

**SURVEYING THE ASSESSMENT LANDSCAPE:  
CONVERSATIONS ON GOOD PRACTICES**

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**New Mexico Higher Education Assessment  
and Retention (NMHEAR) Conference  
February 23rd, 2007**

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# WORKSHOP EXERCISES

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## Conversation 1: Wobegon Case Study

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**Purpose:** To discuss and develop strategies for analyzing and acting on evidence of student learning.

To discuss and develop strategies for creating shared responsibility for student learning.

**Timeframe:** 60 minutes

### Activities & Conversations:

1. (5 minutes) Individually, read over the Wobegon College case study. Jot down any notes or questions that come to mind.

2. At your table, discuss the case study using the following questions to guide your conversation:

◆ (20 minutes) **In what ways should Wobegon College be analyzing and using the evidence of student learning?**

- Who should be involved in the analysis?
- What does the evidence suggest about student learning?
- Can the same evidence be used in different ways?
- Who will act on the evidence to initiate a change?

◆ (20 minutes) **How could Wobegon College ensure shared responsibility for student learning and assessment of student learning?**

- What strategies could be used to educate and engage others (e.g., students, faculty, staff, board of trustees) in assessment of student learning?
- What are the roles that these people have in ensuring student learning? Create a list identifying titles and responsibilities.
- Would the same strategy work equally well with all stakeholders?
- What process is in place (or needs to be created) to ensure change or improvements will happen?

3. Capture the major points of your discussion using these three headers:

**Analysis & use of the evidence of student learning**

**Ideas on shared responsibility of student learning**

**Recommendations for acting on the evidence**

4. (15 minutes) **Report Out**

We'll have several groups report out the most important points from the three headers above.

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## Conversation 2: Applications to Your Institution

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**Purpose:** Provide an opportunity to engage in a meaningful, self-directed conversation about student learning, framed around an issue that you currently find most pressing.

**Timeframe:** 60 minutes (total)

**Activities & Conversations:**

1. (5 minutes) Individually, spend a few minutes reading and thinking about the fundamental questions below.

**Fundamental Questions for Conversations on Student Learning**

- (1) How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, degrees, students, and other stakeholders?
- (2) What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?
- (3) In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?
- (4) How do you ensure shared responsibility for student learning and assessment of student learning?
- (5) How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of your efforts to assess and improve student learning?
- (6) In what ways do you inform the public and other stakeholders about what your students are learning?

2. (5 minutes) What fundamental question best captures the conversation you are ready to explore right now?

*Through a show of hands and some moving about, we will hold several simultaneous semi-structured conversations about assessing student learning.*

## Fundamental Question 1

### **Are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, degrees, & students?**

**Purpose:** Understand how assessment efforts align with the mission.  
Define the core questions and goals for assessment.

**Timeframe:** 45 minutes

#### **Activities & Conversations:**

1. (5 minutes) Individually, jot down your response to these three questions about your institution:
  - What are some defining aspects or characteristics of your institution, its mission, its operations, its students, its current context, priorities, culture, etc., that are critical for any “outsider” to understand?
  - What are your goals for assessment beyond maintaining accreditation?
  - What do you want the benefits of your work and your institution’s efforts to be?
2. (30 minutes) Using your notes as context, discuss:
  - How does mission influence what learning is the right learning?
  - Do students learn what you claim they learn?
  - How might you use the information gathered from your assessment efforts to actually meet some of the goals you identified?
  - How are your learning outcomes tested against the institution’s mission? What methods do you utilize?
  - What are potential goals and benefits of assessment that would be valued and meaningful to your institution?
3. Capture the major points of your discussion.
4. (10 -15 minutes) Time and space permitting, you will report out the most important points of your conversation to the larger group.

## Fundamental Question 2

### **What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?**

**Purpose:** To identify strategies & methods for ensuring there is appropriate evidence that students are meeting intended student learning outcomes.

**Timeframe:** 45 minutes

#### **Activities & Conversations:**

1. (5 minutes) Individually, jot down your response to these questions regarding assessment at your institution:
  - What evidence exists that students achieve stated learning outcomes?
  - What evidence exists on effective teaching and learning environments?
  - Ideally & practically, what evidence would you *want* to have on student learning, effective teaching, and learning environments?
  - Is there a gap between these questions? How would you close this gap?
2. (30 minutes) Using your notes as context, discuss:
  - Why does the aforementioned gap(s) exist?
  - At what points in the curriculum or co-curricular activities are essential outcomes (institutional, program, gen ed, major) assessed?
  - When, how, & who collects this information? Who analyzes the data?
  - What measures are working well? What needs to be changed? How do you know?
  - Is it relevant, useful, reflective of higher learning?
3. Capture the major points of your discussion.
4. (10 -15 minutes) Time and space permitting, you will report out the most important points of your conversation to the larger group.

