

# Purpose of Assessment

Assessment in higher education has a long history in the United States. According to Victor Borden and Karen Bottrill (1994), college reputational ranking studies began in 1910, followed by peer comparisons of faculty workload and salary guidelines. Resource allocation measures emerged in the 1960s, and activity-based costing methods for generating financial performance information and benchmarking projects began in the 1990s. Finally, student outcomes assessment and process reengineering surfaced in the late 1980s and 1990s.

This book extends higher education's experience with assessment into the arena of performance of whole organizations, programs, and processes within the framework of systems thinking. For the purpose of this book, assessment of organizational performance is defined as the measurement of organizational performance that assessment users evaluate in relation to reference points for the purpose of supporting their requirements and expectations.

The discussion begins with an explanation of assessment's purpose as seen through the lens of those who use assessment results. It explores how groups inside and outside the institution use assessment, what assessment information they seek, and the potential impact they have on an organization's capacity to perform. Since assessment users are the "end users" of the assessment program, they represent the program's "customers." Indeed, it is their needs, preferences, and requirements that drive the development, deployment, and evaluation of assessment programs.

## Assessment User Groups

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### Anthropology Department at a Large State-Supported Research University

The call came early one morning, just before class. He remembers it well because it upset him so much that he had difficulty preparing for class. He had been chair of the Cultural Anthropology Department for nearly three years and was finally getting to understand, or so he thought, the politics of this large, state-supported institution. To be honest, he never really thought it was possible that the dean would seriously consider dropping the department. After all, who ever heard of a high-quality university without a cultural anthropology department?

It all began about ten years earlier when PBS filmed a program on DNA in the new DNA lab. Everyone considered DNA the answer to many of life's baffling questions. The lab catapulted the discipline of physical anthropology to the top of the dean's "list of favorites." Unlike cultural anthropology, which has been around since the beginning of time (or so it seemed), physical anthropology was a growing discipline (thanks to DNA) replete with its own professional association and refereed journals.

At this institution, national ranking was everything. Unfortunately, the Cultural Anthropology Department was ranked unacceptably low. The chair defended his department to the dean by explaining that it was extremely difficult to get published in the refereed journals because there were so many distinguished scholars in the field. He also explained that their salaries were below those in other disciplines, which made recruitment nearly impossible. And because so many positions remained unfilled, he was forced to use adjunct faculty, which, of course, contributed to a lower ranking.

This vignette exemplifies the power that external assessment users—in this case, organizations that rank academic programs—have over organizations in higher education. Their decisions have a staggering impact on an organization's capacity to perform. It is therefore very important for educational leaders to clarify for assessors (1) who their important external assessment users are, (2) the types of assessment information they need, (3) the types of decisions they make based on assessment results, and (4) the potential impact those decisions have on the organization's capacity to perform. High-quality assessment programs are robust and capable of providing the right information at the right time in the right format to meet ever-changing needs of all the organization's important assessment user groups.

There are two types of groups who use assessment results in higher education: external and internal. External user groups are governing boards; governmental agencies; potential students, donors, employees, and contractors; organizations that affirm; and external academic peers. Based on their evaluation of assessment findings, these groups make important decisions that greatly affect the following organizational aspects:

- Operating and capital resources
- Research grants and contracts
- Program mix and pricing structures
- Student financial aid
- Sanctions for noncompliance
- Accreditation
- Rank
- Eligibility
- Censure
- Future enrollments
- Future workforce
- Donations and gifts
- Access to contractors
- Workforce strikes and slowdowns

Internal user groups exist inside the institution. There are three types of internal user groups: senior leaders, administrators and managers, and faculty and staff. Internal user groups use assessment for the following purposes:

- To account to others
- To manage strategy
- To allocate resources
- To manage and control quality of processes and organizational culture
- To improve programs and services
- To support personnel decisions
- To advocate causes

This chapter explores external and internal user groups typical in higher education. It is intended that this discussion will help assessors widen their own analysis of important assessment user groups to their organizations.

## External Assessment User Groups \_\_\_\_\_

External user groups, by definition, reside outside the institution. Each group has a unique interest in assessment based on its function and relationship with the organization. As noted earlier, the major external assessment user groups in higher education discussed in this chapter

are governing boards; governmental agencies; potential students, donors, employees, and contractors; organizations that affirm; and external academic peers.

## Governing Boards

For assessment purposes, governing boards are defined as bodies that govern, coordinate, and advise institutions and programs at the local and state levels. Using this definition, local governing boards and statewide boards of regents are all considered governing boards because they use assessment for similar purposes. The discussion begins with local governing boards.

### Local Governing Boards

Local governing boards typically use assessment results to hold senior leaders accountable for the overall performance of the institution or program. They seek assessment findings that answer the following accountability questions, among others:

Is the organization clear in its purpose and do members of the organizational community share a vision of excellence?

Is the institution achieving its mission (outcomes performance)?

To what extent do members of the organizational community practice the organization's values and beliefs?

Does the organization offer high-quality programs and services? How does the organization assess its academic programs and services, and how does it use assessment findings for improvement?

What is the role of sponsored and unsponsored research as defined by the institution's mission and strategic plans? What types of research are taking place? Who are the major sponsors?

What are the funding patterns, overhead rates, budgetary consequences, and other financial considerations, both now and in the future?

Does the organization have clear policies regarding intellectual property rights and publication of results of research sponsored by corporations?

Who are the faculty, and what do they do?

To what extent are students, alumni, faculty, staff, and other partners satisfied?

Who graduates, and what do they end up doing?

Is the organization efficiently using its critical resources?

Does the organization have adequate and reliable revenues and expenditures that ensure financial durability?

Does the organization's costs and service quality compare favorably with comparable institutions?

What is the organization's overall return on investment?

### **Statewide Governing Boards**

Statewide governing boards seek answers to the same accountability questions as local boards, as well as additional questions pertaining to specific issues important to the state. For example, in 2005, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) established performance standards to "certify" state-supported four-year public research institutions and two- and four-year public nonresearch institutions (see State Council, 2005). For certification, SCHEV seeks answers to the following accountability questions:

#### **Access**

Does the institution provide access to higher education for all citizens throughout the state, including underrepresented populations?

Does the institution meet its enrollment projections?

Does the institution meet its degree estimates?

#### **Affordability**

Does the institution ensure that higher education remains affordable, regardless of individual or family income? What are the costs, and are they reasonable?

Does the institution conduct periodic assessment of the likely impact of tuition and fee levels net of financial aid on applications, enrollment, and student indebtedness?

#### **Academic Offerings**

Does the institution offer a broad range of undergraduate and (where appropriate) graduate programs?

Does the institution regularly assess the extent to which the institution's curricula and degree programs address the state's need for sufficient graduates in particular shortage areas as determined by the state?

#### **Academic Standards**

Does the institution maintain high academic standards by undertaking continual review and improvement of academic programs?

Is the institution decreasing the number of lower-division students denied enrollment in introductory courses?

