GEORGE D. KUH • STANLEY O. IKENBERRY
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Using EVIDENCE *of* STUDENT LEARNING *to* Improve HIGHER EDUCATION

National Institute for
Learning Outcomes Assessment

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CONTENTS

Preface ix

Acknowledgments xvii

About the Authors xix

1. From Compliance to Ownership: Why and How Colleges and Universities Assess Student Learning 1
Stanley O. Ikenberry and George D. Kuh

PART ONE
What Works? Finding and Using Evidence

2. Evidence of Student Learning: What Counts and What Matters for Improvement 27
Pat Hutchings, Jillian Kinzie, and George D. Kuh
3. Fostering Greater Use of Assessment Results: Principles for Effective Practice 51
Jillian Kinzie, Pat Hutchings, and Natasha A. Jankowski
4. Making Assessment Consequential: Organizing to Yield Results 73
Jillian Kinzie and Natasha A. Jankowski

PART TWO
Who Cares? Engaging Key Stakeholders

5. Faculty and Students: Assessment at the Intersection of Teaching and Learning 95
Timothy Reese Cain and Pat Hutchings
6. Leadership in Making Assessment Matter 117
Peter T. Ewell and Stanley O. Ikenberry

7. Accreditation as Opportunity: Serving Two Purposes with Assessment 146
Peter T. Ewell and Natasha A. Jankowski

8. The Bigger Picture: Student Learning Outcomes Assessment and External Entities 160
Jillian Kinzie, Stanley O. Ikenberry, and Peter T. Ewell

PART THREE
What Now? Focusing Assessment on Learning

9. Assessment and Initiative Fatigue: Keeping the Focus on Learning 183
George D. Kuh and Pat Hutchings

10. From Compliance Reporting to Effective Communication: Assessment and Transparency 201
Natasha A. Jankowski and Timothy Reese Cain

11. Making Assessment Matter 220
George D. Kuh, Stanley O. Ikenberry, Natasha A. Jankowski, Timothy Reese Cain, Peter T. Ewell, Pat Hutchings, and Jillian Kinzie

References 237

Appendix A: NILOA National Advisory Panel 261

Appendix B: NILOA Staff, 2008 to 2014 263

Index 265

PREFACE

UNDERSTANDING WHAT STUDENTS know and are able to do as a result of their college education is no simple task, yet it is fundamental to student success and to the quality and effectiveness of American higher education. This volume grows out of a deep concern that the practical value of otherwise well-conceived efforts to assess student learning in American higher education is often diminished by deeply nested misconceptions. Many in the academy—especially those most directly responsible for the assessment of student learning—still view the assessment of student learning as an obligatory, externally imposed chore of compliance and accountability. Yes, to be fair, the capacity and commitment of colleges and universities to assess student learning outcomes have grown substantially, especially over the last decade. But the fruits of these investments—the tangible benefits to students and academic institutions—are embarrassingly modest.

What is required, we believe, is a fundamental reframing of the conversation around assessment and a clearer focus on the *use* of evidence of student learning in more productive and targeted ways. As we explain in this book, a complex, evolving combination of trends and forces makes evidence of student learning essential to improving student success and strengthening the vitality of colleges and universities. The quality of student learning at colleges and universities is inadequate—even declining, some say—and the meaning and coherence of a college degree are threatened as most undergraduates attend multiple institutions. New providers of higher education, transformative emergent technologies, anxiety over college costs, scarce and constrained resources, high levels of student debt, and the growing concerns of governing board members, employers, policymakers, accreditors, donors, and others have placed the gathering and use of evidence of student learning in a new light. Often missed in this cacophony of voices is the fact that many institutions have been responding to these challenges for years, but with too little to show for their efforts.

It is the *use* of evidence of student learning—its utility and impact on the lives of students and the prospects of campuses—that is the focus of

this book. Documenting student learning and the conditions that promote high levels of student performance is a daunting task. Knowing how to harness evidence of student learning to improve teaching and learning and propel students to greater accomplishment is ultimately what matters.

This is the central challenge we take up in this book: identifying what colleges and universities must do to move the assessment of student learning from an act of compliance to the use of assessment results to guide changes that foster stronger student and institutional performance. Rather than accept the conventional view that going through the motions of assessment is a necessary burden, we argue that evidence of student learning is essential to strengthen the impact of courses, programs, and collegiate experiences; to ensure that students acquire the intended knowledge, proficiencies, and dispositions; to continuously improve teaching and learning; and to document the value of higher education to individuals and society. Thus conceived, gathering evidence of student learning is not for compliance with external demands but, rather, an institutional strategy, a core function of continuous improvement, and a means for faculty and staff to elevate student success and strengthen institutional health.

