills, attitudes, competencies, or habits of mind that students are expected to acquire.

Equitable learning outcomes direct instruction, learning, and assessment. They are an important tool in communicating educational priorities to students.

In revising your current assessment processes, or if creating new processes, it is critical the following elements are discussed and addressed:

- A process for ensuring all courses, programs, and institutional learning outcomes statements is integrated, and reflect the values of all stakeholders.
- Regular review, discussion, and analysis of learning outcome statements at the course, program, and institutional level to maintain their relevancy and alignment is embedded in processes.
- Systems are identified for communicating learning outcome statements and making them readily available to all stakeholders.

INSTITUTION-LEVEL ASSESSMENT PLAN

This dimension measures the extent to which an institution has a comprehensive assessment plan aligned with institution-level assessment and program- and unit-level assessment plans, with regular review from stakeholders. A comprehensive assessment plan will detail the processes, resources, and activities required to achieve the strategic objectives identified by the AST. Alignment of assessment processes to the strategic objectives requires intentionality. The assessment plan should be comprehensive and address all parts of the “assessment system” to be built in service of the strategic objectives. Discussions should center around the following key elements:

1. Initial Implementation vs. Full Implementation

Research suggests it can take from two to four years to operationalize an evidence-based program, practice, or effective innovation completely and successfully. The initial

implementation phase of your assessment plan is about testing the waters. It is important that the environment of the initial implementation mirrors the environment in which the new assessment system will be fully implemented to accurately gauge if the new system will be effective, when scaled. In the initial implementation phase information on all aspects of the implementation needs to be collected and analyzed so that adjustments can be made before a full implementation is launched. A plan for Identifying how to begin and how to scale efforts to renew your organization's assessment system should be intentional. Consideration should be given to which programs or courses will "go first" and which academic departments are willing to scrutinize the system and provide feedback for each of the phases of the assessment process to identify improvements. How this information will be collected, shared, discussed, and analyzed is a key component of the initial implementation of any assessment process.

2. Roles and responsibilities

Clearly articulating the role of faculty, faculty assessment committees, students, deans, the assessment and institutional research offices, and executive leadership in assessing student learning ensures that, organizationally, the left hand knows what the right hand is doing. Collaboratively creating process maps with all the key stakeholders in the room is an effective method for coming to a shared understanding of the process and the responsibilities of individual stakeholders.

3. Frequency of assessment

The cadence of assessment should align with the culture of assessment your organization is trying to foster. Faculty are assessing student learning all the time both informally and formally. Assessment of student learning across multiple sections of a course

taught by different faculty must be intentional and planned. The overarching philosophies driving the assessment system you are creating should drive the assessment cycle defined for your institution.

4. Institution-level Assessment Resources

Addressing equity in student learning requires a systemic approach that permeates the institution in policy and practice (Achieving the Dream, 2020). This dimension of the NILOA Excellence Framework focuses on faculty and staff development, institutional policies and procedures supporting assessment activities, and centralized assessment resources availability and use. Integration of strategy, consistent planning, and accountability is at the heart of any approach to renewing your institution's assessment efforts with an equity lens.

5. Faculty and Staff Development

The strongest opportunity for improved teaching and learning is through tangible structural change, supported and linked with high-impact professional development for faculty and staff (AtD Toolkit, 2020). Your faculty development office should be a primary collaborator in redesigning the institution's assessment system. Professional development should build on key existing professional development curricula as well as develop new curricula to strengthen a tight learning system of student learning outcomes, high-impact teaching strategies, and assessment of student learning. Professional development topics for consideration as a place to start may include the following: design of equitable and measurable student learning outcomes, instructional design, equitable assessment strategies, data analysis through an equity lens, and collaborative meaning-making.

6. Institutional Policies and Procedures

Institutional policies and procedures incentivize behavior and hold an institution accountable for adhering to processes with fidelity. Institutional policies related to student learning outcome assessment at all levels — course, program, and general education — should be drafted or revised to align with the strategic goals of the new assessment program.