Is the institution maintaining or increasing the ratio of degrees conferred per FTE faculty member?

### **Student Progress and Success**

Is the institution improving its student retention and progression rates?

Is the ratio of degrees awarded increasing as the number of degree-seeking undergraduates increases?

### **Articulation**

Does the institution develop articulation agreements that have uniform application to all state colleges?

Does the institution provide additional opportunities for associate degree graduates to be admitted and enrolled?

Does the institution offer dual enrollment programs in cooperation with high schools?

### **Economic Development**

Does the institution actively contribute to efforts that stimulate the economic development of the state, and if so, in what ways?

### **Research**

Has the institution increased its level of externally funded research conducted at the institution?

How does the institution facilitate the transfer of technology from university research centers to private sector companies?

### **K–12 Enhancement**

Does the institution enhance K–12 student achievement, upgrade teachers' knowledge and skills, and strengthen leadership skills of school administrators? If so, in what ways?

## **All Governing Boards**

Governing boards also often seek answers to a variety of accountability questions pertaining to the institution's past performance problems, hot political and economic issues, and important local, statewide, and national strategic initiatives. Governing boards typically prefer assessment findings presented within the context of past performance or comparable institutions through benchmarking (or both). Governing boards that operate under so-called sunshine laws are restricted in their use of assessment findings. Governing boards, like other important assessment user groups, make many important decisions in a sched-

uled and somewhat predictable time frame based on annual academic and fiscal cycles. The assessment program should be able to predict and therefore provide reports in a timely manner.

Based on their evaluation of assessment findings, governing boards make many important policy decisions that influence an institution's mission, financial resources, physical plant expansion and renovation, program mix, and pricing structures. They also make personnel decisions about the institution's leadership system.

## Governmental Agencies

For assessment purposes, governmental agencies are defined as federal, state, and local governmental and quasi-governmental organizations, commissions, task forces, and legislative delegations. For discussion purposes, this definition excludes state governing and coordinating boards defined earlier as governing boards.

Governmental agencies, like governing boards, use assessment results to hold organizational leaders accountable for some or all of an organization's performance results. In addition, they use assessment to determine the extent to which institutions and programs help the government achieve its goals and objectives such as workforce development and creation and transfer of knowledge and technology. They use assessment to determine institutional eligibility for grants, contracts, and student financial aid. Finally, state and federal auditors and inspectors use assessment to ensure compliance with tax codes, labor and civil rights laws, disability laws, safety (fire) and security standards, standards for the use of human subjects and animals in research, environmental regulations, accounting standards, civil rights, affirmative action, Title IX, health and food services standards, and so forth.

In general, governmental agencies seek answers to the following questions:

Does the organization offer high-quality programs and services in areas important to the government? How do these programs and services compare with those offered by other organizations?

Does the organization have adequate and reliable revenues and expenditures that ensure financial durability?

Does the organization comply with laws, regulations, and research guidelines?

Does the organization use its critical resources efficiently?

Does the organization meet eligibility requirements to receive grants, contracts, and student financial aid?

Based on their evaluation of assessment findings, governmental agencies make important decisions that greatly affect an organization's capacity to perform. For example, they use assessment to support decisions to award grants, contracts, and student financial aid. They also use assessment to support decisions to impose sanctions and penalties for noncompliance.

An important federal agency that collects institutional data often used in assessment for comparisons and benchmarks is the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCEA), part of the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences. NCEA is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education. The center collects data related to higher education through its program called Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). IPEDS is a system of survey components designed to collect data from postsecondary educational institutions that receive federal dollars through aid, grants, and contracts (see National Center, 2005).

IPEDS collects and reports data on institutional characteristics, completions, enrollment, graduation rates, student financial aid, employees by assigned position, fall staff, salaries, and finance. An important mission of NCEA is to make statistics collected through IPEDS available to the public. NCEA disseminates IPEDS data in several formats, including peer analyses, data sets, predetermined data tables, and a searchable Web site providing current statistics on a broad range of topics.

### Potential Students (Including Parents), Donors (Including Alumni), Employees, and Contractors

A third type of external assessment user group represents potential students and their parents, potential donors including alumni, potential employees, and potential contractors. This group uses assessment to support "choice" decisions.

According to Daniel Seymour (1993), potential students and their parents consider an organization's academic quality an important factor in making choice decisions. He recommends that academic leaders use assessment to "tell the quality story" to these important stakeholders. However, for leaders to use assessment findings effectively in marketing materials, they must first understand what quality means to the market and match market needs with organizational resources, vision, and competitive position to determine and communicate its competitive advantage.

To support their choice decisions, these assessment users seek answers to the following questions pertaining to academic quality:

What is this institution's quality of programs and services? What is the quality of housing and athletic facilities? How does this compare with the quality at other comparable organizations?

How satisfied are students, faculty, and staff? What percentage of students complete their educational goals (retention, transfer admission, graduation, placement, graduate school admission)?

What is the cost of attending this institution in relation to the quality of its educational offerings? How does it compare with the cost at other comparable organizations?

Does the organization have adequate resources to maintain quality in its programs and services?

What reputation, national ranking, and accreditation status does this institution and its programs have?

Potential employees seek answers to the same quality questions, however, they are also concerned with the quality of faculty and staff, quality of teaching and research facilities, and competitiveness of compensation and benefits. Potential contractors are concerned with reliability of organizational revenues that ensure financial durability and the organization's track record for making promised payments in a timely manner.

Based on their evaluation of organizational performance, this group of assessment users makes important choice decisions that greatly affect an institution's future enrollment, donations, gifts, workforce, and the willingness of qualified service providers to bid for and contract with the institution.

## Organizations That Affirm

This category of external assessment users represents a variety of organizations that rule on accreditation, censure, classification, rank, and eligibility; it also includes organizations that bargain with the institution. This group uses assessment to determine how well organizations meet and comply with their specific requirements so that they can determine an organization's accreditation status, classification, rank, and eligibility. Educational leaders pay a great deal of attention to this group of assessment users because it can potentially affect many aspects of an institution's capacity to perform.

### **Organizations That Accredit**

Accreditation is a process of external review conducted by private, nonprofit accrediting organizations. According to Judith Eaton (1999), president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), there are three types of accrediting organizations: regional accreditors

that accredit public and private nonprofit and for-profit two- and four-year institutions; national accreditors that accredit public and private nonprofit and for-profit single-purpose institutions, including distance-learning colleges and universities, private career institutions, and faith-based colleges and universities; and specialized and professional accreditors that accredit specific programs or schools such as law schools, medical schools, engineering schools and programs, and health profession programs.

According to Eaton (1999), organizations in higher education seek accreditation to ensure quality for their students and the public, gain access to federal funds such as student aid and other national programs, and ease transfer of courses and programs among colleges, universities, and programs. Organizations also seek accreditation to engender employer confidence in their evaluation of job applicant credentials and decisions to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education. There are five key features of accreditation: self-study, peer review, site visit, action (judgment by accrediting organization), and ongoing external review.

