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WORKSHEETS, GUIDES, AND EXERCISES

The following worksheets, guides, and exercises are designed to anchor assessing for learning as a core institutional process.

1. *Principles of Commitment*. Developing a principles of commitment statement positions assessment within an institution or system and establishes a context for collective engagement. As an institutional or system leader, draw from the following list of possible individuals who might work together to draft that document within the context of your institution's or system's mission, purposes, and values:

- Administrators
- Alumni
- Board of trustees members
- Faculty—full- and part-time
- Librarians and information resource staff
- Local community members, including advisory committee members
- Other staff
- Parents
- Representative employers
- Representatives from professions or professional organizations
- Students
- Student affairs and support staff
- Other stakeholders inside or outside of the institution

2. *Principles of Commitment.* As an institutional or system leader, once you have identified a cross-representation of individuals to draft a principles of commitment document, you may want to ask the authoring group to read one or more of the following documents before they collaboratively draft a statement and then send it out for wider review. Focused on principles of learning and assessment, these documents may inform your institution's or system's discussion and resulting statement.
- a. Chickering, A.W., & Gamson, Z.F. (1987). Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3–7. These principles appear in summary on numerous institutional Web sites, such as the following:
www.rochester.edu/ITS/edtech/documentation/Pedagogy/7principles.pdf.
 - b. The American Association for Higher Education's "9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning," which follows:

American Association for Higher Education

9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. **The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.** Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only *what* we choose to assess but also *how* we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning and, therefore, firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations—those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way—about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.** Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, “one-shot” assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment’s questions can’t be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.
7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return “results”; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution’s planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making and is avidly sought.
9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation—to ourselves, our students, and society—is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

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- c. The collaborative document, "Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning," written by a joint task force consisting of representatives from the American Association for Higher Education, the American College Personnel Association, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, June 1998: www.aahe.org/teaching/tsk_frce.htm. This document presents ten principles for learning drawn from research and practice. Two other American College Personnel Association documents, "The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs" (www.acpa.nche.edu/sli/sli.htm) (1996), and "Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs" (www.acpa.nche.edu/pgp/principle.htm) focus on principles and practices to promote discussion about ways to intentionally enhance student learning, including collaborating with others across a campus.
 - d. Angelo, T. (1999, May). Doing assessment as if learning matters most. *AAHE Bulletin*: www.aahebulletin.com/public/archive/angelomay99.asp.
 - e. Maki, P. (2002, May). Moving from paperwork to pedagogy: Channeling intellectual curiosity into a commitment to assessment. *AAHE Bulletin*: aahebulletin.com/public/archive/paperwork.asp.

3. *Principles of Commitment.* Another way to draft a principles of commitment statement is to ask representatives from across your institution to identify institutional anchors that link assessment to mission, values, and vision. North Carolina State University has anchored its commitment to assessment within four contexts. Read the summary of the university's approach in Box 1.2.

To address institution- or program-level readiness for a collective commitment to assessing student learning, ask individuals to explain how one or more of the following principles might anchor your institution's shared commitment to assessing student learning. Ask individuals to fill out the following chart as a way to stimulate discussion leading to a draft.

Possible Anchors for an Institutional Commitment

Research on learning or the integration of research on learning into educational practices	
Scholarship of teaching and learning	
Responsiveness to developments in disciplinary and professional organizations' work focused on assessment	
Focus on learning-centeredness	
Focus on organizational learning	
Responsiveness to accountability	
Other	

4. *Meaningful Beginnings*. Having authored a draft principles of commitment statement, ask individuals of that authoring group to list meaningful ways in which the institution (or a program) can launch a shared commitment to assessing student learning. Use the scenario in Box 1.3 from Rochester Community and Technical College as a way to think about how your institution will initiate a meaningful and shared commitment.

BOX 1.2 INSTITUTIONAL EXAMPLE: *North Carolina State University*

North Carolina State University, a premier research-extensive institution, has anchored its commitment to assessment in four ways: (1) responsiveness to professional and public accountability, including its primary constituents: students; (2) clarity about its institutional descriptors, “high quality programming,” “institutional excellence,” and “effectiveness,” and its status as a premier research-extensive institution focused on learner-centeredness; (3) desire to provide evidence of student learning to better inform decision makers and planners as they direct and allocate resources that support the institution’s work; (4) desire to promote dialogue across the institution about student learning. The meaningful beginning point for the university has been its decision to focus annually on student outcomes within programs across the institution and to integrate this work as part of program review. Thus, assessment at the program level is a continuous process of raising and answering a significant question or questions about student learning that each program chooses to assess each year. Program review, then, characterizes the university’s meaningful beginning.

Source: Contributed by Jo Allen, James A. Anderson, and Marilee J. Bresciani, North Carolina State University. Reproduced with permission.

BOX 1.3 INSTITUTIONAL EXAMPLE: *Rochester Community and Technical College*

Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC), the oldest of the community colleges in Minnesota, established in 1915, began its institutional commitment to assessing student learning by linking institution wide planning, a commitment to assuring quality throughout the institution, and accreditation. It has realigned its mission and vision for the 21st century, identified design criteria and academic performance indicators to determine points of reference for assessing quality performance, and has begun to implement comprehensive assessment of student learning. The college’s focus on performance indicators at all levels of its work has provided an institutional context within which the community now works. RCTC established a college wide assessment committee consisting of representatives from across the institution that has established broad commitment. The college launched its initial commitment to assessment through pilot projects in general education and in certain programs, including connecting its work to a larger statewide system office project that is piloting a data software program designed to track student learning results. Key to the institution’s sustained commitment was the president’s recognition that a budget line needed to be established in the institutional budget, a clear recognition that this work is recognized and valued. An institutional Web site provides descriptions of assessment work in departments and programs, highlights work faculty are undertaking, provides resources on assessment, and provides committee meeting minutes (www.acd.roch.edu/asl).

