

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT

Principles and Profiles of
Good Practice

TRUDY W. BANTA

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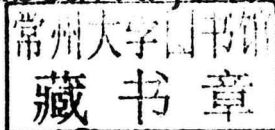
KAREN E. BLACK



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Trudy W. Banta, Elizabeth A. Jones,
Karen E. Black



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To
Holly, Logan, and T. J.
Father, Mother, and Debbie
Marie, Mary, Earl, Joe, Mary Anne, Beth, Ryan,
Brett, Claire, and Moses

And special thanks to
Shirley Yorger

PREFACE

“Please send me some examples of assessment in general education.” “I need examples of assessment in engineering and business.” “How can we encourage faculty to engage in assessment?” “Can you name ten institutions that are doing good work in assessment?” These are the questions colleagues around the globe send us via e-mail or ask us at conferences or during campus visits. These are the questions that motivated the three authors of this book to develop its content on outcomes assessment in higher education.

Two of us—Karen Black and Trudy Banta—were involved in a similar project in the mid-1990s. With colleagues Jon P. Lund and Frances W. Oblander, we edited *Assessment in Practice: Putting Principles to Work on College Campuses* (Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996). That book began with chapters on each of ten principles of good practice that had emanated from assessment experience prior to 1995 and continued with a section containing 86 short case studies of campus assessment practice categorized by the focus of assessment in each, including general education, student development, or classroom assessment. The principles and the cases in that 1996 publication are as relevant and useful today as they were then. In fact, two of us are still using the book as a reference and some of the cases as examples in the courses we teach for students enrolled in doctoral programs in higher education. Nevertheless, we decided that a new book organized similarly would give us even more examples to share when we are asked questions like those noted earlier.

First we posted a request on the ASSESS listserv for brief profiles of good practice in assessment. In addition, we sent some 800 e-mail requests to individuals who had contributed to *Assessment in Practice*, or to the bimonthly *Assessment Update*, or who had presented at the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis in recent years. We received approximately 180 expressions of interest in contributing a profile. We then wrote to these 180 individuals and asked them to prepare a 1,500-word profile using an outline we provided.

The outline we used for case studies for *Assessment in Practice* contained just four headings to guide authors in developing their narratives: Background and Purpose (of the Assessment Activity), Method, Findings and Their Use, and Success Factors. Now that more than a decade has passed, we wanted to know if the use of our findings had had a noticeable or measurable effect on practice, and more important, on student learning and success. We also were interested in details such as the years of implementation, and the cost of the assessment initiatives. Therefore, our outline for authors of profiles for this book contains the following headings: Background and Purpose(s) of Assessment, Assessment Method(s) and Year(s) of Implementation, Required Resources, Findings, Use of Findings, Impact of Using the Findings, Success Factors, and Relevant Institutional Web Sites Pertaining to This Assessment Practice.

We were surprised and pleased that a large proportion of the early expressions of interest we received led to the development of full profiles. By our deadline we had received 146 of these. After reviewing them we wrote Part One of this volume, illustrating the principles of good practice in assessment that we consider essential with examples from some of the 146 profiles. We used as the primary reference for the principles a section titled, “Characteristics of Effective Outcomes Assessment” in *Building a Scholarship of Assessment* (Banta & Associates, 2002). That listing was based on work by Hutchings (1993); Banta and Associates (1993); Banta et al. (1996); American Productivity and Quality Center (1998); and Jones, Voorhees, and Paulson (2002).

For Part Two of this volume we selected for inclusion in their entirety 49 of the most fully developed of the profiles we had received. As in *Assessment in Practice*, we placed each of the profiles in a category based on its primary focus, such as general education, academic major, or program review. The profiles in each category are preceded by a narrative that explains their most important features.

Initially we were quite frustrated by the fact that although we had received so many good profiles, we were able to use only a third of them due to space limitations. But then, after securing permission, we decided to list in Resource A all of the institutions and authors from the collection of 146 profiles. In almost every case we have provided a Web site that may be consulted for further

information about the assessment practices under way at the institution identified. In Resource B all the profiles are categorized to make it easier for readers to find the type of assessment (general education or graduate programs) they seek. Resource C presents a list of institutions by Carnegie Classification for the 49 profiles used in their entirety. Resource D contains the titles of the authors of the 49 full profiles.

The institutional profiles of assessment practice that we received represent a range of public and private institutions, from community colleges to research universities. Representation is also national in scope: profiles were received from institutions in California and Massachusetts, Florida and Oregon, and many states in between. As is clear from reading the “Background and Purpose” sections of the profiles, accreditation, both regional and disciplinary, has been a major driving force behind assessment at many of these institutions. State requirements for public institutions also played a role in some of the examples.

As we know so well, state and national legislators and federal policy makers are calling on colleges and universities to furnish concrete evidence of their accountability. Many of our constituents believe that standardized test scores will provide the evidence of student learning that is needed, and tests of generic skills such as writing and critical thinking are being suggested as the sources of such evidence. The profiles we have reviewed will disappoint decision makers in this regard. In almost all cases where standardized tests of generic skills have been used at these institutions, the test scores are not being reported as a single source of evidence of student learning. Faculty who have studied the scores over several years with the intention of using them to provide direction for improvements have determined that test scores alone are not adequate to the task of defining what students learn in college, nor are they illuminating and dependable guides for making decisions about improvements in curriculum and methods of instruction that will enhance student learning. Where standardized tests of generic skills have been tried, in most cases they have been supplemented with indirect measures such as questionnaires and focus groups and/or faculty-developed direct measures such as classroom tests or capstone projects.