Every accrediting agency has a unique set of standards and criteria against which it evaluates performance of an institution or program. For example, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCC), a regional accreditor, requires institutions and programs to provide answers to the following questions (2004):

Does the organization have a purpose appropriate to higher education?

Does the organization have resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that purpose?

Does the organization maintain clearly specified educational outcomes that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers?

Does the organization assess achievement of its intended outcomes, and does it make improvements based on assessment results?

ABET Engineering Accreditation Commission (2006) accredits four engineering programs: applied science, computing, engineering, and technology. ABET was established in 1932 and is now a federation of twenty-eight professional and technical societies representing the four engineering programs. In 2006, ABET accredited 2,700 programs at over 550 colleges and universities nationwide.

To be accredited by ABET, institutions must demonstrate that their engineering programs meet eight basic and two engineering-specific criteria. Basic criteria pertain to students, program educa-

tional objectives, program outcomes and assessment, professional component, faculty, facilities, institutional support, and financial resources. Program-specific criteria pertain to curriculum and faculty.

Prior to the 1980s, most institutional and program-specific accreditation standards focused on the quality of resources such as faculty competence, financial stability, adequacy of technology, and library resources. Today, accreditation standards focus not only on the quality of resources, processes, programs, and services but also on the achievement of educational outcomes. Accreditors have moved from an input-driven model of accreditation to a goal-based model. In fact, some standards expect institutions to address “institutional effectiveness,” a standard that requires them not only to identify expected outcomes for their educational programs and administrative and educational support services but also to assess achievement of those outcomes and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.

After evaluating assessment findings, accreditors make decisions to affirm or deny accreditation for new institutions and programs and to reaffirm or deny accreditation for ongoing institutions and programs.

### **Organizations That Censure**

The primary organization in this category is the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a professional association with a current membership of forty-five thousand, with more than five hundred local campus chapters and thirty-nine state organizations. AAUP’s mission is to “advance academic freedom and shared governance, to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education, and to ensure higher education’s contribution to the common good” (2005a, p. 1). AAUP sees its role as protecting individual rights and advancing “principles and standards of sound academic practice governing the relationship between faculty and their institutions” (2005b, p. 1.) AAUP encourages institutions to use its principles and standards as guidelines for framing faculty regulations and handbooks.

AAUP uses assessment to censure administrations of institutions that fail to adhere to principles and standards of academic governance it believes ensures academic freedom and tenure. In 1938, AAUP began censuring administrations after determining conditions for academic freedom and tenure at the institution were unsatisfactory (2005b). In its document titled “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure” (2004), AAUP clarifies specific standards it believes protect academic freedom and academic tenure. These principles address the two issues because AAUP considers both essential to teaching and research.

AAUP investigates particular cases brought to its attention by its members on campuses throughout the United States (2005b).

When the group determines that a situation on a campus represents a major departure from its principles and the situation remains unresolved, it initiates a review process that may result in censure of the institution's administration. In January 2006, the administrations of forty-seven institutions were on AAUP's published censure list.

AAUP publishes its censure list in every issue of its publication *Academe* and highlights censured institutions in job notices published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and in numerous disciplinary societies such as the American Historical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the College Art Association. The group asks its members to refrain from accepting appointment to an institution so long as the institution remains on the censure list (Knight, 2003).

In addition to censuring administrations, AAUP publishes a national salary report of faculty salaries and benefits that assessors use for comparisons and benchmarks (2005a).

### **Organizations That Classify**

This group of assessment users classifies institutions and programs based on assessment findings. This group is important because much can be at stake based on an institution's classification.

One of the leading groups that classifies higher educational institutions is the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a private foundation. According to the Carnegie Foundation (2005), the typology, first published in 1973, was called the "Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education." The foundation updated the typology in 1976, 1987, 1994, and 2000, with another review launched in 2005.

The Carnegie Foundation classifies only degree-granting American colleges and universities that are accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education. The foundation originally created the typology to ensure a representative selection of participating individuals and institutions in its higher education projects. Today, many organizations use the Carnegie classification for different purposes. One use is to qualify institutions for federal research funds; another is to organize institutions into groups for ranking and benchmarking purposes.

The Carnegie Foundation classification (2005) requires answers to two assessment questions:

How many and what types of programs does the organization offer at the undergraduate and graduate level?

How many and what types of degrees does the organization award?

After evaluating assessment results, the Carnegie Foundation matches the institution with one of the following classifications:

- Doctorate-granting institutions
  - Doctoral or research universities—extensive
  - Doctoral or research universities—intensive
- Master’s colleges and universities
  - Master’s colleges and universities I
  - Master’s colleges and universities II
- Baccalaureate colleges
  - Baccalaureate colleges—liberal arts
  - Baccalaureate colleges—general
  - Baccalaureate or associate’s colleges
- Associate’s colleges (community colleges)
- Specialized institutions
  - Theological seminaries and other specialized faith-related institutions
  - Medical schools and medical centers
  - Other separate health profession schools (nursing, pharmacy, and so forth)
  - Schools of engineering and technology
  - Schools of business and management
  - Schools of art, music, and design
  - Schools of law
  - Teachers colleges
  - Other specialized institutions (military institutes, maritime academies, and so forth)
- Tribal colleges and universities

### **Organizations That Rank**

This group of assessment users uses assessment to rank institutions and programs based on “academic quality.” Organizations that rank are important external assessment users because much can be at stake based on an institution or program’s ranking. As demonstrated in the vignette about the Cultural Anthropology Department at a large research institution, some academic departments live or die based on their national ranking.

The reason most organizations rank institutions or programs is to help potential students and research sponsors make informed choice decisions. Most organizations that rank institutions and programs compare organizational performance using weighted indicators. They collect data from national and local databases and surveys sent to institutions and peers.

*U.S. News and World Report* (2006) is one organization that annually ranks over fourteen hundred accredited schools. It divides institutions and programs into categories based on the 2000 Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education and then ranks them based on fifteen weighted indicators in seven categories:

1. Peer assessment (25 percent), a rating of academic programs on a scale from 1 to 5 as determined by surveyed presidents, provosts, and deans of admissions
2. Retention (20 percent)
  - Average freshman retention rate
  - Average graduation rate
3. Faculty resources (20 percent)
  - Class size, 1–19 students
  - Class size, 50+ students
  - Faculty compensation
  - Faculty with Ph.D.s or top terminal degrees
  - Proportion of full-time faculty
  - Student-faculty ratio
4. Student selectivity (15 percent)
  - High school class standing in top 10 percent
  - SAT and ACT scores
  - Acceptance rate
5. Financial resources (expenditures per student, 10 percent)
6. Graduation rate performance (5 percent), the difference between the actual six-year graduation rate for students entering in the fall of one year and the predicted graduation rate
7. Alumni giving (5 percent)

*U. S. News and World Report* (2005) also ranks institutions based on “best value.” This score is a composite of three variables: ratio of quality to price, percentage of undergraduates receiving scholarships or grants meeting financial need, and average discount, defined as the percentage of a school’s total costs covered by the average need-based scholarship or grant to undergraduates.

