



Are there real advantages to developing and implementing student assessment programs and policies? What steps can colleges and universities take to collect and use student assessment data in a way that most benefits students, faculty, and the institution as a whole?

Improving Student Assessment at Baccalaureate Institutions

Written specifically for administrators, faculty, and staff in baccalaureate institutions who are involved with student assessment on their campuses, *Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Baccalaureate Institutions* draws upon the results of a national survey of nearly 1,400 colleges and universities to provide institutions with important tools they need to successfully collect

and use student assessment data: (1) a self-inventory mechanism that institutions can use to examine and evaluate their own student assessment process and functions, and (2) a national profile of what baccalaureate and other institutions around the country are currently doing to support and promote the use of student assessment. Together, these tools will allow individual institutions to acquire insight into the activities that their own and other institutions are already performing, those which merit greater attention, and those which can make a difference in improving institutional performance.

Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Baccalaureate Institutions

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NCPI Technical Report #5-08

Inside this brochure you'll find a summary of some of the most important findings and recommendations presented in this report. To download a free copy of the complete report, please visit our website, <http://ncpi.stanford.edu>. To purchase a bound copy, please send a check or money order for \$10.00 to the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, Stanford University School of Education, 520 Galvez Mall, 508 CERAS, Stanford, CA 94305-3084. All orders must be prepaid. Price includes shipping.

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Designing Student Assessment to Strengthen Institutional Performance in Baccalaureate Institutions. By Marvin Peterson, Catherine Augustine, Marne Einarson, and Derek Vaughan. NCPI Technical Report #5-08. 1999.

The past decade has witnessed an increased call for student assessment in higher education, driven by accreditation self-studies, state mandates, academic administrators, faculty groups, institutional researchers, and program review officers. Despite this growing demand from both internal and external sources, NCPI research has found that most baccalaureate institutions are not using student assessment data to its full potential—for example, to make academic decisions—and that the student assessment data they collect has only a limited impact.

The tables below present a number of NCPI recommendations that researchers believe will lead to significant increases in baccalaureate institutions’ use of and benefit from student assessment information. These findings and recommendations fall into three main areas: The Nature of Assessment, Promoting Assessment, and Supporting Assessment.

THE NATURE OF STUDENT ASSESSMENT

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT
<p>When collecting student assessment data, baccalaureate institutions tend to use tests and other written instruments, although some units or departments also make use of less traditional assessment methods such as observations of student performance, student portfolios or comprehensive projects, capstone courses, student interviews, employer interviews, and alumni interviews.</p>	<p>Employ more extensive data collection methods, using a greater number of instruments and tests and more student-centered methods.</p>	<p>These alternative approaches can increase faculty participation in assessment efforts and help institutions to gather student assessment data that is not accessible via more conventional tests and surveys. Institutions that employ a wider variety of assessment instruments are also more likely to use this data in academic decision-making.</p>
<p>Most baccalaureate institutions emphasize the collection of student assessment data that includes basic college-readiness, academic intentions, academic progress, and institutional satisfaction. Baccalaureate institutions collect less extensive information on their students’ higher order skills, vocational skills, and the civic and social roles taken on by former students.</p>	<p>Review the type and extent of assessment data being collected and, where needed, broaden and deepen collection efforts to include alternative areas of assessment.</p>	<p>Not only will collecting a wider array of data provide a richer understanding of student growth, but the more cognitive data institutions collect, the more likely they are to use this assessment data in making faculty-related decisions, and the more likely this information is to have an impact on institutional external relations.</p>

PROMOTING STUDENT ASSESSMENT

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT
<p>While policies supporting professional development opportunities appear to be fairly common in baccalaureate institutions, activities that do not affect faculty time spent in the classroom are more prevalent than those that take faculty away from the classroom, such as paid leaves and course reductions.</p>	<p>Increase the use of professional development and offer a greater variety of professional development opportunities.</p>	<p>An increase in the number and type of assessment-related professional development opportunities can promote a higher level of involvement in student assessment and can also improve the likelihood that constituents will understand how to use student assessment information. Researchers also found that those institutions that offer professional development are more likely to use assessment data to make educational decisions.</p>
<p>Approximately half of baccalaureate institutions surveyed report that they provide regular workshops on student assessment for academic and student affairs administrators. Most also have a faculty governance committee that regularly addresses assessment issues.</p>	<p>Increase the use of ongoing internal accountability-related activities.</p>	<p>Not only will offering such activities demonstrate support for assessment, but institutions that offer more administrative and governance activities also collect more cognitive and affective student assessment data and report that these data have a positive impact on faculty members.</p>
<p>While most baccalaureate institutions regularly distribute reports to traditional internal constituents such as faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs professionals, few baccalaureate institutions regularly distribute these reports to a broader range of constituents.</p>	<p>Distribute student assessment reports to a wide group of constituents, including students, the general public, and employers.</p>	<p>People who are aware of student assessment activities and results are more likely to use that student assessment-related information in their own decision-making.</p>
<p>Baccalaureate institutions responding to the survey described only academic affairs administrators as being very supportive of student assessment. Even the chief executive officer was described, on average, as being only somewhat supportive of student assessment. Faculty governance was also described as being only somewhat supportive.</p>	<p>Periodically measure the degree of internal support for student assessment.</p>	<p>Such measurements may be a useful means for baccalaureate institutions to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts to promote assessment. In addition, the more supportive faculty and administrators are of student assessment, the more likely it is that the institution will use student assessment data to make faculty-related decisions.</p>

SUPPORTING STUDENT ASSESSMENT

FINDING	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFIT
<p>Half of the baccalaureate institutions surveyed have evaluated their plan or policy for student assessment.</p>	<p>Institute mechanisms to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of assessment plans and policies.</p>	<p>Internal monitoring allows institutions to better understand whether assessment plans are meeting their objectives and whether the effort is benefiting the institution. In addition, institutions that conduct such evaluations report positive effects on faculty, students, and external relationships.</p>
<p>Baccalaureate institutions report that accreditation mandates, improving undergraduate programs, and student performance are all very important purposes for engaging in assessment. This finding indicates that institutions are both aware of external demands and purposefully engage in student assessment to improve internal processes.</p>	<p>Maintain a commitment to student assessment as a means to foster internal institutional improvement.</p>	<p>Institutions that conduct assessment for the purpose of internal improvement—and not only in response to external demands—collect more cognitive and affective data and report that they use this data to make educational decisions.</p>
<p>Fewer than half of baccalaureate institutions report that they have a computerized student information system that tracks students from application through graduation. Even fewer have a system that includes student performance indicators or an integrated database.</p>	<p>Expand and improve the use of computerized student information systems.</p>	<p>In addition to improving the management of student assessment information, databases that can link that information to other organizational data can facilitate the study of the link between students' performance and their institutional interactions. Institutions that conduct such studies report that their student assessment information has been useful in making educational decisions and that this information has had an impact on both faculty and students.</p>
<p>Most baccalaureate institutions have some type of planning group for student assessment. Typically, these groups are chaired by an academic administrator and are staffed by faculty, academic administrators, and institutional researchers. However, only one-third of these planning groups has a student</p>	<p>Obtain wide input on student assessment issues, and consider involving more students in assessment planning groups.</p>	<p>Student representation increases the likelihood of understanding how students feel about assessment. Once institutions understand how students view assessment, they can overcome student objections to</p>



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