Curriculum Committee and Assessment Committee bylaws should also be updated to align with the institution's assessment philosophy. Details regarding how information will be shared with stakeholders should be incorporated into all policies and procedures.

Job descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, and employee and assessment handbooks are key institutional documents that support the assessment system. In order to systematize the assessment process, these documents and the functions they support must also align with the new assessment program. Not only should updated roles and responsibilities be reflected in job descriptions and collective bargaining agreements, but also in employee performance evaluation metrics and tools. These efforts will enable your organization to sustain the momentum generated in the initial implementation of the assessment program and transform the culture of your organization to the point where the assessment initiative is no longer an initiative, but the way the college ensures excellence in teaching and learning.

7. Centralized Assessment Resources

Creating an assessment system to identify opportunities to improve student learning is a large and complex undertaking. Providing centralized assessment resources to serve all stakeholders where they are in their assessment journey is essential. A good place to start in establishing a centralized assessment repository is with a website. Through an interactive

website, the institution's assessment goals and objectives can be clearly articulated and supported with practical documents such as dashboards, process flow diagrams, assessment handbooks, and committee membership information. To entice faculty, staff, and other stakeholders to visit the website frequently, tips and examples of best practices can be showcased on a regular basis.

8. Tools & Technology

Removing barriers to participation in the assessment of student learning is an aspect of systematizing your assessment program that cannot be ignored. Oftentimes, the tools and technology in place to support assessment are deemed too complicated or cumbersome to use. The result is that the assessment of student learning is not timely, meaningful, or actionable to faculty who need this information to identify means to improve student learning. Centralized tools and technology that facilitate easy collection of student artifacts of learning across all faculty and course sections that inherently link the student artifact to various student demographic data alleviate the burden of data collection and allow more time for data analysis. A review of how assessment practitioners can access assessment data is another key component of removing barriers. Various data visualization tools are available that present data in a dashboard format that is easily accessible and digestible. These dashboards, coupled with professional development on data literacy and equity-mindedness, are powerful tools in providing faculty with information they can use to take action to improve student learning immediately.

9. *Financial Resources*

An institutional commitment to improving student learning requires an institutional financial commitment. It is important to take a long view when weighing the costs and benefits of a renewed assessment system. Increasing quality and lowering costs can go hand in hand, over time (Senge, 2006). For example, basic improvements in work processes could reduce time on tasks that require little analysis and increase time for dialogue and collaborative meaning-making, resulting in higher student success and satisfaction. To project the financial resources needed to support a renewed assessment system at your institution, begin with engaging the Business and Finance division in understanding the financial investment your institution is currently making in assessment. Prioritize those financial costs that will be most impactful in the initial implementation of the initiative. Consider that these costs may continue to be expenses the institution will incur moving forward. For example, consultant fees to establish an assessment database may be a one-time investment, while the cost of data visualization software licenses will be ongoing.

Faculty resources beyond technology and professional development should not be overlooked. Building into the assessment system the time and space for faculty to dialogue, share insights, and identify new practices to improve student learning takes financial resources. This may require release time for faculty from teaching their regular load or stipends in addition to their salaries. Compensating faculty to engage in the initiative and lead other faculty navigating new assessment processes will reduce barriers to participation. Adjunct faculty, in particular, will be more likely to engage in the adoption of a new assessment system if their time is valued and compensated.

INSTITUTION-LEVEL ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

This dimension measures the extent to which an institution makes assessment plans, results, and processes available to stakeholders. Much of the documentation created in the assessment process should be made available to all stakeholders. For example, assessment schedules, learning improvement reports, and data dashboards can be posted to internal websites for broad accessibility. Equitable assignment and assessment repositories can be created from learning improvement reports for stakeholders across the organization to discuss and learn from. Tools used to track participation can be shared to inform discussions on progress made and hold stakeholders accountable to the assessment process.