The National Research Council (NRC) is another organization that ranks research doctorate programs in higher education. NRC was chartered in 1916 as one of the four National Academies (2006) created to further knowledge and advise the federal government. (The others are the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine.) All four are pri-

vate, nonprofit institutions that provide science, technology, and health policy advice under a congressional charter.

In 1983 and again in 1995, NRC studied and ranked research doctorate programs with the aim of helping institutions improve the quality of their programs through benchmarking; providing potential students and the public with accessible, readily available information on doctoral programs nationwide; and enhancing the nation's overall research capacity (Ostriker and Kuh, 2003). It is currently conducting a new assessment of doctorate programs, to be completed in late 2007. Unlike previous studies, the current study will gather quantitative data on doctoral programs using online questionnaires covering the following areas:

- Scholarly productivity and impact of program faculty
- Effectiveness of doctoral education
- Research resources
- Demographic characteristics of students and faculty
- Resources available to doctoral students
- Characteristics of each doctoral program

The *Princeton Review* (2006) is another organization that ranks institutions. It bases its rankings on data gathered through student surveys and national and local databases. The *Princeton Review* publishes its findings annually in a book called *The Best 361 Colleges*. In 2004–2005, the *Princeton Review* interviewed 110,000 students at over 2,000 schools, an average of more than 300 students per school. Using a seventy-item survey, the *Princeton Review* asks students to tell about themselves, their school's academics and administration, campus life at their college, and their fellow students' attitudes and opinions. Based on student responses and institutional data, the *Princeton Review* identifies the 362 top-rated schools and ranks the top 20 of them in sixty-two areas organized into eight categories: academics, demographics, parties, schools by type, politics, quality of life, extracurricular activities, and social life. *The Princeton Review* claims that its rankings reflect a consensus of the colleges' surveyed students rather than its own opinions.

### **Organizations That Determine Eligibility**

This group uses assessment to determine eligibility of institutions and students based on specific requirements. For example, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) uses assessment results to certify athletic programs and player eligibility (2006b). NCAA began certifying Division I institutions in 1993 after piloting the program for four years. A second cycle of certification began in 1999 and continues today.

According to NCAA (2006b), the purpose of athletics certification is to ensure integrity in institutional athletics programs and to help institutions improve their athletics departments. Certification achieves this by opening affairs of athletics to the university community and the public, by setting standards for the operation of athletics programs, and by putting tough sanctions in place for institutions that fail to conduct a comprehensive self-study or to correct problems.

According to NCAA (2006a), the core of certification is the institution's self-study and annual certification of eligibility, which is designed to benefit institutions. NCAA claims that self-studies (program reviews conducted by an institution's faculty and staff as opposed to a site-visit team made up of colleagues from peer institutions) and certification increase self-awareness, affirmation, and opportunities for improvement. NCAA seeks information in four basic areas: governance and commitment to rule compliance; academic integrity; financial integrity; and equity, welfare, and sportsmanship.

NCAA decides if an institution is "fully certified," which signifies that its athletics department is in substantial conformity with NCAA operating principles; "certified with conditions," which signifies that its athletics department is in substantial conformity with operating principles but problems identified during the self-study and a peer-review team evaluation must be corrected before full certification is issued; or "not certified" (2005b). NCAA sanctions for nonconformance include suspension, probation, and termination of membership; limitations on postseason play, recruitment, and television coverage; imposition of fines; reduction of financial aid awards; and termination or suspension of coaching staff (2005b).

In 2003, NCAA created a new academic measure, known as the academic progress rate (APR), as part of a new academic reform program (2005a). APR is based on academic eligibility, retention, and graduation of scholarship student-athletes. APR is a real-time assessment of a team's academic performance that awards two points each term to scholarship student-athletes who meet academic eligibility standards and who remain with the institution. A team's APR is determined by adding total points earned at a given time divided by total points possible. NCAA will soon introduce a new academic measure, called the graduation success rate (GSR).

### **Organizations That Bargain with Institutions**

Not all institutions have formalized unions; however, many have internal organizations that bargain and negotiate like formalized unions. Unions are important external assessment users because they influence an organization's capacity to perform through threats of strikes and actual strikes and slowdowns.

The purpose of most unions is to advance causes and further the interests of their members. Unions such as the National Education Association (2006) also impose codes of ethics on their members and serve as lobbyists. Unions use assessment for several purposes but primarily to support a bargaining position, advocate for their causes, and ensure compliance with collective bargaining agreements.

Unions in higher education typically seek answers to the following questions:

What is the organization's current and projected workforce?

What are the organization's overall current and projected resources?

What percentage of resources has been and will be devoted to employee compensation and benefits?

What is the quality of worklife for employees?

What is the quality of the workplace (safety, security)?

How many jobs have been and will be eliminated, maintained, expanded, or outsourced?

How many grievances have been submitted and processed each year or bargaining cycle? What are the nature and scope of those grievances, and what actions typically result from them?

## External Academic Peers

This last group is not an assessment user group in the same sense as the others because academic peers do not use assessment findings derived from an organization's assessment program. However, academic peers serve similar purposes as other assessment user groups in making decisions about the quality of performance (in this case, research) that have the potential of greatly influencing the reputation and future research opportunities and resources of academic organizations.

External academic peers are scholars who assess the quality and effectiveness of research submitted for publication in refereed journals. Refereed journals are published by professional associations, institutions, and other independent entities. Academic peers also assess the quality and effectiveness of published research and express their opinions through written rebuttals, formal reviews, citations, and use in follow-up studies.

As evaluators, external academic peers judge the quality of research (methodology, scope, relevance, findings) based on criteria, standards, and guidelines established by professional associations, editorial boards, institutions, and other external entities. This process of evaluation, known as peer review, has a long history in higher

education and performs an important and significant role in the assessment of research.

## Internal Assessment User Groups

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Internal assessment user groups operate inside the institution. As noted earlier, there are three types of internal assessment users, defined by position and job responsibilities: senior leaders, administrators and managers, and faculty and staff. These groups use assessment to account to others, manage strategy, build learning organizations that strengthen innovation, allocate resources, control quality, improve programs and services, and support personnel decisions.

### Senior Leaders

For purposes of assessment, senior leaders are defined as people responsible for providing the organization with direction and support. Senior leaders are presidents, vice presidents, chancellors, vice chancellors, and deans. Senior leaders operate at the institutional level; however, in some large institutions, senior leaders also operate at the college or school level.

For assessment purposes, senior leaders are distinguished from administrators and managers. In truth, many senior leaders perform management functions and many administrators and managers perform leadership functions. The important point is that people engaged in leadership activities use assessment differently than people engaged in management activities.

