Integrating Assessment with Teaching and Learning Excellence: A Proactive Model

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HOW WE GOT HERE

In 2017, the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE) established a Knowledge Development Task Force (KDTF) with a mission to identify and facilitate ways to advance the development of a body of knowledge devoted to assessing and improving student learning in higher education.

Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education
AALHE
PROMOTING ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Our Current Project Objective:

To explore if and how current assessment practices at various classifications of higher education institutions:

a) focus upon and influence curriculum design and redesign;

b) deliberately use assessment for instructional planning, professional development, and implementation of effective pedagogy; and

c) emphasize continual enhancement of student learning.

To answer these questions, the KDTF subdivided to pursue 2 parallel lines of inquiry:

- Review of extant literature

- Initial website review of institutions that might be candidates for our multi-institutional case study
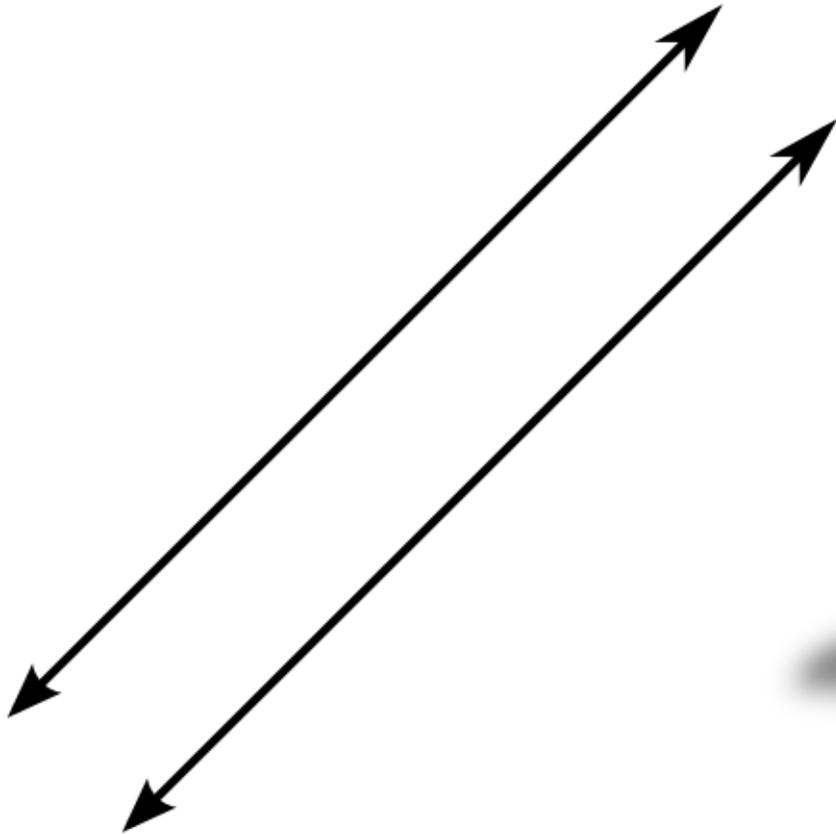
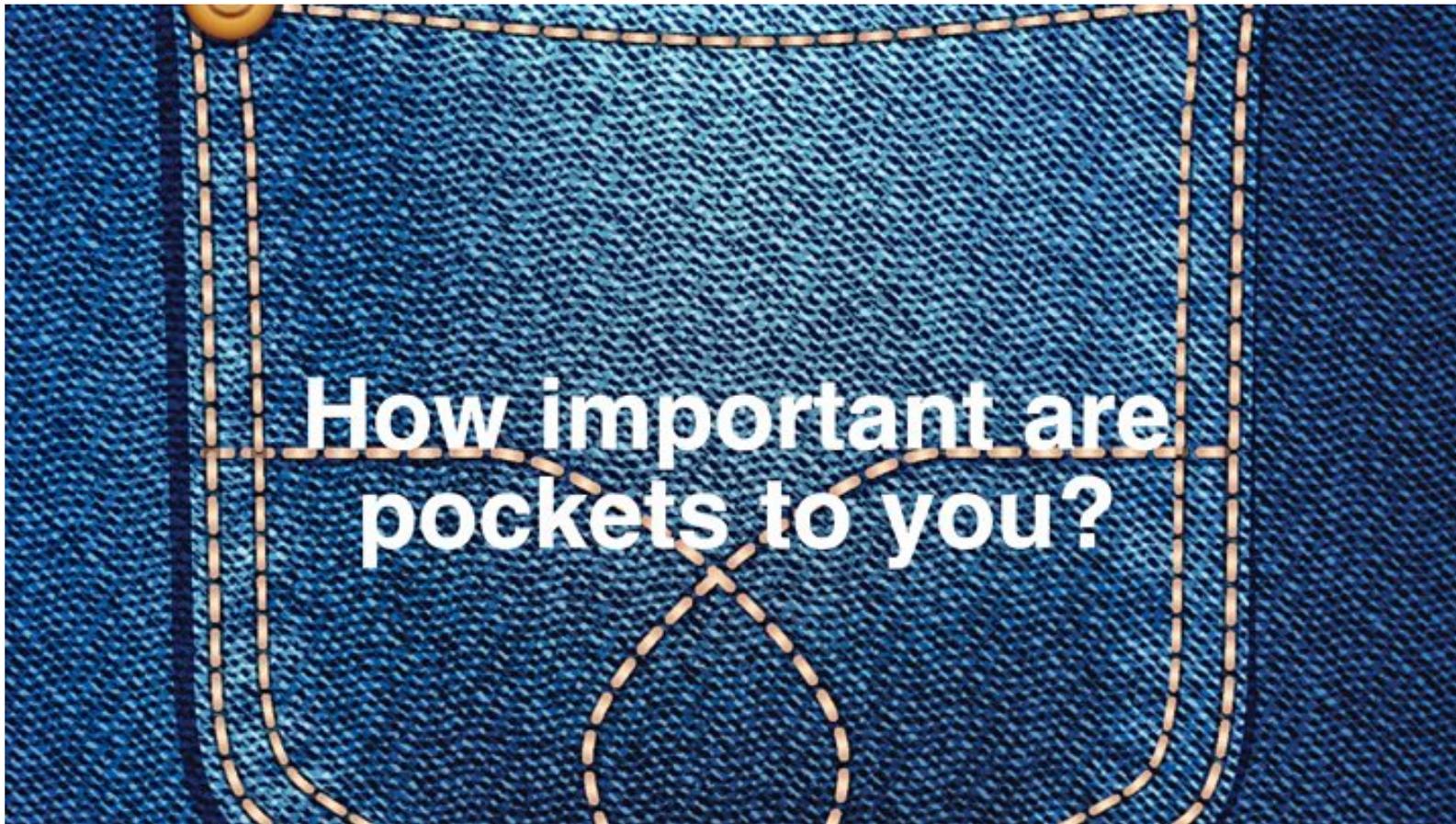We'll talk more about these findings later.