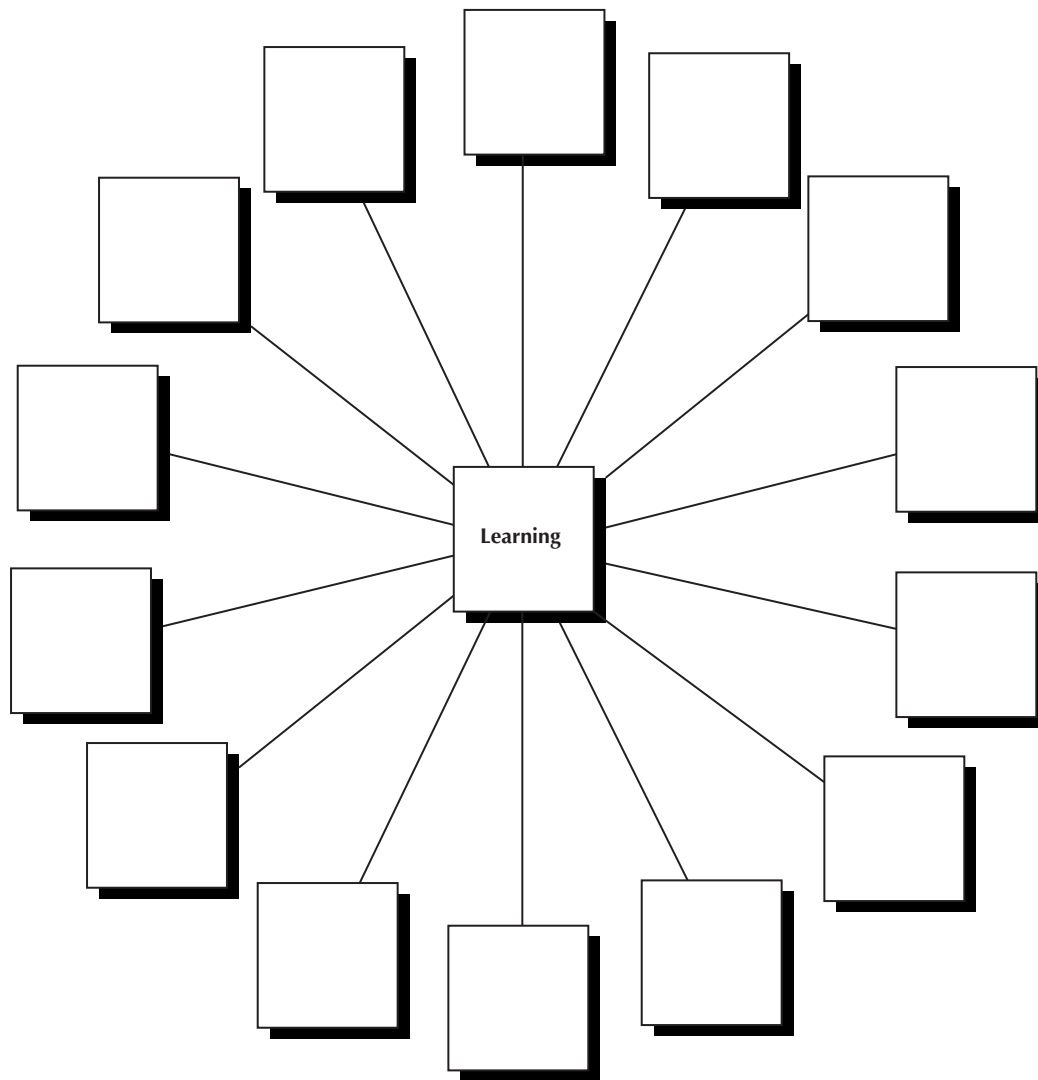
Source: Contributed by Anne M. High, RDH, MS, Director of Dental Hygiene, Co-coordinator of Assessment, and Tammy J. Lee, MBA, EdD., Business Instructor, Co-coordinator of Assessment, Rochester Community and Technical College. Reproduced with permission.

5. *Meaningful Beginnings*. Another way to develop a meaningful beginning is to reach consensus with representatives across the campus about ways to initiate institution- and program-level assessment. Ask members of this group to discuss the possibilities listed in the following chart or to generate other approaches that may be more appropriate for your institutional context.

Meaningful Beginnings

Development of a new mission statement or educational philosophy for the institution, an academic department, school, program, or service	
Initiation of strategic planning	
Re-conceptualization or revision of faculty and staff roles and rewards	
Design or revision of a core curriculum	
Development of a new program or service	
Selection of a new institutional leader	
Response to voiced dissatisfaction about student learning	
Recognition of classroom-based assessment as a foundation for institution- and program-level assessment focus	
Preparation of documentation to respond to legislators, accreditors, policy makers, or other public audiences	

6. *Relationships to Explore Compelling Questions.* As institution- and program-level groups begin to identify collective questions that initiate inquiry, such as those listed on page 2, identify constituencies within and outside of your institution who contribute to students' learning, using the figure that follows. Determine how representatives from some of these constituencies might become involved in assessing institution- or program-level compelling questions. For example, if your institution or program wants to inquire into how well students integrate interdisciplinary perspectives into problem solving, which of those constituencies might become involved in exploring how and how well students develop these perspectives over the continuum of their studies? What new kinds of working relationships might you develop to assess the development of this kind of perspective taking?



Contributors to Student Learning