The Authors

The contributors to this book are especially well suited to take up its challenge. All are actively engaged with the work of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), which is colocated at the University of Illinois and Indiana University. Founded in 2008, NILOA is the leading national voice supporting efforts by colleges and universities to obtain, use, and share evidence of student learning to strengthen student attainment and improve undergraduate education. NILOA's monthly newsletter informs more than 6,500 college presidents, provosts, faculty, student affairs staff, institutional research directors, and assessment professionals about fresh thinking and new developments, resources including NILOA reports on special topics, case studies featuring best practices, and related topics. On average, more than 10,000 individuals each month visit the NILOA website (www.learningoutcomesassessment.org); most are from the United States, but academics from 120 countries and territories also draw on NILOA resources.

Since 2012, NILOA has tracked the use of Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) and related efforts to calibrate teaching and learning activities with desired outcomes, including developing a library of exemplary course assignments from different disciplines that

elicit essential learning outcomes. NILOA's Occasional Paper series—with more than 20 releases at the time of this writing—has engaged the nation's most prominent educational leaders and assessment scholars and practitioners in a dialogue around contemporary issues. All of these efforts are designed to increase the capacity of colleges and universities to gather and use evidence of student learning to guide change in ways that strengthen the quality and impact of American higher education.

Taken together, the contributors to this volume represent an exceptional blend of scholarly acumen and practical experience.

Tim Cain, a historian of higher education with a background in college student development, brings to his inquiries related to faculty involvement in outcomes assessment both expertise on faculty and students and experience codirecting a campus-wide undergraduate research initiative at the University of Illinois.

Peter Ewell, at the National Center on Higher Education Management Systems, inspired and chronicled many of the formative and contemporary events shaping assessment work since the mid-1980s by working with hundreds of campuses and providing policy advice on assessment to states and accreditors.

Pat Hutchings was among the pioneers at Alverno College in its early years of outcomes assessment, served as the inaugural director of the American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum, and, as a senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, worked with faculty who were studying their students' learning.

Stan Ikenberry, president emeritus of the University of Illinois and the American Council of Education and NILOA co-principal investigator, has a lifetime of experience in American higher education and a deep understanding of why colleges and universities must harness evidence of student learning to confront the challenges facing students and institutions.

Natasha A. Jankowski manages the day-to-day work of NILOA and is among the best-informed scholar-practitioners about issues related to public reporting and use of assessment data to mobilize resources to realize the promises of data-informed efforts to promote student success and institutional improvement.

Jillian Kinzie, through her work with hundreds of colleges and universities at the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Institute for Effective Educational Practice and her experience with various accreditation organizations and review teams, brings deep insight into the applications of assessment results for institutional improvement.

George Kuh, also a NILOA co-principal investigator, with his leadership roles with national assessment programs such as NSSE, the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP), and the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) research program, coupled with a 35-year run as a university faculty member and academic administrator, brings another set of informed perspectives and expertise to the topics this book addresses.

Perhaps the most important qualification these authors share is a commitment to shift the functions and forms of assessment away from the conventional view that assessment is primarily an act of compliance to the realization that gathering and using evidence of student accomplishment are indispensable for addressing concerns about academic quality and informing institutional improvement.

The Organization of the Book

Stan Ikenberry and George Kuh open the book with their chapter "From Compliance to Ownership: Why and How Colleges and Universities Assess Student Learning." They present the contextualized rationale for why it is imperative for the focus of assessment to shift from an act of mere compliance to one of institutional ownership in which evidence of student learning is harnessed to make decisions and guide change. As signaled earlier, the guiding premise is that assessment of student learning is essential to student success and institutional performance. While this same work may also confirm the quality and benefit of higher education and may be useful to regional accreditors and policymakers, the value of evidence of student learning lies on campus, within the academy, where it can be harnessed to make wiser decisions and improve the learning experience of all students.

This volume is then divided into three main parts.

Part I: Making Assessment Work

In Chapter 2, "Evidence of Student Learning: What Counts and What Matters for Improvement," Pat Hutchings, Jillian Kinzie, and Kuh discuss what constitutes *actionable* evidence of student learning, as contrasted to other forms of data about the student experience, and consider the broad range of sources of relevant evidence, such as surveys, portfolios, classroom assignments, and external performances and their useful application for quality improvement.