Because of their wide range of responsibilities, senior leaders need a variety of assessment information. Their individual information preferences vary according to their leadership and decision-making styles; however, most senior leaders, at one point or another, seek answers to some or all of the following questions:

Are we clear in our purpose, and do we share a vision of excellence?

Are we structured so as to maximize our resources and achieve our strategic goals?

Are our guiding principles clear, and to what extent are we practicing them? Does our organizational culture optimize organizational performance?

Do we value our public responsibilities, and do we set high standards as an organizational citizen?

Are we offering the right programs and services?

Are we achieving what we intended to achieve in terms of teaching, research, and service?

Are we making progress on our strategic goals?

Are we as productive as we should be?

Are we more productive than we were in the past? What organizational operations have recently increased productivity?

Are we using our resources efficiently? What human, financial, technological, and facilities resources do we waste, and how do we waste them? Are we using our resources as we expected?

What does it cost to manage quality in our programs and services in relation to benefits from those costs?

Are we as innovative as we should be? What creative changes have we implemented over the past three years? What parts of our operations have not undergone creative changes in the past three years and why? In what ways have our creative changes improved performance results?

Have we established partnerships with the right partners and suppliers? To what extent do our partnerships achieve their objectives?

What is the quality of our faculty and staff? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How prepared is our workforce to meet future requirements of our organization? Do our high-performing employees leave our organization, and if so, why do they leave? Is the departure rate better than last year?

How many worker-hours are lost to illness and injury?

Are our employees satisfied with their compensation and benefits? How do we compare with other institutions that share our mission?

What is the quality of our leadership system and organizational structure? How effectively do these systems shape and lead us toward a shared vision of excellence?

What is the quality of our infrastructure in terms of technology, buildings, and grounds? Do our level and use of technology enable us to be competitive? Does our technology encourage or impede innovation and change?

Does our location provide easy access to the people we serve and that serve us?

Do we protect our environment as much as we should and could?

How satisfied are the people we serve? How satisfied are our important stakeholders?

How effectively do we design our products and services to meet the future needs of the people we serve (students, research sponsors)?

How flexible are our key work processes, and how do we use that flexibility to meet our current and future requirements?

How much troubleshooting do we do, and how much does it cost to do it?

How many students leave before they complete their academic goals? Why do they leave? What percentage of students graduate? How long, on the average, does it take for students to graduate?

How do students pay for their education? Is this satisfactory? How much debt do they incur? What are the consequences for our institution's financial durability?

How much external funding do we receive in relation to need? What are the implications for our institution's financial durability?

How do our costs and service quality compare with those at comparable institutions? What would be gained by outsourcing some of our operations? Do our overall costs outweigh overall benefits received by the people we serve and our stakeholders?

Senior leaders use assessment for many purposes but mainly to account to important external stakeholders, manage strategy, support resource allocation decisions, and manage organizational culture. Each is discussed in turn.

### **Accountability**

External assessment users, such as governing boards, government agencies, and major donors, hold senior leaders accountable for the performance of their organizations. Senior leaders use assessment to account to these important stakeholders in terms of mission achievement (performance outcomes), progress toward strategic goals, efficient use of resources, quality of institutional resources, programs and services, accreditation, ranking, compliance, and so forth.

Internal auditors assess performance on behalf of senior leaders. They evaluate performance against internal policies and procedures and sometimes against external laws, rules, standards, and criteria. Internal auditors report assessment findings to senior leaders through audit reports.

It is the responsibility of senior leaders to identify and clarify all the unique needs of the organization's important external assessment users. It is the responsibility of assessment leaders to build a robust assessment program that enables senior leaders to fulfill their accountability responsibilities.

### **Managing Strategy**

Senior leaders use assessment results to manage strategy in specific ways, namely, to frame strategy; to clarify, operationalize, and align strategy; and to monitor strategy achievement.

*Framing Strategy.* Senior leaders use strategic planning processes to frame strategies that determine an organization's competitive advantage and place in the environment. Barbara Taylor and William Massey (1996) argue that strategic thinking requires objectivity and an honest assessment of how an institution is doing and where it is heading. Educational leaders must not only know what the organization is setting out to do but also when it has succeeded or failed.

Carter McNamara (1999b) explains that leaders use a variety of strategic planning models, including goals-based, issues-based, organic, or scenario-building models, to frame strategies. Leaders select the model best suited for their "organization's leadership, culture of the organization, complexity of the organization's environment, size of the organization, expertise of planners," and other factors (p. 1).

Strategic planning typically starts with an analysis of an organization's external and internal environment—a process known as a SWOT analysis (SWOT is an acronym for "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.") External environmental factors, such as pending legislation, emerging health issues, demographic trends, and emerging social, economic, technology, and financial issues, present opportunities and threats to organizations in higher education that senior leaders consider when framing strategy.

Assessment is also helpful in exposing institutional strengths and weaknesses. Through assessment, senior leaders can discover a great many things, including these:

- Nature and scope of student learning
- Quality of research
- Quality of programs and services
- Levels of satisfaction of employees, students, and important stakeholders
- Quality of partnerships with important suppliers and service partners
- Quality of critical resources
- Quality of work processes
- Current levels of productivity and efficiency
- Scope of innovation
- Financial health and well-being of the institution

Institutional strengths and weaknesses, combined with external opportunities and threats, help senior leaders frame strategies to bring their institutions closer to their vision of performance excellence.

*Clarifying, Operationalizing, and Aligning Strategy.* One of the important functions of assessment, according to Robert Kaplan and David Norton (1996), is to help senior leaders add meaning and clarity to strategies. Organizations that “can translate their strategy into their measurement system are far better able to execute their strategy because they can communicate their objectives and their targets” (p. 147).

One way in which assessment helps leaders clarify strategic goals is by clarifying performance expectations through performance indicators and reference points. Take, for example, the strategy to increase enrollment. Exhibit 1.1 illustrates how assessment helps leaders clarify performance expectations of this strategic goal through performance indicators and reference points.

Kaplan and Norton (1996) claim that assessment also helps leaders put strategy into action—in other words, operationalize strategy. Assessment does this by clarifying how strategy affects specific entities in the organization. For example, take the strategy “increase enrollment” and its performance indicator of “undergraduate student FTE in chemistry, physics, and engineering” and reference point of “increase by an average of 3 percent over the next five years.” This performance indicator and reference point send a loud signal to the Chemistry, Physics, and Engineering Departments and their supporting organizations. The strategy, as clarified, does not explain what actions need to be taken, nor does it guarantee additional resources, but it clearly indicates which organizations need to act.

Sometimes lofty strategies need to be operationalized through subgoals more conducive to action and assessment. For example, leaders could operationalize the same strategy “increase enrollment” by creating several subgoals, one of which could be “increase retention.” Leaders can measure actual performance of this strategic subgoal (depending on institutional circumstances) through performance indicators and reference points such as those listed in Exhibit 1.2.

