

# What Do Students Know – and How Do We Know They Know It?

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with

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# The things we love to point to ...

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- Selectivity
- Rising SAT scores
- Research funding, grants
- Outlays for technology
- Endowment dollars
- Nationally ranked programs
- Faculty stars

# The things faculty love to point to...

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- GRE scores
- Satisfaction surveys
- Internship supervisors' feedback
- Students working in the field studied
- Model programs (gen ed, WAC, first-year experience, capstones, etc.)
- High standards, gatekeeping

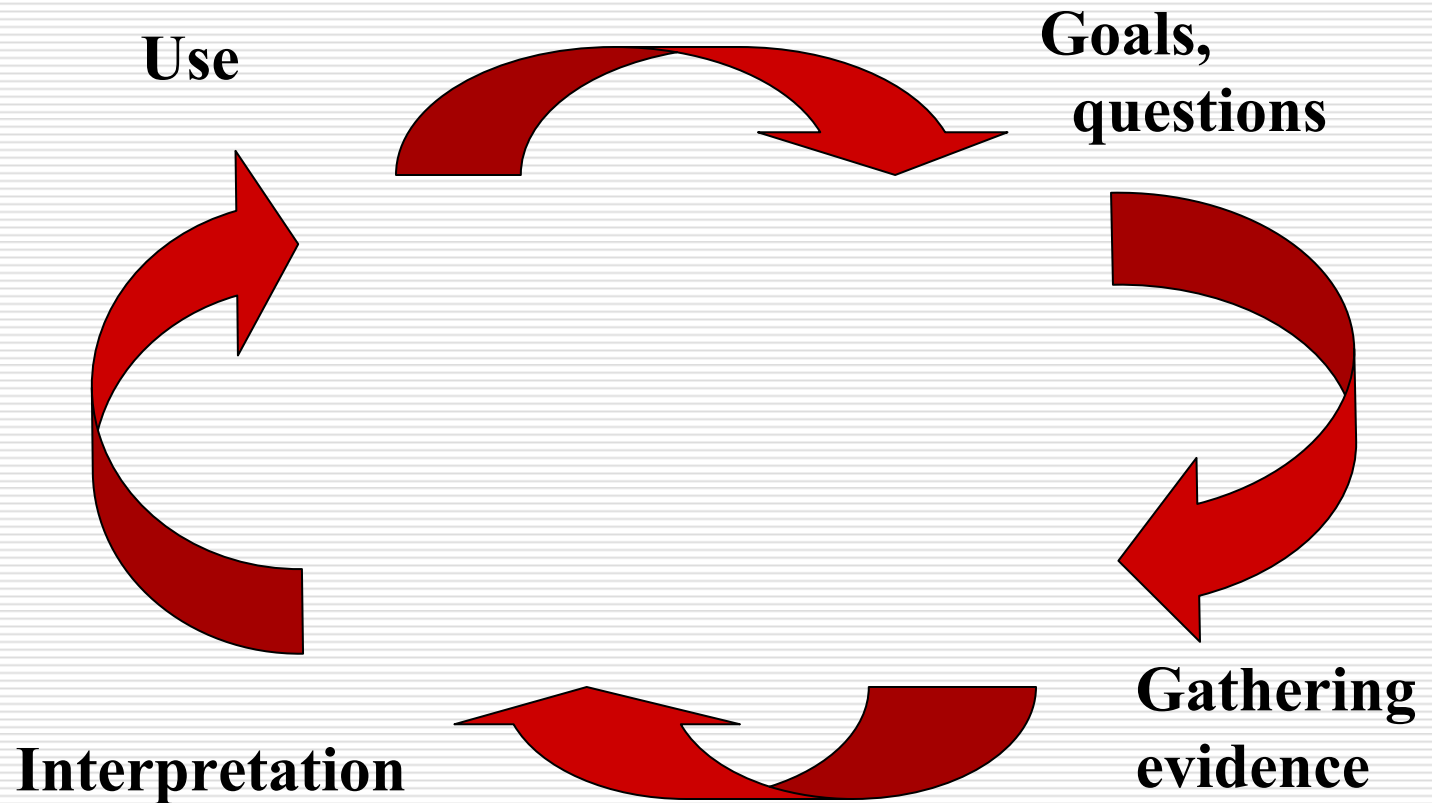
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# Assessment?