In Chapter 3, "Fostering Greater Use of Assessment Results: Principles for Effective Practice," Kinzie, Hutchings, and Natasha Jankowski illustrate

the broad range of effective uses of assessment evidence, drawing on case studies and focus groups conducted by NILOA and reports from institutional consortia and individual institutions to describe approaches that prompted meaningful use of assessment results and the principles that undergird these efforts.

Chapter 4, "Making Assessment Work Consequential: Organizing to Yield Results," examines different approaches to implementing assessment work as Kinzie and Jankowski illustrate how institutions with different missions use assessment committees, teaching and learning centers, faculty reward and governance structures, and institutional research and effectiveness offices to gather, use, and productively communicate evidence of student learning.

Part II: Who Cares? Key Stakeholders

In Chapter 5, "Faculty and Students: Assessment at the Intersection of Teaching and Learning," Tim Cain and Hutchings focus on what may be the most important but often the most frequently overlooked dimensions of assessment—faculty collaboration and student participation in the design and implementation of assessment approaches. They offer principles for how to make assessment more meaningful and useful for those who are central to student learning and institutional improvement.

In Chapter 6, "Leadership in Making Assessment Matter," Peter Ewell and Ikenberry explore the role of institutional leaders—specifically governing boards, presidents, provosts, deans, and department chairs—in managing and leading assessment efforts and in the practical use of evidence of student learning to inform institutional decision making and increase student learning and success.

In Chapter 7, "Accreditation as Opportunity: Serving Two Purposes with Assessment," Ewell and Jankowski address accreditors' need for evidence of student learning to assure quality and institutions' role in meaningful engagement with accreditation standards, with special emphasis on the ways institutions implement and respond to accreditation requirements and the role of learning outcomes frameworks such as the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP).

In Chapter 8, "The Bigger Picture: Student Learning Outcomes Assessment and External Entities," Ikenberry, Kinzie, and Ewell examine state and federal policy related to assessing student learning as a means of quality improvement and consider the work of national organizations such as the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the American Council on Education, the Association of American Colleges

and Universities, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, and the Council of Independent Colleges, among others.

Part III: What Now?

In Chapter 9, "Assessment and Initiative Fatigue: Keeping the Focus on Learning," Kuh and Hutchings discuss what campuses can do to ameliorate the potential debilitating effects when faculty and staff find themselves overwhelmed trying to implement multiple assessment projects and improvement initiatives along with their regular responsibilities.

In Chapter 10, "From Compliance Reporting to Effective Communication: Assessment and Transparency," Jankowski and Cain consider transparency not as a reporting or compliance exercise but as an effort to communicate to various internal and external audiences a variety of evidence on student learning. NILOA's transparency framework is highlighted as a means for thinking about the several dimensions of assessment that can be made more transparent, the interests of various audiences in such information, and the ways higher education can more effectively communicate evidence of student learning to both internal and external stakeholders.

In the closing chapter, the contributors to this volume ponder what the assessment movement has accomplished in providing useful evidence of student outcomes and the work left to be done.

This volume is very much a collaborative endeavor. From the beginning, all the contributors helped shape the book's purpose and structure. While certain authors took the lead on respective chapters, in every case, their good work benefitted from the comments and ideas of other contributors. And, in some instances, ideas that originally appeared in one chapter found their way to another when and where the material made for a stronger, more coherent, and persuasive presentation. The order of authorship reflects this collaborative nature. Kuh and Ikenberry, as NILOA co-principal investigators, and Jankowski, as associate director, are listed first. The other authors, all NILOA senior scholars, are listed in alphabetical order.

Audience

We intend for the book to spark a fresh and broad conversation on the future of higher education and the role of evidence of student learning in dealing with the contemporary challenges facing American higher education. Thus, the volume is especially relevant for those who lead,

govern, and make America's colleges and universities among the best in the world—presidents and provosts, governing board members, and education policymakers. They are key players in positioning assessment work within the broader framework of higher education so that it informs institutional decision making and quality improvement efforts.

We expect the book to be particularly useful for faculty members and assessment professionals, institutional researchers, and those new to assessment, as it provides both practical and conceptual advice for thinking about and undertaking student learning outcomes assessment. For this reason, the contents are also instructive for graduate students aiming for a position in postsecondary education, along with administrators and staff members seeking to better understand how gathering and using student learning outcomes data—done well—can contribute to their effectiveness and to overall institutional performance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FROM ITS INCEPTION, NILOA has benefitted from sage counsel from national thought leaders who comprise NILOA's national advisory panel, listed in Appendix A. Their commitment to the core values of the academy and its obligations for societal betterment is inspiring and aspirational.

