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Institute of
Education Sciences

What are practices and strategies that may increase postsecondary faculty engagement in activities that assess effectiveness of academic and support programs?



Background

Assessment activities in higher education have received greater attention in recent years [due to the increased focus on accountability](#) from state and federal agencies. Institutions seeking regional accreditation must display how student learning outcomes are being used to drive decision-making at the course, program, and institutional levels. Engaging institutional stakeholders in assessment is seen [as essential to improving use of assessments by higher education faculty](#).

Causal studies were prioritized to understand practices and strategies that may increase engagement in activities that assess academic and support program effectiveness. Regrettably, no causal studies were found that focus on such practices or strategies, so this FAQ provides studies from assessment-related journals and other publications that feature assessment practitioner experiences, perspectives, and activities. Although not causal, these studies may offer insights about how assessment staff have been able to increase staff and faculty engagement at their institutions.

- **Understanding beliefs, attitudes, and motivations about assessment held by faculty and staff can help to identify areas of support.** Engagement in assessment activities is linked to attitudes and beliefs held by faculty and staff about assessment, and research reveals the benefits of understanding/mapping out the culture of assessment on campus. In a [mixed methods case study](#) of one public teaching intensive university in the southwest United States, researchers found that among its 33 faculty members, beliefs in the capacity for assessment to improve teaching was a significant predictor of their willingness to participate in assessment.
- In interviews with seven faculty members, another [study](#) examining individual and institutional characteristics associated with faculty engagement in program assessment revealed that faculty viewed **leadership from the organization, alignment between faculty and the organization in their experience with and philosophy on assessment, opinions about the value of assessment, and opportunities to participate in collaborative learning communities** as factors contributing to their willingness to engage in assessment activities.
- **Offering targeted professional learning activities for faculty and staff may support their understanding of how to design, implement, and carry out assessment activities.** [An analysis of changes](#) in attitudes among 20 faculty members at a regional university in the western United States found that understanding of, confidence, and attitudes towards assessment improved after participation in a workshop series and after implementing lessons from the workshop for a year.
- A [case study](#) of three private liberal arts institutions in the southeastern United States examined the conditions that support student affairs staff's engagement in assessment. **Emphasis on assessments by leaders, support, and resources were identified as important elements for institutions to promote as part of assessment practices that foster engagement.**

- A [mixed methods study](#) examining opinions among 11 faculty members and 37 administrators from 28 institutions in the United States found that **faculty view the lack of incentives as a barrier to participation in assessment activities**. Types of incentives identified in the study included stipends, course releases, inclusion within the promotion and tenure process, providing meals during assessment activities, and campus exposure.
- A [case study](#) examining how faculty are engaged in assessment at a private institution in the eastern United States presents a framework that can help shift the culture and practice of data-informed teaching by **motivating faculty to collect data, educating faculty about data collection and analysis, facilitating data analysis by providing support, and disseminating results**. Faculty were motivated to participate when funds were made available for faculty-developed teaching innovation projects, rewarded and recognized for their efforts, provided professional learning opportunities, and offered a university-wide teaching and learning summit to share the results of their assessment activities. As a result, faculty emphasized the importance of **reporting out and communicating results of assessment processes to campus stakeholders and providing time to make meaning of and reflect on results**.



Additional Resources



The Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education ([AALHE](#)) offers a list of resources to support academic, programmatic, and student affairs assessment; faculty development; and assessment templates.



The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment ([NILOA](#)) publishes a free resource titled [Assessment in Practice](#), featuring short, informative examples showcasing meaningful assessment processes and practices from the field.



The annual [Assessment Institute](#), hosted by Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) includes free links to recordings and materials for recent sessions and editions of its practitioner-oriented journal, *Assessment Update*.



The New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability published a [set of guidelines](#) for assessment and accountability in higher education to support institution leaders in articulating and assessing student learning outcomes.