Institution-level Evidence of Student Learning

This dimension is focused on the use of assessment results at all levels of the institution to guide decision-making to improve student learning and communicating those changes both to internal and external institutional audiences. Assessing student learning is not an end, but rather a means to identify opportunities to improve student learning. The AST should discuss and come to consensus on the following:

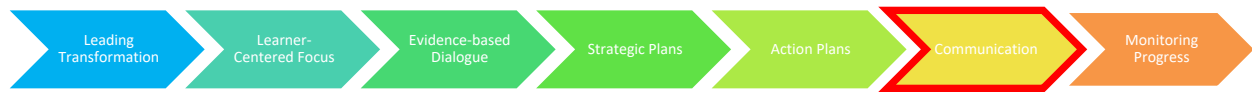
- How will student artifacts of student learning be collected?
- How will evidence of student learning be analyzed?
- How will assessment of student learning be documented?
- How will interventions to improve student learning be decided upon?
- How will what was learned from one assessment project be communicated/shared with other areas of the college?

SECTION SUMMARY

- An action plan provides a means to realize assessment goals and objectives through coordinated action between structural, process (behavioral), and attitudinal change.
- The NILOA criteria for excellence in assessment can be used to inform the processes needed to support equity-minded practice for both the individual assessment practitioner, as well as the organization.
- Designing a system that intentionally provides the time and space for individuals and groups to engage in self-reflection regarding student learning is essential in fostering a culture of inquiry and that is not mired in compliance-oriented tasks.
- Equitable learning outcomes direct instruction, learning, and assessment. They are an important tool in communicating educational priorities to students.
- A comprehensive assessment plan will detail the processes, resources, and activities required to achieve the strategic objectives identified by the AST.
- Addressing equity in student learning requires a systemic approach that permeates the institution in policy and practice (AtD Toolkit, 2020).
- Assessing student learning is not an end, but rather a means to identify opportunities to improve student learning.

SECTION 6: COMMUNICATION

Figure 10. Focus 6: Communication



Research suggests that change communication influences how employees perceive significant change and can contribute to reducing resistance to that change. Effective change communication fosters a sense of being appreciated and being involved in the change process, while lack of support and transparency of communication leads to more negative attitudes (Schulz-Knappe, Koch, & Beckert, 2019). These negative attitudes and resistance to renewing your institution’s assessment system put the successful implementation of new ideas and processes at risk.

With significant change comes the fear of loss. In renewing your institution’s assessment system, you will likely encounter resistance if there is a perception that what will be gained does not outweigh the perceived loss of position, autonomy, and/or academic freedom. To minimize resistance to the significant changes in your organization’s processes for assessing student learning, it is important to share the vision of the initiative and frame communication in the context of the gains that will be realized for all stakeholders throughout the entire process. For example, tell the story of how a renewed assessment system will provide faculty with better insight into opportunities to improve students’ learning in a timely and actionable way. Highlight how a new system will be more efficient and require less time on data collection and cleansing and will allow for more time for analysis and dialogue with colleagues. And most importantly, share why these efforts are critical to increased student success for all student

groups. Also take advantage of the diverse perspectives assembled on the Assessment Strategy Team to identify tactics that will resonate with various stakeholders.

A communication strategy can play an important role in generating awareness and enthusiasm for your renewed assessment system. When identifying a communication strategy, it is important to consider the following elements:

- Messaging, progress reports, updates, and data should be available to every stakeholder. Different methods (e.g., emails, websites, intranet sites, posters, etc.) should be considered for their effectiveness in connecting with a particular audience.
- Create a feedback mechanism to provide a two-way exchange of information. This can be accomplished with regular surveys, or more informally with quick polls during meetings. Ensure there is contact information on all outgoing communication vehicles for people to contact with questions, comments, and suggestions.
- Maintain a regular stream of communication without communication overload. Communicating change is not a one-time event. Continuously restate the vision, retell the story, and highlight successes throughout the process to sustain momentum.
- Communication to faculty from faculty is most effective in inspiring faculty and motivating action. Video messages, workshops, and presentations at department meetings, etc. where faculty share information with a faculty target audience should all be included in any communication strategy.