NILOA's work, along with numerous advances in the assessment field, would not be possible without the visionary leadership and generous support of philanthropic organizations. We are especially grateful to Lumina Foundation and Jamie Merisotis for the leadership grant that helped launch NILOA. The Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Teagle Foundation also provided resources at critical junctures, and we are most thankful for their interest and support.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has been our principal home and a congenial host for NILOA and a superb staff, including graduate research assistants and senior scholars (Appendix B). We have been warmly welcomed and supported by this rich academic community. NILOA's impact and sustainability could not have been possible without the stimulating, engaged environment that makes it possible for us to thrive.

If there were an award for outstanding copyediting, it would surely belong to Sarah Martin from the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Her work and expertise have touched every page of this book, and the volume is much the better because of her. We also appreciate the good services provided by the Indiana University Center for Survey Research in conducting the three national NILOA surveys we refer to in this volume.

Finally, we tip our hats to countless colleagues across the country who responded to surveys, participated in focus groups, helped with case studies and reports, and otherwise shared their good work. It is through their efforts to assess student learning inside and outside the classroom that we have learned a great deal about the value of this important work and how it can be used to enhance student accomplishment and improve institutional performance. We are in their debt.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Timothy Reese Cain is associate professor at the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education and a senior scholar at the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment. He writes and teaches about the history of higher education, college and university faculty, campus speech, and learning outcomes assessment. He has published in *Teachers College Record*, *Labor History*, and the *History of Education Quarterly*, among numerous other outlets, and his first book, *Establishing Academic Freedom: Politics, Principles, and the Development of Core Values*, was released in 2012. He earned his A.B. in history at Duke University, his M.A. in higher education and student affairs at The Ohio State University, and his Ph.D. in education at the University of Michigan. From 2005 to 2013, he was on the faculty at the University of Illinois, where he coordinated the higher education program and codirected the Ethnography of the University Initiative.

Peter T. Ewell is vice president at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), a research and development center founded to improve the management effectiveness of colleges and universities. A member of the staff since 1981, his work focuses on assessing institutional effectiveness and the outcomes of college and involves both research and direct consulting with institutions and state systems on collecting and using assessment information in planning, evaluation, and budgeting. He has directed many projects on this topic, including initiatives funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Ford Foundation, Spencer Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Pew Charitable Trusts. In addition, he has consulted with over 475 colleges and universities and more than 30 state or national governments internationally on topics including assessment, program review, enrollment management, and student retention. He has authored seven books and numerous articles on the topic of improving undergraduate instruction through the assessment of student outcomes. A graduate of Haverford College, he received his Ph.D. in political science from Yale University in 1976 and was on the faculty of the University of Chicago.

Stan Ikenberry is former president of the University of Illinois, serving from 1979 through 1995 and again in 2010. He presided over an era of major change at Illinois, including the founding of the University of Illinois at Chicago, the creation of the Beckman Institute and the National Center for Supercomputing Applications in Urbana-Champaign, the creation of a President's Award Program to enhance diversity and aid students, and a general strengthening of the university's academic programs and campus facilities. Following his departure from the Illinois presidency Ikenberry pursued a sabbatical at the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching in Princeton and in 1996 became the tenth president, of the American Council on Education. He returned to the University of Illinois as professor in 2001, joining the graduate program in higher education on the Urbana campus. In 2008, along with his colleague George Kuh, he became co-principal investigator of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. He earned a bachelor's degree from Shepherd College and his graduate degrees from Michigan State University. He is the recipient of 16 honorary degrees and is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Natasha A. Jankowski is associate director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment and research assistant professor with the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She has presented at numerous national and international conferences as well as at many institutional events and assessment workshops. The author of multiple reports and case studies for NILOA, she has also elsewhere published on accountability and assessment. Her main research interests include assessment and evaluation, organizational evidence use, and evidence-based storytelling. She holds a Ph.D. in educational organization and leadership from the University of Illinois, an M.A. in higher education administration from Kent State University, and a B.A. in philosophy from Illinois State University.