According to Kaplan and Norton (1996), leaders also use assessment to link important strategic objectives together and to align local efforts with institutional efforts. Strategic alignment is critical to performance success and requires linkages between strategic goals, lower-level organizational goals, functional goals, personal goals, and assessment. Without alignment, “individuals and departments can optimize their local performance [and still] not contribute to achieving strategic objectives” (p. 148). Strategic alignment also requires linkages between goals and recognition, promotion, and compensation programs.

## Exhibit 1.1

Performance Indicators and Reference Points  
for the Strategic Goal “Increase Enrollment”

<b>Performance Indicators</b>	<b>Reference Points</b>
First-year student headcount	Increase by an average of 3 percent over the next three years
New transfer student FTE	Increase by an average of 4 percent over the next three years
Undergraduate student FTE in chemistry, physics, and engineering	Increase by an average of 3 percent over the next five years

## Exhibit 1.2

Performance Indicators and Reference Points  
for the Strategic Subgoal “Increase Retention”

<b>Performance Indicators</b>	<b>Reference Points</b>
Retention rate of minority student headcount	Increase by an average of 3 percent over the next five years
Retention rate of upper division transfer student headcount	Increase by an average of 3 percent over the next five years
Retention rate of entering first-year student headcount	Increase by an average of 3 percent over the next five years

**Monitoring Strategy.** According to Kaplan and Norton (1996), leaders use assessment to learn when and if strategic goals are achieved. When formulating strategy, leaders create measures not only to clarify, operationalize, and align strategy but also to measure its achievement as part of their accountability and improvement responsibilities.

Mark Huselid, Brian Becker, and Richard Beatty (2005) claim that it is easier to craft a strategy than to deliver one. For this reason, leaders should build a “workforce scorecard” that identifies and monitors workforce success in relation to strategic execution. To maximize workforce potential, leaders should view human capital in terms of contribution to strategy execution rather than just cost and productivity. The authors claim that it is not the activity that counts but the impact of the activity on organizational outcomes. Leaders should recognize and accept that some positions and roles in an organization—positions that may have nothing to do with hierarchy—have a more important influence on execution and achievement of strategy than others. Leaders should differentiate those positions and label them as “A” positions. Furthermore, they should allocate a disproportionate

amount of resources to them and more closely monitor their success and contributions to strategy execution.

Using Huselid and colleagues' arguments, leaders assessing the "increase enrollment" strategy should differentiate (and classify as "A") positions in the organization that have the most impact on increasing enrollment, such as recruiting positions and positions that affect retention of high-risk students. Leaders should also allocate a disproportionate amount of resources to these positions and more closely monitor their success and contributions to strategy execution.

It remains unresolved whether senior leaders, in addition to administrators and managers, should use assessment to monitor or drive strategy. Some experts believe that assessment should be used only to monitor strategy achievement and not to drive it. Others argue that assessment should make visible specific performance weaknesses that can only be addressed through strategic initiatives that take advantage of emerging opportunities. Assessment, they argue, should be used to uncover and drive strategy.

No doubt both propositions are true because senior leaders use assessment to learn when and where improvement is needed but also to compare levels of performance against strategic goals. In both uses, however, senior leaders must link assessment to performance associated with strategies derived from strategic planning processes. Without links to strategy, assessment becomes the driver of change. And when assessment becomes the driver of change, people cannot understand where the organization is going and how they fit in. Instead, they perceive assessment as a personal report card, with consequences for their job security or compensation (or both). When assessment becomes the driver of change, people are more likely to believe that they are victims of assessment and may then feel compelled to fake or sabotage data or to focus on short-term fixes rather than on long-term improvements, thereby limiting the organization's improvement potential. When people see strategies derived from strategic planning processes as the drivers of change, rather than assessment, they are more likely to support changes leading to strategic execution if they were involved in the strategic planning process; focus on long-term, systemic improvements rather than short-term fixes; and are supportive of assessment because of its focus on organizational rather than personal performance results. Finally, assessment taken out of its strategic context prevents leaders from gaining assessment's added benefit of helping them clarify, operationalize, and align strategic, organizational, lower-level, and personal goals and assessment.

### **Supporting Resource Allocation Decisions**

Senior leaders also use assessment to support resource allocation decisions. Good decision making is usually supported by reliable and

valid decision support data, much of which comes from assessment. Senior leaders face many challenging, sometimes unpopular, decisions to ensure the future success of their organizations. For example, senior leaders frequently face decisions to sustain, eliminate, reorganize, downsize, expand, outsource, or privatize all or some of the institution's operations. Senior leaders need timely and accurate assessment results about a unit's costs and benefits to support these difficult decisions.

In institutions using incentive-based, responsibility-based, and program-based budgeting processes, senior leaders use assessment to support resource allocation decisions. In institutions using formalized performance management systems, senior leaders use assessment to support high-level personnel decisions that frame employee compensation and benefits. Senior leaders also use assessment to improve organizational structure and infrastructure (buildings, grounds, technology) in an effort to optimize the institution's critical resources.

### **Managing Organizational Culture**

Edgar Schein (1992) claims that organizational leaders have a responsibility for creating and monitoring an organization's culture. It is "the unique function of leadership to perceive the functional and dysfunctional elements of the existing culture and to manage cultural evolution and change in such a way that the group can survive in a changing environment" (p. 15).

More and more, senior leaders use assessment to ensure that organizational culture is supportive to organizational learning and innovation. Fred Kofman and Peter Senge (1993) define learning organizations as organizations that continuously adapt to changing and interdependent environments. Learning organizations are systemic, cooperative, and creative compared to traditional organizations, which are fragmented, competitive, and reactive. Richard Karash (2001) defines learning organizations as organizations in which people at all levels, individually and collectively, increase their capacity to produce results they really care about.

In 1998, Peter Drucker described ingredients for what he calls the discipline of innovation: know the organization's purpose (mission), define significant results (vision), abandon programs where they don't get results, and "reassess, reassess, and reassess." That same year, Peter Senge (1998) expanded on Drucker's discipline of innovation by adding the ingredient of working together and learning from one another's efforts. Without a culture of organizational learning, organizations stifle their innovativeness. Assessment is the core research initiative for all learning organizations. And for purposes of innovation, assessment for learning is much more powerful than assessment for evaluation, according to Senge.

Senior leaders recognize that for an organization to “learn,” all members of the organizational community must understand where the organization is headed and how much progress is being achieved. The organizational community needs regular, accurate, and timely feedback on progress toward strategic goals. In a true learning organization, members use assessment to answer the performance question “How are we doing in relation to our performance goals?” Senior leaders, as well as administrators and managers, use assessment to enable the organization to learn from its past performance within the context of its desired future.

### Administrators and Managers

For purposes of assessment, administrators and managers are defined as all individuals who manage the operations of an organization or a “unit of analysis” whose performance is under review. In higher education, administrators and managers generally include assistant vice presidents, assistant deans, directors, coordinators, and department chairpersons. As mentioned before, many administrators and managers perform leadership functions, and many senior leaders perform management functions. The important point is that people engaged in management activities use assessment somewhat differently than when they are engaged in leadership activities.