Although, we have not yet found the kind of institution-wide integration we were seeking, but we have found many encouraging examples of "pockets of excellence."

You can't always **get what you want,**
but if you try sometimes, you might find,
you **get what you need.**

— *Mick Jagger* —

AZ QUOTES

We believe that expanding pockets of excellence will lead to systemic change. So, we're going to spend this morning encouraging you to make your program, department or college a pocket of proactive excellence.

First Activity

Recap of Case Study Activity

**Strengths and Weaknesses
of Reactive Approach (Group B)**

- Need to go back to the faculty and see what is already happening.
- Need to encourage faculty to collaborate with other departments (no formal structures like Group A had).
- Institutional siloes may be a barrier.
- Software system for assessment data is a benefit.

**Strengths and Weaknesses
of Proactive Approach (Group A)**

- Is there sufficient trust to integrate assessment with planning? There are still plenty of faculty who think that grades are adequate measures of student ability and other assessment is redundant.
- New resources presented in the case could help to promote integration, but need to be sure it wasn't all top-down. Need support from faculty senate.
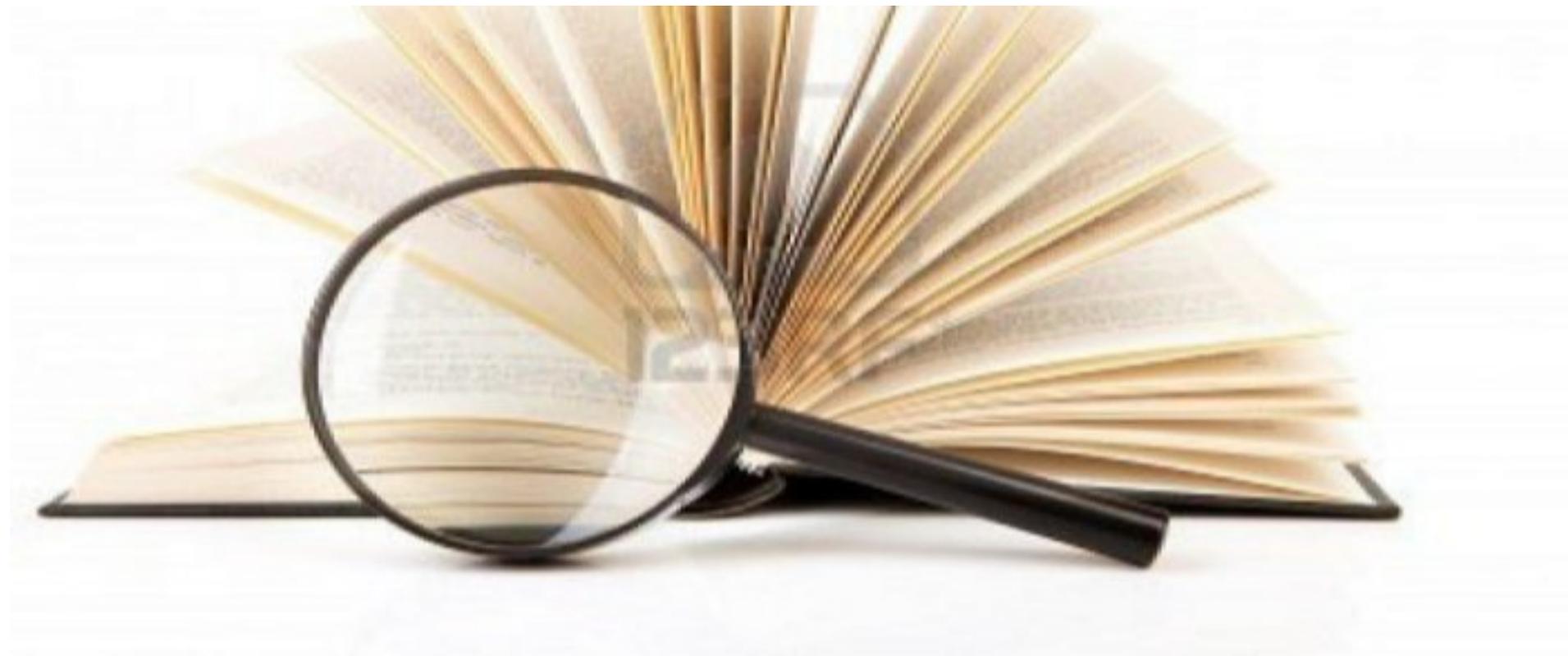
Literature Review

Empirically Exploring Higher Education Cultures of Assessment

Matthew B. Fuller, Ph.D.
Susan T. Skidmore, Ph.D.
Rebecca M. Bustamante, Ph.D.
Peggy C. Holzweiss, Ph.D.