Pat Hutchings is a senior scholar with the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment and a scholar-in-residence with the Center for Teaching and Advising at Gonzaga University, in Spokane, Washington. From 1998 to 2009 she was a senior scholar and vice president at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a position she moved to from the American Association for Higher Education where she was the inaugural director of the AAHE Assessment Forum and director of the Teaching Initiatives. Her work has focused on a variety of strategies for creating a campus culture of teaching and learning: student learning outcomes assessment, the peer collaboration and review of teaching, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Her most recent

book, coauthored with Mary Taylor Huber and Tony Ciccone, is *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Reconsidered: Institutional Integration and Impact*. She began her academic career as a faculty member and chair of the English department at Alverno College.

Jillian Kinzie is associate director of the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice and the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. She is also a senior scholar at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. She worked as an administrator in academic and student affairs for many years at several institutions. When she was a visiting faculty member in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at Indiana University, she received a Student Choice Award for outstanding teaching. Kinzie has coauthored a monograph on theories of teaching and learning and a Lumina Foundation monograph *Continuity and Change in College Choice: National Policy, Institutional Practices and Student Decision Making*. She has conducted research on women in undergraduate science, retention of underrepresented students and educational effectiveness and institutional change. She is coauthor of *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* (Jossey-Bass, 2005); *One Size Does Not Fit All: Traditional and Innovative Models of Student Affairs Practice* (Routledge, 2006), and *Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions, and Recommendations* (Jossey-Bass, 2007). Kinzie earned her Ph.D. in higher education with a minor in women's studies at Indiana University Bloomington.

George D. Kuh is adjunct research professor of education policy at the University of Illinois and Chancellor's Professor of Higher Education Emeritus at Indiana University Bloomington. He currently directs the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment colocated at the University of Illinois and Indiana University. Founding director of the IU Center for Postsecondary Research and the widely used National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), he has written extensively about student engagement, assessment, institutional improvement, and college and university cultures. His recent publications include *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* (2005, 2010), *High-Impact Practices* (2008), and Ensuring Quality & Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale (2013). Recipient of nine honorary degrees and numerous awards from professional associations, in 2014 he received the President's Medal for Excellence, the highest honor the president of Indiana University can bestow. In 2013, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* described George as a "towering figure" who "really launched the field of assessment of institutional quality." George earned the B.A. at Luther College, M.S. at the St. Cloud State University, and Ph.D. at the University of Iowa.

USING EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING TO IMPROVE HIGHER EDUCATION

1

FROM COMPLIANCE TO OWNERSHIP

WHY AND HOW COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING

Stanley O. Ikenberry and George D. Kuh

Control leads to compliance; autonomy leads to engagement.

—Daniel H. Pink

EVERY ERA BRINGS CHALLENGES. Even so, by all accounts, this second decade of the twenty-first century has swept in a steady stream of disruptive developments that threaten some of the most basic assumptions on which the higher education enterprise rests—including how and by whom its core academic functions are delivered.

More than 18 million undergraduate students are currently enrolled at thousands of academic institutions—some quite large, others small, some public, others private, some for-profit, and still others virtual. Movement of students and faculty across these sectors has grown. On many campuses, a large portion of undergraduate teaching is provided by other-than-tenure-track faculty members: part-time adjunct faculty

members and graduate teaching assistants. Soaring college costs, unacceptably low degree-completion rates, new technologies, and competitive new providers have become defining features of what some call higher education's "new normal." Further disruption comes from the uneasy sense that the quality of student learning may be falling well short of what the twenty-first century demands of our graduates, the economy, and our democracy. It is in this complex context that understanding student performance and optimizing success is not just important to maintain public confidence; it is even more necessary to guide and inform academic decisions and policies.

But with challenge comes opportunity. By every relevant measure, higher education adds value to individuals and to society (MacMahon, 2009). What today's students know and are able to do will shape their lives and determine their future prospects more than at any time in history. In addition to the numerous lifelong benefits college graduates enjoy, the performance of our colleges and universities has profound implications for the nation's economy, our quality of life, and America's place in the world. It is this *profound relevance and worth* of higher education that adds a palpable sense of urgency to the need to document how college affects students and to use this information effectively to enhance student attainment and institutional effectiveness.

The big question is this: How will colleges and universities in the United States both broaden access to higher learning and also enhance student accomplishment and success *for all students* while at the same time containing and reducing costs? This is higher education's signal challenge in this century. Any meaningful response requires accurate, reliable data about what students know and are able to do as a result of their collegiate experience. In the parlance of the academy, this systematic stock-taking—the gathering and use of evidence of student learning in decision making and in strengthening institutional performance and public accountability—is known as *student learning outcomes assessment.* Gathering evidence and understanding what students know and can do as a result of their college experience is not easy, but harnessing that evidence and using it to improve student success and institutional functioning is even more demanding. This second challenge is the subject of this volume.