The expression “unit of analysis” is used in assessment to define an organization, program, or process whose performance is under review. A unit of analysis can be an entire institution, a college such as the College of Arts and Sciences, a school such as a law school or medical school, an academic department such as the Chemistry Department, an administrative office such as Admissions or Information Services, a program such as General Education or Writing Across the Curriculum, or a cross-functional process such as payroll. When properly used in assessment, a unit of analysis whose performance is under review has very clear boundaries. Boundaries can be delineated through traditional administrative and budgeting structures or other boundary-defining entities. When a unit of analysis is a cross-functional process such as payroll, the unit requires a clear beginning and ending and clear lines of responsibility and ownership.

Administrators and managers seek answers to many of the same assessment questions as senior leaders do:

Are we offering the right programs and services?

How effective are we at achieving our intended outcomes?

What is the quality of our programs and services?

What is the quality of our resources?

How productive, efficient, and innovative are we?

What is the quality of our organizational culture, and how satisfied is our workforce?

How satisfied are the people we serve?

Like senior leaders, administrators and managers use assessment to account to important stakeholders for their unit's overall performance, manage goals and objectives, support resource allocation decisions, and strengthen organizational culture to encourage innovation. However, in their managerial role, they also use assessment to monitor and control operations; improve programs, services, and processes; and support personnel decisions.

### **Monitoring and Controlling Operations**

Many administrators and managers use assessment to monitor and control people and processes. Administrators and managers use assessment at the operational level to signal when people and processes are getting "out of control" and short-term adjustments are needed. They also use assessment to become aware of problems so that they can put a stop to "business as usual." This form of "quality control" does not necessarily improve performance—it just lets administrators and managers know that performance is not within the normal or intended range.

Administrators in higher education have always used assessment to monitor and control financial aspects of organizational performance. Whether watching for cost overruns on a construction project or overspending in a specific budget line item, administrators and managers use monthly financial reports to monitor budget-to-actual spending to learn when spending is getting out of control.

Increasingly, administrators and managers use specialized software to monitor and control other aspects of organizational performance. For example, they use technology to track technical computer problems, requests for service, computer and network usage and outages, equipment reliability, breaches of security, donor activities, and admissions inquiries, admits, and yield rates. Libraries use technology to monitor usage and track circulation of holdings. Academic advisers use technology to review student progress toward stated goals.

Administrators and managers also use assessment to make sure that resource deployment is aligned with approved plans and institutional strategic initiatives and that operations are in compliance with laws, regulations, accreditation standards, ranking criteria, funding criteria, eligibility standards, and the like. In academic organizations, responsibility for compliance is shared with the faculty. In administrative organizations, responsibility for compliance is shared with employees, but it depends on the degree of employee empowerment existing in the organization under review.

### **Improving Programs, Services, and Processes**

One of the most important uses of assessment is to improve programs, services, and processes. In most organizations, improvement is a shared responsibility.

Administrators, managers, faculty, and staff pursue program, service, and process improvements using a variety of systematic and nonsystematic approaches. Those who use a nonsystematic and more intuitive approach base improvement actions on exposure and experience rather than on performance findings derived from an assessment program. They need and use assessment findings less because they believe that they have a full understanding of the problem, available resources, and levels of support in the political environment. An intuitive approach, which is generally less collaborative than a team-based, systematic approach, usually garners less support among the parties affected by changes that they had no part in generating.

For administrators and managers who use a more systematic approach to program, service, and process improvement, "In God we trust; all others bring data" is a familiar admonition. Systematic approaches generally start with the formation of improvement teams who use assessment every step of the way. For example, teams engaged in process reengineering, benchmarking, Six Sigma, and other traditional improvement approaches use assessment to answer some of the following questions:

How does current performance compare to a desired state?

How does it compare to that of other organizations?

What would the costs to our unit and the institution be if performance is not improved now or in the future?

What are the nature and scope of performance problems?

What are the nature and scope of causes of poor performance?

In what ways can processes be improved? Will our improvements affect the performance of other institutional operations? Which improvements will optimize performance the most? Which improvements will optimize use of critical resources the most?

How will we know when performance has improved?

How much will improvements cost?

To what extent has performance changed as a result of implemented improvements, and how much has it actually cost? Have changes improved performance? Have changes affected other organizations?

How does improved performance compare to a desired state?

What else needs improvement? How much will it cost?

Finally, many administrators and managers who operate within the context of program-based, incentive-based, or responsibility-based budgeting processes use assessment to support budget requests for feasibility studies and other resources required to implement programs and service improvements.

### **Supporting Personnel Decisions**

Administrators and managers also use assessment to support personnel decisions. They use assessment to determine the relative importance of a particular position to the organization, comparable salaries for that position currently offered by competitors in the marketplace, results from a 360-degree feedback system about the individual's past performance, and some aspect of the individual's unit overall performance results. After evaluating a person's past performance in relation to stated goals and clear expectations, supervisors determine appropriate rewards or sanctions.

Administrators and managers who use organizational performance results in the appraisal of lower-level personnel must do so cautiously. Rewarding or punishing lower-level staff on the basis of results of a process in which they have less than full control is a misguided use of assessment data. For example, it is wrong for administrators and managers to hold an employee accountable for customer complaints, slow response times, or mistakes inherent in a process over which the employee has little or no control or responsibility. It is fair, however, to hold all employees accountable for identifying and solving process problems and for advocating and initiating improvements to programs, services, and work processes if supervisors have clarified these expectations early in the performance management process.

Some academic administrators use assessment to support faculty personnel decisions. However, most faculty personnel decisions, such as promotion, tenure, and salary decisions, are made or recommended by faculty committees that may or may not use assessment to support their decisions.

## **Faculty and Staff**

Except when negotiating and bargaining as a union (described earlier as an external user group), most faculty and staff are generally interested in assessment findings pertaining to their own units or a universal topic or issue about which they are studying or making recommendations through committees and task forces.

It should be noted that faculty and staff are not only internal assessment users but also assessors who collect, analyze, and disseminate assessment results for other assessment users. Furthermore, they can also represent owners of the assessment program.

As an internal assessment user group, faculty and staff, like senior leaders, administrators, and managers, use assessment results for accountability, decision support, and improvement. However, they also use assessment results to support the work of committees and task forces conducting self-studies for accreditation and institutional program reviews, faculty personnel decisions, and other important universitywide functions.

Traditional higher educational institutions operate within the context of collegiality, a governance structure that generates many important ad hoc and standing committees and task forces. Major committees or task forces are given specific charges that determine the boundaries of their work. Those charged with the responsibility of solving particular problems or improving selected programs, services, and work processes use either a systematic or nonsystematic approach to their work. Those who use a systematic approach to improvement make copious use of assessment results, as described earlier. Committees and task forces, depending on their purpose, use assessment to understand the nature of emerging issues or problems, inform the group's decisions, support their causes, and justify their recommendations to others.