Better Together:

How Faculty Development and Assessment Can Join Forces to Improve Student Learning

By Jillian Kinzie, Kathleen Landy, Mary Deane Sorcinelli, and Pat Hutchings

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Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education

Organizing for Learning Improvement: What It Takes

Andrea M. Pope and Keston H. Fulcher

Introduction

DESPITE THE ALMOST-UNIVERSAL ADOPTION OF ASSESSMENT IN U.S. COLLEGES, few examples exist of assessment results being used to improve student learning at the program or institution level. Disappointing though this may be, it is unsurprising given the difficulty of the task. Demonstrating learning improvement requires practitioners to (1) meaningfully assess student learning, (2) effectively intervene via curriculum and pedagogy, and (3) reassess to verify better learning. While this *assess, intervene, reassess* model seems simple in theory, one or more of these components is often missing in practice (Fulcher, Good, Coleman, and Smith 2014). Thus, despite persistent talk of "closing the loop" in higher education, learning improvement remains an elusive goal.

Undeterred, we have focused on this improvement problem: thinking and experimenting alongside faculty content experts, faculty developers, assessment practitioners, and administrators. In fact, two of JMU's Assessment and Measurement doctoral students completed dissertations that successfully culminated in improved student learning. These in-the-trenches experiences illuminated a number of conditions necessary for improvement at the program level—many of which involved the structuring of improvement teams. In a previous article (Fulcher et al. 2014), we suggested who should be on these teams: faculty content experts, experts in curriculum and pedagogy, and assessment practitioners (at minimum). In this article, we suggest how these individuals can work together most effectively.

The Facets of Learning Improvement

Soon after embarking on our first concerted improvement efforts, it became clear that simply throwing a group of higher education experts into the same room would not be enough. As proficient as we were in our respective disciplines, we did not have enough cross-knowledge to work together effectively. We faced many of the issues described by Borrego and Newswander (2008): We did not speak the same language nor have the same perspective regarding how to verify knowledge. In essence, we discovered that *multidisciplinary teams*—where people merely bring their own unique expertise—were not sufficient. Learning improvement requires *interdisciplinary collaboration*—where each team member injects his/her particular expertise while simultaneously learning enough about other members' functional areas to collaborate effectively.

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SELECTED REFERENCES ON INTEGRATING ASSESSMENT WITH CURRICULAR PLANNING

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To date, we have examined the websites of about 30 institutions, based on recommendations from national assessment experts and supplemented by our findings from the literature and direct experience.

We believe we have found evidence of proactive integration of assessment with curriculum and instruction, BUT we don't know how it plays out in the day-to-day life of the institution. Our next step is to conduct phone/web interviews with key personnel at the most promising institutions. We are currently in the process of obtaining IRB approval for this phase of the study, which should begin shortly and will conclude by May 2020.

Value of Assessment to Value of the Integration of Assessment and Curriculum and Instructional Planning and Improvement

Value of Integrating Assessment with Curriculum and Instructional Planning and Improvement

- Students - Maximizing student learning

  - Planning, implementing, and reflecting on instructional strategies and activities to foster each student learning outcome and their elements
    - Think in Ink Program
  - Engaging students in the assessment process
    - Think in Ink – Student Fellows
    - Benefits of engagement and to the process
  - Attending to the integration of student learning outcomes that enhance employability
    - Fosters transfer of learning

Value of Integration, continued

- Faculty

  - Attending carefully to the teaching-learning process
    - Think in Ink
    - Reinvigorating instruction and enjoyment
    - Mechanical Engineering

  - Demonstrating, with credible evidence, effective teaching
    - Course Reflection

  - Using the assessment process as a springboard for Scholarship of Teaching Learning
    - Think in Ink
    - Mechanical Engineering

- Programs

  - Ensuring the cohesiveness of the curriculum and progressive learning of outcomes
    - Greater potential for deepening student learning and transfer
  - Attending to graduates' employability and agility
    - Graduates' Need

Second Activity

What organizational structures currently support or impede the integration of assessment with teaching and learning at YOUR institution?

Recap of Think/Pair/Share Activity

Common Impediments

- Increased reliance on adjunct faculty can lead to a lack of continuity.
- Faculty perceptions that reports are not being read.
- Questions about who owns the assessment.
- Lack of resources.

Common Supports

- Freedom to assess in a way that is valid.
- Data belong to the faculty (and department leadership).
- Instructional fee money can be used for assessment support, including student assistants.
- Reporting infrastructure (software systems) -- with a caveat that an abundance of data can lead to a reactive mindset.

Final activity (concrete action steps)

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