Few of these assessment profiles contain the kind of quantitative data that could be reported simply and grasped easily by external audiences. Moreover, the information in the section “Impact of Using Findings” is seldom expressed in measurable terms. But we have assembled a wealth of information we can use to respond to that oft-asked question of how to engage faculty in assessment. And the evidence of student learning, engagement, and satisfaction that has been amassed has, in fact, been used to add courses and other learning experiences to the curriculum, to educate faculty about better ways to teach, and to improve student support services such as advising. Faculty time and administrative

leadership are the chief resources identified as critical to the success of assessment initiatives.

We sincerely hope that this book will be regarded by faculty, staff, and administrators as the rich resource of principles and profiles of good assessment practice that we envision.

September 2008

Trudy W. Banta
Elizabeth A. Jones
Karen E. Black

THE AUTHORS

Trudy W. Banta is professor of higher education and senior advisor to the chancellor for academic planning and evaluation at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis. She has developed and coordinated 21 national conferences and 15 international conferences on the topic of assessing quality in higher education. She has consulted with faculty and administrators in 46 states, Puerto Rico, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates and has by invitation addressed national conferences on outcomes assessment in Canada, China, England, France, Germany, Spain, and Scotland. Dr. Banta has edited 15 published volumes on assessment, contributed 26 chapters to published works, and written more than 200 articles and reports. She is the founding editor of *Assessment Update*, a bimonthly periodical published since 1989. She has been recognized for her work by the American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, American Productivity and Quality Center, Association for Institutional Research, National Council on Measurement in Education, and National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education.

Elizabeth A. Jones is professor of higher education leadership at West Virginia University (WVU). She has conducted assessment research supported by the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative that resulted in the publication of two books.

She served as the principal investigator of a general education assessment project supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

She has chaired the general education assessment committee at WVU and offered numerous professional development seminars to both student affairs staff and faculty members. Dr. Jones has published numerous articles pertaining to assessment and has presented at national conferences. She is currently the editor of the *Journal of General Education* published by the Pennsylvania State University Press.

Karen E. Black is director of program review at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis where she teaches in the organizational leadership and supervision department and is an adjunct faculty member in University College. She is managing editor of *Assessment Update*.

Designing Effective Assessment

CONTENTS

Preface vii

The Authors xi

PART ONE: PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT 1

- 1 Planning Effective Assessment 3
- 2 Implementing Effective Assessment 11
- 3 Improving and Sustaining Effective Assessment 21

PART TWO: PROFILES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT 29

- 4 Good Practice in Implementing Assessment Planning 31
- 5 General Education Profiles 55
- 6 Undergraduate Academic Majors Profiles 89
- 7 Faculty and Staff Development Profiles 109

8	Use of Technology Profiles	129
9	Program Review Profiles	149
10	First-Year Experiences, Civic Engagement Opportunities, and International Learning Experiences Profiles	173
11	Student Affairs Profiles	199
12	Community Colleges Profiles	219
13	Graduate Programs Profiles	235
14	Good Practice in Improving and Sustaining Assessment	253

RESOURCES

A	Institutional Profiles by Institution	279
B	Institutional Profiles by Category	297
C	Profiled Institutions by Carnegie Classification	311
D	Contributors of Profiles Included in Their Entirety	315
	References	321
	Index	327



PART ONE

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

We introduce this volume with a set of principles for good practice in assessing the outcomes of higher education that have been drawn from several sources, principally from the “characteristics of effective outcomes assessment” in *Building a Scholarship of Assessment* (Banta & Associates, 2002, pp. 262–263). This collection of principles is by no means exhaustive, but it covers many of the components considered by practitioners to be essential to good practice. The principles are presented in three groups, each associated with a phase of assessment: first planning, then implementing, and finally improving and sustaining assessment initiatives. Current literature is cited in providing a foundation for the principles, and brief excerpts from some of the 146 profiles submitted for this book are used to illustrate them.

In Chapter 1, “Planning Effective Assessment,” we present the following principles as essential:

- Engaging stakeholders
- Connecting assessment to valued goals and processes
- Creating a written plan
- Timing assessment
- Building a culture based on evidence

In Chapter 2, “Implementing Effective Assessment,” these principles are identified and discussed:

- Providing leadership
- Creating faculty and staff development opportunities
- Assessing processes as well as outcomes
- Communicating and using assessment findings

In Chapter 3, “Improving and Sustaining Effective Assessment,” the following principles are described and illustrated:

- Providing credible evidence of learning to multiple stakeholders
- Reviewing assessment reports
- Ensuring use of assessment results
- Evaluating the assessment process



CHAPTER ONE

PLANNING EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT

Effective assessment doesn't just happen. It emerges over time as an outcome of thoughtful planning, and in the spirit of continuous improvement, it evolves as reflection on the processes of implementing and sustaining assessment suggests modifications.

Engaging Stakeholders

A first step in planning is to identify and engage appropriate stakeholders. Faculty members, academic administrators, and student affairs professionals must play principal roles in setting the course for assessment, but students can contribute ideas and so can trustees, employers, and other community representatives. We expect faculty to set broad learning outcomes for general education and more specific outcomes for academic majors. Trustees of an institution, employers, and other community representatives can review drafts of these outcomes and offer suggestions for revision based on their perspectives regarding community needs. Student affairs professionals can comment on the outcomes and devise their own complementary outcomes based on plans to extend learning into campus environments beyond the classroom. Students have the ability to translate the language of the academy, where necessary, into terms that their peers will understand. Students also can help to design data-gathering