Faculty committees and task forces charged with the responsibility of conducting self-studies for accreditation and program review use assessment for two purposes: accountability and improvement, according to Catherine Palomba and Trudy Banta (1999). These committees use assessment results during the life of a program as formative assessment to modify, shape, and improve a program's performance. They use assessment after a program has been in operation for a while for accountability and to make summative judgments about its quality or worth compared to previously defined standards for performance.

Faculty skepticism and resistance to some forms of assessment is well documented. However, David Tritelli (2002) claims that even assessment's strongest critiques have "come to be overwhelmed by a sense of inevitability" (p. 3). The threshold question is not whether to assess but what and how to assess. In his historical review of the assessment of student outcomes, Peter Ewell (2002) tracks the development of faculty support for and use of assessment. He recalls an early faculty debate called the "ineffability debate." In this debate, faculty felt that initial attempts to assess student outcomes directly were both demeaning and doomed to failure. The faculty's reservations were founded on methodological, philosophical, and political concerns. Faculty eventually adopted assessment as a survival strategy, improved the assessment methods, and ultimately became comfortably rooted in a peer-based community of judgment.

Ewell (2002) also describes what he calls the "value-added debate." This revolves around whether assessment should focus on ab-

solute levels of student achievement or institutional contributions to developing student abilities. The classic approach to assessing learning gains through pretesting and posttesting, according to this debate, poses perplexing conceptual issues and formidable methodological problems. For example, pretests may not work because students have not yet been exposed to subjects on which they will be posttested. This debate, according to Ewell, helped “forge a growing consensus that paths of student development should not be seen as linear and additive but rather as organic and transformational” (p. 18). As a result, longitudinal studies were developed that were capable of capturing large numbers of variables about both outcomes and experiences using multivariate statistics.

Ewell (2002) claims that faculty on most campuses now use assessment results one way or another; however, “fundamental transformations in instruction that might have resulted from examining systemic evidence of student learning have mostly not happened” (p. 23). Instead, faculty regard assessment of student learning outcomes as an “add-on, done principally at the behest of the administration and sustained as a superstructure outside the traditional array of academic activities and rewards” (p. 23).

Most faculty tenure and promotion requests are decided by faculty peers serving on promotion and tenure committees, many of whom use assessment to support their decisions. Most committees use assessment results focused on productivity and quality of research and service; few use assessment results focused on quality of an individual’s teaching effectiveness as measured by achievement of intended student learning outcomes. According to Roger Benjamin and Richard Hersh (2002), academic cultures do not necessarily value systemic cumulative assessment of undergraduate learning to support faculty requests for promotion, tenure, and merit raises. “The metric most commonly used . . . is a system of qualitative and quantitative measures that emphasize research productivity” (p. 10).

Debate continues as to whether the results of assessments related to student learning conducted at the course and departmental levels should be used to support faculty personnel decisions. Palomba and Banta (1999) argue that assessment results should be used for the evaluation of programs, not faculty members. They explain that the “essential factor in making assessment work is building trust among faculty that the information collected through assessment activities will not be used for inappropriate purposes.” Furthermore, “faculty should be rewarded for the time and energy they invest in assessment-related activities. Institutions should encourage the recognition of assessment activities in faculty review processes” (p. 70).

Barbara Walvoord (2004) takes a different view. She argues “a wise institution keeps the focus [of assessment] on collective action,

not on individual blame. However, if students are learning well in a class, a faculty member may find that information highly useful at renewal, promotion, or tenure time” (p. 9). For example, evidence of learning can balance low student evaluations. But, she argues, the opposite is also true. “Evidence of inadequate student learning in one’s class ought to galvanize the teacher and the department for appropriate action. That action must be collegial and supportive, just as it optimally is when a faculty member is not producing sufficient research. The truth is that assessment brings to teaching a level of accountability that was not always present before and that can be used to benefit the students, faculty, and the institution” (p. 9).

To summarize, faculty who have access to assessment findings related to the effectiveness of their teaching, research, and service may or may not use those findings to support tenure, promotion, and salary requests. It is important to note that during the initial years of higher education in the United States, faculty assessed student learning primarily for the purpose of determining teacher effectiveness. Today, faculty use assessment to measure levels of mastery, provide feedback to students, account to important stakeholders, and improve programs and services. They may or may not use assessment of student learning as a measure of their individual teacher effectiveness.

The degree to which employees at all levels use assessment meaningfully as members of a learning organization depends on several important factors, according to Margaret Wheatley (2005). Employees use assessment in meaningful ways only when they can determine what and how to measure performance. Furthermore, employees must believe assessment is a function of internal and not external forces, adaptive and evolving rather than static, and a form of feedback that increases their own capacity to grow and develop and helps the organization grow in the right direction.

Worksheet 1.1 is designed to help assessors identify their unit’s important external and internal assessment user groups. Examples are provided for a fictitious Chemistry Department.

## Summary

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This chapter explored two types of assessment user groups: external and internal. Each group requires different types of assessment information and uses assessment for different purposes. Assessment user groups in higher education were defined as the “end users” of assessment and therefore represent the “customers” of the assessment program. External user groups are governing boards; governmental agencies; potential students (and parents), potential donors (including alumni), potential employees, and potential contractors; organi-

zations that affirm; and external academic peers. External user groups use assessment to hold organizations accountable; support policy and resource allocation decisions; impose sanctions for noncompliance; support choice decisions; affirm accreditation status, rank, classification, administration censure, athletic eligibility, and bargaining position; and validate research quality. Internal user groups are senior leaders, administrators and managers, and faculty and staff. Internal user groups use assessment to account to others, manage strategy, manage organizational culture, allocate resources, control quality, improve programs and services, support personnel decisions, and advocate causes.

Worksheet 1.1

Assessment User Group Analysis

Unit of Analysis: \_\_\_\_\_ (Example: Chemistry Department)

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Use this worksheet to analyze the unit's major assessment user groups. In column A, list all of the unit's important internal and external assessment user groups. Check column B or C to indicate whether the user group is external or internal to the institution. In column D, describe important decisions this user group makes, based on assessment results that affect the unit. Finally, in column E, using a scale of 1 (least important) to 5 (most important), rate the overall importance of each assessment user group to the unit.

<b>Assessment User Groups (A)</b>	<b>External (B)</b>	<b>Internal (C)</b>	<b>Important Decisions This Group Makes Based on Assessment Findings (D)</b>	<b>Rating of Overall Importance to Unit (E)</b>
<i>Example:</i> SACSCC Regional Accrediting Site Visiting Team	<i>Example:</i> ✓	<i>Example:</i>	<i>Example:</i> ▪ Reaffirm institutional accreditation that determines □ Eligibility for federal, state, and local funding □ Eligibility for NCAA sports □ Level of competitiveness with similar institutions for quality students, faculty, and staff	<i>Example:</i> 5