Why are we changing how we do things, anyway?

A (Brief) Review of the Argument for Change

Why are we changing how we do things, anyway?

2018: A Natural Reflection Point

- 15 years

- Accreditation Complete

- Leadership Transitions

- Call to "Assess Assessment"
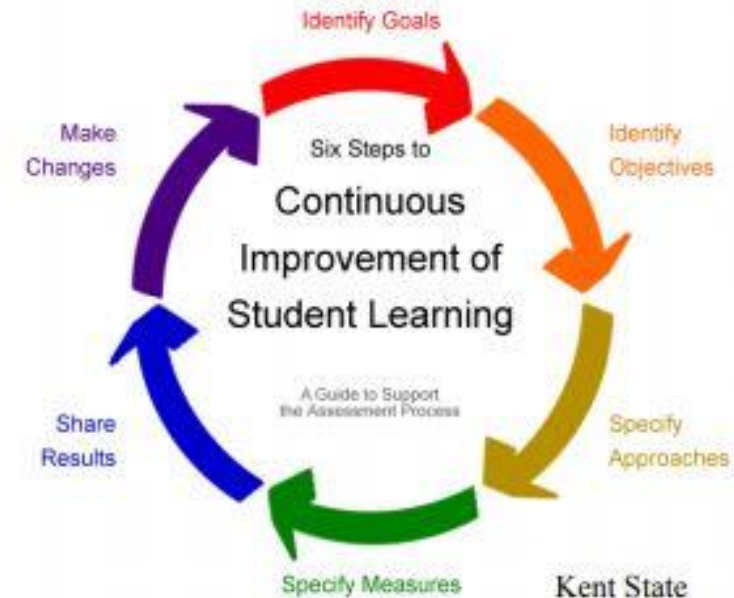
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What We're Supposed to Do:

"[E]ffective **assessment can take a variety of forms** and involve a variety of processes. However, **faculty members, with meaningful input from students** and strong support … should have the fundamental role in **developing and sustaining systematic assessment** of student learning.

"Their **assessment strategy should** be informed by the organization's mission and **include explicit public statements regarding the knowledge, skills, and competencies students should possess as a result of completing course and program requirements;** it also should **document the values, attitudes, and behaviors** faculty expect students to have developed.

"Moreover, while **strong assessment should provide data that satisfy** any externally mandated **accountability requirements, its effectiveness in improving student learning relies on its integration into the organization's processes** for program review, departmental and organization planning, and unit and organizational budgeting."

Excerpt from: The HLC Statement on Assessment of Student Learning, 2003.

Source: Assessment Times, March 2006

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The Charge:

"The Harold Washington College Assessment Committee (HWCAC) is dedicated to fulfilling the HWC core value of **conducting assessment activities to improve learning.** As such we plan, execute, and support the assessment activities of the college and share our findings and recommendations.
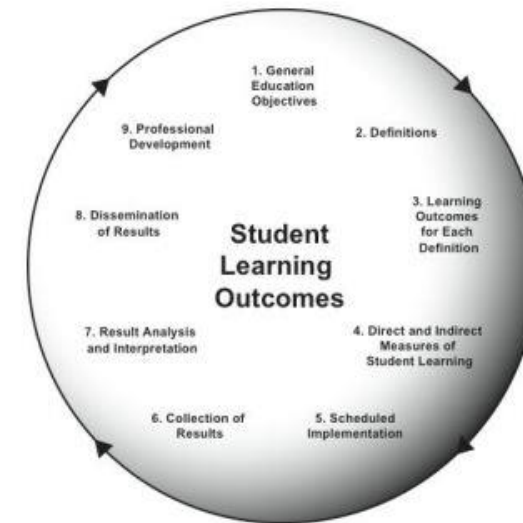
"The HWCAC maintains an annual cycle of General Education assessment in order to **collect, analyze, and disseminate relevant student learning data and… recommendations** to the greater faculty and administration **aimed at the improvement student learning."**

Why are we changing how we do things, anyway?

