

“A Seat at the Table”: Considerations for Student Inclusion in Assessment**The Insight**

Students are a valuable resource in the assessment process and their inclusion may provide the greatest opportunity to enhance student learning and engagement in higher education.

Implications

College administrators need to examine the efficacy of their assessment practices and consider implementing strategies that allow for student involvement in the assessment process.

“If we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must first look to its assessment procedures.”

--Derek Rowntree

Student Assessment is, perhaps, one of the most salient issues facing our college campus today; especially, as we navigate a highly competitive higher education environment where resources are limited, student enrolment is declining, academic institutions are in abundance and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data has ascended as a valued source of student learning and engagement indicators.

Arguably, an approach we, as an institution, have yet to further consider in assessment is the active engagement of students in this process. Is there room at the table for student involvement in assessment? Although similar in nature, assessment is not to be confused with research <https://baselinesupport.campuslabs.com/hc/en-us/articles/204304485-The-Difference-Between-Assessment-and-Research>.

Inevitably, there are many potential benefits of involving students in assessment, including: democratization of the learning process, increased student engagement, student ownership of their learning process, increased student motivation, and the development of useful skills in self and peer-assessment, among other benefits.

After attending the IUPUI Assessment Institute in October, it appears that institutions across the country are equally concerned with student assessment and are supporting greater involvement of students in their learning and in how their learning is assessed. Furthermore, there was a resounding message that to build a culture of assessment you must include students in the process.

I was fortunate to attend a presentation by representatives of Bowling Green State University (BGSU) entitled: “Student Learning Analysts: Actively Engaging Undergraduates in the Assessment Process”. The group provided a systematic overview of a pilot program which included student employees in their university-wide assessment efforts. With support of academic affairs, they hired a group of Student Learning Analysts (SLA) to discuss the culture of assessment on campus, student expectations for learning and ways students could be involved in assessment. In addition, the SLAs were given NSSE data and asked to retrospectively reflect on the results. They were also assisted with conducting focus groups with their peers to discuss opportunities to advance several student Engagement Indicators (EIs) on the NSSE. The significance of involving SLAs in the assessment process was unparalleled. SLAs presented BGSU administration with an in-depth report from authentic perspectives that could only be extracted by students. The report was later disseminated to other leaders of the campus community for the purposes of reviewing existing efforts and planning new initiatives focused on student learning and engagement.

Again, is there a role for student involvement in assessment at Ferris State University? As Derek Rowntree (1987) stated, “if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must first look to its assessment procedures”. I encourage our campus community to critically think about our current assessment practices and to examine whether “saving a seat at the table” for student inclusion will further assist us in moving our college closer to achieving our institutional goals.

Rowntree, D. (1987). *Assessing Students: How Shall We Know Them?*, Kogan Page, London