



Pearson LearningStudio:

Academic Assessment and Analytics in Higher Education

Beyond Measuring: Aligning Assessment and Analytics
with Achievement to Improve Student Success

There is an ongoing national debate concerning how to best measure student learning outcomes in higher education. Do greater analytics and measurement truly lead to greater student achievement? How can we best use data to hold institutions and students accountable for their performance?



The status quo is no longer acceptable—we can leverage data and analytics through technology to create a transformative change in higher education.

As a result of this discourse, there is a huge demand for colleges and universities to measure, demonstrate and improve access to performance data – especially across online programs, many of which are still in their infancy, as more working professionals invest in going back to school through distance learning and continuing education programs to advance or change their careers.

The majority of stakeholders, from academic institutions and educators to the government and accreditation agencies, agree that the status quo is no longer acceptable—and that we can leverage data and analytics through technology to create a transformative change in higher education. The result? Student success every step of the way.

Despite the litany of opinions around measuring student learning outcomes and the wide array of technology solutions out there—thousands of higher education institutions nationwide are already using assessment tools. A survey conducted by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment in April 2009 revealed that among all institutions surveyed – consisting of a national sample of colleges and universities – 92 percent are using at least one assessment tool with institutionally valid samples. Two-thirds use three or more measures at the same time. Ninety percent use at least one institutional-level tool while also having another approach to program assessment. Despite these promising numbers, the majority of respondents use the tools for accreditation purposes only, with little focus on other key areas, such as comparing grade to outcome, correlating satisfaction to success, and determining student readiness.

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The five key characteristics of an assessment culture include:



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What may account for institutions using multiple tools and their failure to attend to all areas of assessment is the wide range of technology solutions available— from academic analytics that produce actionable intelligence to programs that help to evaluate and reinvent course curriculum. Decision makers are challenged to cull through a variety of options and select the ones that best fit their institution’s needs, even if those solutions sometimes fall short. The key is to implement not just any solution, but the optimal technology that creates a constant feedback loop of measurement and data— ultimately driving 360 degrees of improvement.

The good news is that powerful, comprehensive applications and tools are emerging. These tools embrace and enable what we call an ‘assessment culture’— an environment that is ultimately focused on the best possible education for students and meaningfully connects and informs all stakeholders, from administrators and educators to students and parents.



The tools, which can be implemented with any web-enabled course, whether supplemental, hybrid or fully online, allow institutions to directly tie learning outcomes to course content, such as exams, assignments and discussions, for a clear-cut benchmark of student success. Institutions can encourage a culture of assessment by giving faculty and administrators access to a set of effective tools for writing and organizing learning statements (often connected to program accreditation standards), identifying the courses and teaching methods that map to these statements, and creating and storing rubrics for assessing the level of student achievement of these learning statements.



1. Building a culture of assessment and enhancing accreditation management

Public pressure is escalating for colleges and universities to measure performance and provide access to this data, yet some institutions still lack automated methods to collect and assess this vast amount of information. As a result, it is critical for institutions to adopt tools and technology that create an organized structure for defined learning outcomes and enable effective reporting of learning standards.

2. Monitoring and acting on key performance indicators

Assessment and analytics enable a proactive versus reactive approach. Action can be taken when specific conditions or thresholds are met based on trending data and monitoring reports related to multiple measures. These actions can occur in real time versus after the fact. The ability to make informed adjustments ultimately improves overall student learning and success rates, not to mention retention and accreditation effectiveness.



3. Setting the optimal pace for student success

Every student is different, so it is necessary to provide customized and appropriate learning paths that are guided by performance and metrics. By leveraging tools that facilitate student-centric learning, differentiated instruction, and collaborative effectiveness through data, instructors are empowered to drive student success.

4. Collecting, providing feedback on, and scoring student success

Adhering to national standards is now more important than ever. The ability to easily structure electronic portfolios that are aligned to standards and learning outcomes, as well as the ability to collect and report on data, is a key factor in a culture of assessment.



5. Consistently evaluating teaching and learning

Change cannot happen unless there is significant feedback to analyze. By regularly collecting and assessing student, teacher and administrator feedback on both well-documented and commonly overlooked topics, such as teacher workload, class size, and learning object effectiveness, both on-ground and online learning can be optimized.

While achieving a culture of assessment may not happen overnight, with the right tools and technology, combined with a collective strategy and commitment to embracing academic assessment and analytics practices, it is absolutely attainable. Keeping in mind that measurement loses its value without improvement, we can work from the classroom up to create the global citizens and effective educational institutions we need now and in the decades to come.

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