SECTION 7: MONITORING PROGRESS HOLISTICALLY AND CONTINUOUSLY

Figure 11. Focus 7: Monitoring Progress



The Results category of the Malcolm Baldrige Excellence Framework, and the Reflection & Growth/Improvement category of the NILOA Excellence Framework parallel each other. In both paradigms, the emphasis is on measuring the effectiveness of the system of policies, processes, and organizational structure put into place to foster a culture of equity in assessment. It is important to identify what body (i.e., the AST or another leadership group) will be responsible for monitoring progress regularly. Annual updates to the President or Board of Trustees will also serve as a means for the institution to hold itself accountable to continuously monitoring the effectiveness of the assessment system.

At the beginning of this journey, during the Strategic Plan phase, a tool such as the Balanced Scorecard was created with both leading and lagging indicators that align with the objectives of the initiative to measure progress throughout your implementation. Once the implementation of the initiative has begun, this scorecard will serve as a tool to measure the effectiveness of the system you designed and inform improvement to action plans and processes. Processes for how data will be collected, tracked, and analyzed for each element of the Scorecard should be identified. Regular review of the performance of the initiative based on the Scorecard will ensure adherence to plan from a process and cost perspective.

The Balanced Scorecard is a useful tool in measuring progress and effectiveness from a quantitative perspective. However, much more nuanced insight about the adoption rate and

effectiveness of the new initiative can be gained through more qualitative methods. Focused group discussions, reflection surveys, and interviews should be included in the approach to measuring the effectiveness of the assessment system.

If the assessment system is not yielding the desired results, an analysis of which component of the Scorecard is falling short needs to be determined in association with the qualitative measurements. Questions similar to the ones reflected upon during development of the Strategic Plan should be revisited in this phase to determine what adjustments are needed to make course corrections to the processes put into place. The following questions should guide the analysis:

- Are equity gaps in student learning closing?
- Is the level of participation in the assessment of student learning where it should be?
- Do all courses and programs have learning outcomes?
- Is evidence of student learning collected at the desired rate?
- Is evidence of student learning shared and used to inform opportunities to improve learning?
- Is the assessment of student learning resourced adequately?

SECTION SUMMARY

- A balanced set of leading and lagging performance measures aligned with the initiative's objectives provides the basis for monitoring performance and provides a clear basis for improving results.
- The composite of performance measures should include both quantitative and qualitative measures.
- Processes for how data will be collected, tracked, and analyzed for each element should be identified.

- Regular review of performance of the initiative will ensure adherence to plan from a process and cost perspective.
- If the assessment system is not yielding the desired results, an analysis of which component of the system is either not effective so that adjustments can be made to improve performance.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Equity gaps in student learning are pervasive and beg the question “How can we do better?” Challenging assumptions about your organization’s approach to securing equitable outcomes for students by critically examining teaching and learning assessment policies, practices, and structures through a lens that questions why inequities exist so that effective changes can be made is the fundamental purpose of this Guide.

The Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice provides a roadmap, grounded in proven process improvement frameworks, to provide community college leaders with a self-assessment process of their organization’s assessment systems. The goal is not only to improve student learning using assessment but to identify strategies to close equity gaps.

This journey begins with strong leadership that facilitates organizational learning to renew or redefine the learning assessment system. As a team learns together, a shared understanding of the challenges is constructed. Equity-minded assessment processes involve “questioning processes, biases, assumptions within ourselves, others, and the processes followed” (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020, p. 13). Within every section of the Guide, specific questions and prompts are provided for your organization to use in reflection and dialogue in constructing an assessment system uniquely suited to your institution’s needs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream (AtD) is a membership organization of community college dedicated to closing achievement gaps and accelerating student success by guiding institutional change, influencing public policy, generating knowledge, and engaging the public. A broad base of resources such as research-based toolkits, reports, and workshops are available. <https://achievingthedream.org/our-work/>

Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education

The mission of the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE) is to develop and support a community of educators and inform assessment practices in higher education to foster and improve student learning and institutional quality. <https://www.aalhe.org/>

Malcolm Baldrige Excellence Framework (Education)

The Malcolm Baldrige Excellence Framework (Education) is available for purchase at low cost on the National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST) website. Case studies, blogs, and workshop and conference schedules are also available. <https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/baldrige-excellence-framework/education>

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) is a research and resource-development organization dedicated to documenting, advocating, and facilitating the systematic use of learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning. <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/>

Society for College and University Planning

The Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) is a community of leader practitioners using integrated planning strategies. Resources and workshops for strategic planning in higher education are provided. <https://www.scup.org/>

Society for Organizational Learning

A plethora of resources, many specific to higher education, are provided by the Society for Organizational Learning. <https://www.solonline.org/resources/>

Teaching-Learning-Assessment Framework

The AAC&U's Teaching-Learning-Assessment (TLA) Framework is a practical web-based tool developed to help institutions build capacity and lead institutional transformation as part of the Guided Pathways model for student success. Each phase includes a series of guiding questions, resources, campus spotlights, team activities, and key takeaways to help prepare campuses for recreating the process at their own institutions. <https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/tla-framework>

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

Equity gaps are a significant issue in post-secondary education. These gaps are evident in student success metrics such as completion, persistence, and course success rates. They affect students of different cultures, ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and abilities. The presence of an equity gap is a signal that the underlying learning structure of policies, processes, and instructional practice does not serve all students effectively.

As the primary access point to higher education for low-income students and students belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups, community colleges, in particular, are well-positioned to address this issue. One underutilized tool in this effort is the assessment of student learning. Student learning outcomes identify what a student will know or be able to do after successfully completing a program, course, or instructional unit. Despite the concern for equity in higher education, a National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) survey found that assessment data were rarely used to address equity gaps in learning, even though provosts considered equity important to assessment work (Jankowski et al, 2018).

Cultivating inclusive learning environments for diverse students requires an institution to interrogate its teaching and learning policies and practices continually. This ongoing interrogation helps identify opportunities to improve learning for all student groups. Total Quality Management frameworks such as the Baldrige Education Framework for Education and the NILOA Excellence in Assessment framework provide organizations with a detailed

description of the components of an effective TQM system. However, the gap between research and research-based practice can be a wide chasm for many organizations to cross. Navigating the distance between the current state of the organization and establishing the systems that will enable the desired state of the organization requires effective leadership.

RESTATEMENT OF THE GOALS OF THE GUIDE

Through their student learning assessment process institutions have the opportunity to interrogate their own assumptions, practices, and systems to improve student learning and close opportunity gaps between different student groups in achieving academic milestones that enable long-term success. Generating quality learning experiences for all students requires that attention be paid to developing equitable learning outcomes, delivering instruction equitably, and designing assessments that are equitable. The Institutional Guide for the Strategic Improvement of Assessment Practice is designed to be a resource for community college leaders in identifying opportunities to improve their institution's practice of learning outcomes assessment to identify and understand equity gaps to inform efforts to address them.

The following primary research questions guided the research, development, and implementation of the Guide:

What tools can a community college leader use to navigate from their current state of assessment of student learning to an aspired practice rooted in research, uniquely suited to their needs?

- What frameworks can an institution use in a self-review to identify opportunities for improvement in their assessment of learning outcomes processes to close equity gaps in student success?
- How can an institution develop a strategy that is uniquely suited to their institution's context and needs to leverage the assessment of student learning to close equity gaps?

- How can an institution bridge the gap between strategy and execution successfully to develop an effective learning outcomes assessment system in their organization?

LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND THE GUIDE

This product dissertation was developed to help community college leaders conduct an equity-centered gap analysis on their current assessment practice. The Guide was created by synthesizing two evidence-based total quality management frameworks while integrating leadership theory and equity theory into a practical roadmap. The two quality management frameworks used as the foundation for the Guide are the Baldrige Excellence Framework and the NILOA Excellence in Assessment designation. Continuous quality improvement requires regularly reviewing and measuring the effectiveness of processes and policies toward achieving the goals of the program or system.