## Fundamental Question 3

### **In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?**

**Purpose:** To identify strategies and methods for using and acting on evidence of student learning.

**Timeframe:** 45 minutes

#### **Activities & Conversations:**

1. (5 minutes) Individually, jot down your response to these three questions about your institution:
  - In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?
  - What systems are in place to ensure that conclusions are drawn and actions taken on the basis of the analysis of evidence?
  - Who uses the evidence to make changes and improvements? Does this person or group have the authority to make the changes?
2. (30 minutes) Using your notes as context, discuss:
  - How should evidence of student learning be incorporated into planning and budgeting efforts at the department or academic division level?
  - How should evidence of student learning be incorporated into broad institutional planning and budgeting efforts?
  - What is the *process* of acting on recommendations from assessment efforts?
  - Draw a map of the process identifying offices, committees, and other entities that are involved in making the change(s) occur.
3. Capture the major points of your discussion. Include a map of a process, as discussed.
4. (10 -15 minutes) Time and space permitting, you will report out the most important points of your conversation to the larger group.

## Fundamental Question 4

### **How do you ensure shared responsibility for student learning and assessment of student learning?**

**Purpose:** Identify & develop strategies for engaging a variety of constituents in effective assessment of student learning.

**Timeframe:** 45 minutes

#### **Activities & Conversations:**

1. (5 minutes) Individually, jot down your response to these three questions about your institution:
  - Who are your constituents with regard to assessment of student learning?
  - How do you engage them in the process of assessing student learning?
  - What are the motivations and interests of all these constituents in students learning? Do these differ? Why?
2. (30 minutes) Using your notes as context, discuss:
  - What were the common constituents identified? What were some of the interesting ones?
  - What strategies can you use to educate *everyone* about assessment--and engage them in the process?
  - How are results of assessment processes communicated to stakeholders (including students) inside and outside of your institution? Were these stakeholders engaged in the process? ...in determining learning outcomes?
  - What's the impact of changing demographics and industries on teaching & learning? How do you know about the changes?
3. Capture the major points of your discussion. Provide information about interesting constituents and communication strategies.
4. (10 -15 minutes) Time and space permitting, you will report out the most important points of your conversation to the larger group.

## Fundamental Question 5

### **How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of your efforts to assess and improve student learning?**

**Purpose:** Identify & develop strategies for effectively evaluating your current efforts to assess student learning.

**Timeframe:** 45 minutes

#### **Activities & Conversations:**

1. (5 minutes) Individually, jot down your response to these questions about your institution:
  - Please sketch out your institution's assessment activities or make a quick inventory of current assessment practices.
  - Considering the above, at what point in the process do you evaluate your assessment efforts? Is there a strategic point to do so? Is it embedded in current practice?
  - Is there a gap between these questions? How would you close this gap?
2. (30 minutes) Using your notes as context, discuss:
  - Considering your sketches, what are the gaps? Why do they exist?
  - How do you measure the effectiveness of your assessment efforts? What type of evaluation activities occur? How often? By whom?
  - Have you identified benchmarks for learning and assessment?
  - Have you identified aspirational peers for learning and assessment? What do you want to learn from these aspirational peers? What could make this learning possible?
3. Capture the major points of your discussion. Include details of a plan for the evaluation of assessment efforts.
4. (10 -15 minutes) Time and space permitting, you will report out the most important points of your conversation to the larger group.

## Fundamental Question 6

### **In what ways do you inform the public and other stakeholders about what your students are learning?**

**Purpose:** Identify strategies and methods for informing the public and other stakeholders about student learning.

**Timeframe:** 45 minutes

#### **Activities & Conversations:**

1. (5 minutes) Individually, jot down your response to these three questions about your institution:
  - What do you want the public and other stakeholders to know about student learning and your efforts to assess and improve learning?
  - How do you currently make student learning and your efforts to assess and improve learning transparent to the public and other stakeholders?
  - Is there a gap between these two questions? How would you close this gap?
2. (30 minutes) Using your notes as context, discuss:
  - What are the challenges or worries about making student learning transparent?
  - What are the potential benefits of making student learning transparent?
  - Many institutions construct an Economic Impact Report; consider a Learning Impact Report. Who would be the audience? What and who would be impacted? Spend some time sketching out section or chapter headings. What data would be required to write this report?
3. Capture the major points of your discussion. Include information about a potential Learning Impact Report.
4. (10 -15 minutes) Time and space permitting, you will report out the most important points of your conversation to the larger group.