It's simple. You figure out what they want, find the least damaging way to respond, send off a report, and forget it.

# The Assessment Loop

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# So what *is* assessment?

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A systematic process of 1) setting goals for or asking questions about student learning, 2) gathering evidence, 3) interpreting it, and 4) *using* it to improve the effects of college on students' learning and development.

# A faculty lament ...

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“But I already test and assign grades. I flunk the ones who don’t measure up. Why do we need assessment?”

# Not just semantics . . .

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- Assessment / Evaluation
- Improvement / Accountability
- Measurement / Evidence /  
Documentation
- Validity / Reliability

# Three dimensions of learning --

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- *What* students learn
- *How well*
- *What happens over time*

# Traditional domains of student learning...

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- Basic (entry) skills
- College-level skills
- General education
- The major/professional program
- Social, ethical development

# Shifting conceptions of knowledge and knowing...

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- Unity
- Western
- Universalizing
- Objective
- Detached
- Abstract
- Area-based
- Value-neutral
- Multiplicity
- Plural
- Situated
- Constructed
- Relational
- Experiential
- Intercultural
- Values inquiry

# Emerging goals for 21<sup>st</sup> century college learning . . .

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- ❑ An expanding list of core skills (e.g., technological fluency, teamwork)
- ❑ Inquiry skills (e.g., investigation, analysis, problem-solving, innovation)
- ❑ Civic and societal knowledge (e.g., diversity, global awareness)
- ❑ Self-knowledge and examined values
- ❑ Integration of knowledge from many sources

# Emerging strategies for undergraduate learning

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- Putting student work at the center (e.g. “hands-on” research, projects)
- Practice across the curriculum (e.g., writing, technology, foreign language)
- Experiential learning (e.g. internships, fieldwork, service learning)

# Emerging strategies, cont.

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- ❑ Linking across courses (e.g. learning communities)
- ❑ Culminating, integrative work (e.g. capstones)
- ❑ Developmental records (e.g. portfolio of beginning, intermediate & advanced work), reflection

# Descriptive data include ...

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- Retention, graduation rates
- Time to degree completion
- Percentage going to grad school
- Percentage employed in the field they studied
- SAT scores, class rank of incoming students
- Percentage completing a capstone, internship, freshman year experience, semester abroad, etc.

# Indirect methods include ...

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- Surveys
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- “Ethnographic research”

# Direct methods include ...

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- Portfolios
- Capstones
- Performances
- Common assignments
- Secondary readings
- Course management programs
- Local tests, comps in the major
- Commercial tests
- Student self-assessment

# Higher-order thinking ...

( adapted from L. Resnick, 1987)

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- It's **nonalgorithmic**, i.e., the path of action is not fully specified in advance.
- It's **complex**, i.e., the total path is not "visible" from any single vantage point.
- It often yields **multiple solutions**, each with costs and benefits.
- It requires **nuanced** judgment and interpretation
- It involves application of **multiple criteria**, which may conflict with one another

# Higher order thinking, cont ...

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- ❑ It often involves ***uncertainty***; not everything about the task is known or can be.
- ❑ It requires ***self-regulation***; someone else is not giving directions.
- ❑ It involves ***making meaning***, discerning patterns in apparent disorder.
- ❑ It is ***effortful***: the elaborations and judgments required entail considerable mental work and are likely to take time.

# Methods for complex outcomes ...

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- Portfolios
- Capstones
- Performances
- Common assignments
- Secondary readings
- Course management programs
- Local tests
- Student self-assessment

# Think quality improvement first, quality assurance second

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- ❑ Score work analytically, not just holistically
- ❑ Look for patterns of strength, weakness
- ❑ Look at cohorts, trends over time
- ❑ Compare results first to *your* baselines, not to other universities
- ❑ View scores from a quality improvement perspective

# What do they know, and how do we know they know it?

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- Clarify expectations for student learning: what, how well, over time
- Document learning
- Interpret the evidence thoughtfully, systematically
- Act on recommendations
- Communicate findings
- Be responsibly accountable