The NILOA Excellence in Assessment designation was suspended in 2022 to consider several big questions, including whether what institutions do impacts student learning and success, whether there are cohesive, complementary experiences across courses and co-curricular experiences, and how effectively assessment paradigms connect to multiple disciplines, epistemologies, and pedagogical approaches (Baker, McConnel, 2022). The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is facilitating this conversation with the broader assessment community and deciding the path forward through a survey that was launched in late 2022, group interviews in January and February 2023, and feedback sessions at several of their General Education, Pedagogy, and Assessment conferences in 2023 (AAC&U, 2023). Once the release of the review is completed and the updates to the Excellence in Assessment designation are finalized, there will be opportunities for future researchers to adjust the Guide.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework is also undergoing a transformation. The National Institute of Standards and Technology announced in 2022 that a decision was made to launch a comprehensive, independent review to “reimagine” the Baldrige Program (Foundation for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, 2022). The review was completed in 2023. Recommendations and implementation strategies from the review resulted in a new emphasis on organizational resilience (National Institute for Standards and Technology, 2023). In this context, the NIST defines resilience as “more than just bouncing back to a prior state following a disruption. Resilience is about businesses and other organizations being ready and able to adapt, innovate, and thrive in a dynamic environment where change and disruption are constant. Resilient organizations succeed despite significant challenges and help strengthen their communities and ecosystems for the benefit of all” (National Institute for Standards and Technology, 2023, para. 2). An updated application and award criteria are expected to be available in January 2024. The award criteria focus on the drivers and indicators of resilience and long-term success and are derived from the concepts found in the Baldrige Excellence Framework and literature on organizational resilience. The deepened focus on organizational resilience provides an opportunity for further research related to how an organization can revise its assessment of student learning processes so that are appropriate in a dynamic environment.

The Institutional Guide for the Strategic Improvement of Assessment Practice is designed to assist community college leaders in defining an assessment system that is uniquely suited to their institutions’ culture and needs. It is not a “packaged” assessment system or checklist of action items. Instead, the Guide is based on learning organization theory and

provides not only a roadmap for leaders but also includes specific questions and prompts for the organization to reflect upon and discuss to facilitate organizational learning. The Guide is designed to lead an organization through the necessary steps to define, implement, and measure the effectiveness of a holistic approach to the assessment of student learning, designed and implemented by the organization.

AN ENVIRONMENT OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

This product dissertation was developed during a time when views on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) vary along demographic and partisan lines. According to the Pew Research Center, most people of color say that focusing on EDI in the workplace is a good thing (Minkin, 2023). White workers, however, have varying viewpoints. For example, white democrats, women, and people under 30 view EDI work positively, whereas views among Republican men are less favorable about EDI work (Minkin, 2023). These partisan and demographic divisions regarding EDI are also evident in an analysis of school district mission statements. Lawmakers in numerous states have proposed laws that limit what educators can say in the classroom about topics such as race or gender identity. even as other states have mandated greater emphasis on these topics (Odabas and Aragao, 2023). These racist policies that further perpetuate system racism and that limit an institution's educational mission to serve all student groups equitably are evidence that structural racism persists today. It is important for community college leaders to continue to establish organizations that reflect on their policies and practices, such as the assessment of student learning, to ensure all student groups are well served by higher education and reap the social and economic benefits that a post-secondary education affords them.