Assessment should be *intentional* and *purposive,* relevant to deliberately posed questions important to both institutions and their stakeholders, and based on multiple data sources of information, according to the guidelines for evidence of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC, 2014). Evidence does not "speak for itself." Instead, it

requires *interpretation, integration,* and *reflection* in the search for holistic understanding and implications for action. As did assessment pioneers at Alverno College many years ago, Larry Braskamp and Mark Engberg (2014) describe this work as "sitting beside" in an effort to assist and collaborate with members of the academy in ways that engender trust, involvement, and high quality performance.

Whatever the preferred formula or approach—and there are many—we are convinced that if campus leaders, faculty and staff, and assessment professionals change the way they think about and undertake their work, they can multiply the contributions of learning outcomes assessment to American higher education. The good news is that the *capacity* of the vast majority of American colleges and universities to assess student learning has expanded considerably during the past two decades, albeit largely in response to external pressures. Accreditors of academic institutions and programs have been the primary force leading to the material increase in assessment work, as these groups have consistently demanded more and better evidence of student learning to inform and exercise their quality assurance responsibilities (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Prior to the mid-1990s, accrediting groups tended to focus primarily on judgments about whether an institution's resources—credentials of the faculty, adequacy of facilities, coherence of the curriculum, number of library holdings, and fiscal soundness—were sufficient to deliver its academic programs. Over the past 15 years, however, both institutional and program accreditors have slowly shifted their focus and now expect colleges and universities to obtain and use evidence of student accomplishment (Gaston, 2014). In other words, the question has become "What have students learned, not just in a single course, but as a result of their overall college experience?" Still more recently, in addition to collecting evidence of student performance, accreditors are beginning to press institutions to direct more attention to the *consequential use* of assessment results for modifying campus policies and practices in ways that lead to improved learning outcomes.

The push from accrediting bodies for institutions to gather and use information about student learning has been reinforced by demands from policymakers at both the federal and state levels. As college costs continue to escalate and public investment in aid to students and institutions has grown, governmental entities have become more interested in how and to what extent students actually benefit, sometimes referred to as the "value added" of attending college. This, in turn, has brought even more attention to the processes and evidence accrediting groups use to make their decisions. Employers also have an obvious interest in knowing what

students know and can do, prompting them to join the call for more transparent evidence of student accomplishment.

Taken together, this cacophony of calls for more attention to documenting student learning has not gone unheard by colleges and universities. Thought leaders in the field of assessment have developed tools and conceptual frameworks to guide assessment practice (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Suskie, 2009). In fact, the number of assessment approaches and related instruments jumped almost ten-fold between 2000 and 2009 (Borden & Kernel, 2013), both reflecting and driving increased assessment activity on campuses. Perhaps the best marker of the growth in the capacity and commitment of colleges and universities to assess student learning comes from two national surveys of provosts at accredited two- and four-year institutions conducted by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh et al., 2014). The most recent of these studies found that 84% of all accredited colleges and universities now have stated learning goals for their undergraduate students, up from three-quarters just five years ago. Most institutions have organizational structures and policies in place to support learning outcomes assessment, including a faculty or professional staff member who coordinates institution-wide assessment and facilitates the assessment efforts of faculty in various academic units. While the majority of institutions use student surveys to collect information about the student experience, increasingly, classroom-based assessments such as portfolios and rubrics are employed. Taken together, this activity strongly suggests that many U.S. institutions of higher education are working to understand and document what students know and can do.

At the same time, all this effort to assess student learning, at best, seems to have had only a modest influence on academic decisions, policies, and practices. Make no mistake: the growth in assessment capacity is noteworthy and encouraging. But harnessing evidence of student learning, making it *consequential* in the improvement of student success and strengthened institutional performance is what matters to the long-term health and vitality of American higher education and the students and society we serve. Moreover, consequential use of evidence of student learning to solve problems and improve performance will also raise the public's confidence in its academic institutions and give accreditors empirical grounds on which to make high-stakes decisions.

What is needed to make student learning outcomes assessment more consequential? Answering that question first requires a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the motivations of different groups who conduct this work and their sometimes conflicting effects on faculty