The Learning Outcomes Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice provides community colleges with the tools to center equity in interrogating their assessment of student learning systems. In the process of facilitating change, the organization will need to gain a realistic and deep understanding of the current state of learning and assessment at their organization. The Guide provides guidance for community college leaders in setting the stage for the group to analyze, synthesize and understand the meaning of the data, and not simply absorb information passively. The Guide also includes guidance on how to recognize and challenge mental models held by individuals and the organization. Mental models not only shape how individuals and teams perceive the world, but also how they act and the approach they take. This can help broaden perspectives, identify blind spots, and promote more effective decision-making and collaboration. The Guide provides change agents with reflective tools to reframe racialized gaps in performance as a function of the institution's teaching and learning systems rather than as a deficiency in the students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Eliminating gaps in student success and learning is a complex task for community colleges, but the implications of successfully addressing these disparities are profound and far-reaching. Leveraging the Guide to identify opportunities to renew an organization's assessment system to close equity gaps aligns with the community college's core mission of providing accessible and affordable education to all members of the community and fostering positive regional economic development.

Shifting the assessment culture of an organization takes substantial commitment. Senior leaders must visibly and consistently advocate for changing assessment processes to close

equity gaps. Faculty must be invited and incentivized to participate at all levels in the decision-making process. This ensures diverse perspectives are considered and will result in an approach suited for the organization. Community colleges must also be willing to commit financial resources to faculty compensation, professional development, and technical tools to realize their collective vision. Finally, it must be acknowledged that cultural shifts take time.

Meaningful change is a gradual process requiring ongoing commitment. Community colleges embarking upon a culture shift in their approach to assessment need to recognize that cultural shifts may require ongoing adjustments. It is essential to embrace a mindset of adaptability and continuous improvement.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The assessment of student learning stands as an essential component of teaching and learning. This future research section aims to explore opportunities for further research that can inform effective educational practices.

The Learning Outcomes Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice is a research-based tool that integrates elements from various sources such as learning organization theory, equity-mindedness tenets, assessment of student learning practices, and quality improvement frameworks. These elements are synthesized to provide a guided roadmap for organizations to develop their own approach to using assessment to close equity gaps. One potential area for further research is to study the effectiveness of this tool as a whole in facilitating an organization's self-review and driving improvements in the current practices.

Establishing a core learning team to serve as a reflective leadership group that collaboratively develops a shared vision and strategy for the organization is an integral part of

the process of renewing an organization's assessment processes to close equity gaps. Research that focuses on how to establish a team that reflects the organization and student population, and the impact this has on the effectiveness of the renewed assessment process is another area for further study.

Another area of focus for future research would be to examine how organizations should monitor and continuously reflect on the results of their efforts. For example, does an organization start anew with a different core learning team to begin the work as if starting from scratch? Is there a benefit to maintaining team membership, if possible?

Recommendations and implementation strategies from the review of the BEFE resulted in a new emphasis on organizational resilience (National Institute for Standards and Technology, 2023). Exploratory research into determining the relevance and impact of building resilience into an assessment of student learning system is another opportunity for further research.

The Guide specifically focuses on defining an infrastructure that centers equity in the assessment of student learning. How this guide can apply to related aspects of the assessment of student learning, such as faculty development, is also worth pursuing.

CONCLUSION

Equity gaps persist as a critical challenge in post-secondary education, affecting student success metrics such as completion, persistence, and course success rates across diverse demographic groups. These disparities signal a systemic issue within the learning structure, highlighting the inefficacy of existing policies, processes, and instructional practices in serving all students equitably. Community colleges, as pivotal gateways for low-income and minority

students to higher education, play a crucial role in addressing these gaps. Despite the urgency to address equity, a gap exists between the importance placed on equity by education leaders and the limited use of assessment data for this purpose (Jankowski, et al., 2018).

The Learning Outcomes Assessment Review Guide for Equity-minded Practice aims to empower community college leaders in identifying and addressing equity gaps through the examination of their learning outcomes assessment procedures. The research questions guiding the development of the Guide focus on tools, frameworks, strategies, and steps necessary for institutions to bridge the gap between their current state and an aspired practice rooted in research. Creating inclusive learning environments necessitates continuously interrogating teaching and learning policies and practices. The Guide provides a roadmap to navigate these complexities by synthesizing research-based assessment practices, Total Quality Frameworks such as the Baldrige Education Framework and the NILOA Excellence in Assessment framework, with student learning theory and equity theory.

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