What We've Done and Been:

- Faculty Led
- Voluntary Participation
- Annual Assessments for 15 years
- District Model
- Growing (Gen Ed → Unit/Program)
- National Recognition
- International Recognition

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Student Learning Outcomes
1. General Education Objectives
2. Definitions
3. Learning Outcomes for Each Definition
4. Direct and Indirect Measures of Student Learning
5. Scheduled Implementation
6. Collection of Results
7. Result Analysis and Interpretation
8. Dissemination of Results
9. Professional Development

Source: Assessment Times, Dec 2006

So, it's all good, right?
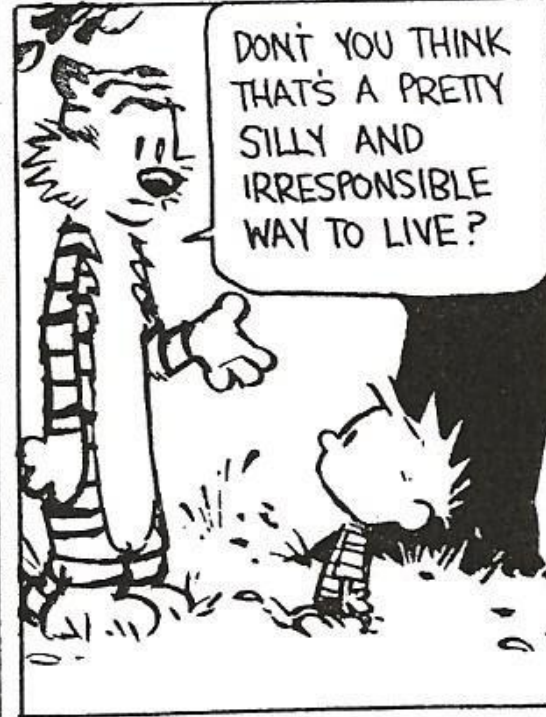
Why are we changing how we do things, anyway?

In our reflections, four points stood out:

    1) 'Closing the Loop' has been a struggle for 15 years, along with "student input;"

    2) Our commitment to volunteerism and to technology usage led to sample issues;

    3) We could collect 'output' data, but absent of 'input' data, it was useless;

    4) Program Assessment works!

All of which led to Primary Recommendation #4:

"We should radically rethink general education assessment."

SOURCE: *Not Again: The Humanities Assessment,* Full Report (February 2019, p.3)

One Perpetual Challenge
(i.e. The Bad Penny):

Our "Closing the Loop" Problem

*"**Our assessments**, which focused on our general education learning outcomes, **have helped us understand much more about what our students learn,** how they best learn, and some of the key influences on their learning outcomes. HWC's Assessment Committee has a solid decade of this kind of research.*

*"**I know all Assessment Committee members remain acutely aware that the most difficult aspect of this process involves what we have frequently called "Closing the Loop." ...** we have disseminated and discussed the findings of our assessments. Yet have no supervisory or managerial responsibility for implementing any changes...This is not within our charge, and it would be impossible and unhelpful to make it so."*

Source: Assessment Times, Spring 2012

- **Lack of implementation power**

- **Vagueness of recommendations**

- **No/limited student engagement**

One New Challenge:
Did we break our model?

"It turns out that nearly half (46.6%) of the students who completed the assessment had … successfully completed English 102. That compares unfavorably to the general student body for the fall of 2016, of whom, less than 20% had successfully completed English 101, and just under half had no record of English completion…

This disparity between the sample and the general population raises problems with generalizing from the abilities, attitudes, behaviors, and choices of the sample to the general HWC student body, and also highlights a significant data blind spot with respect to the general student body. In short, it seems that the self-selection built into the methodology led to a sample make-up that make any generalizations of interpretations of the data highly suspect.

Source: Not Again Humanities Report, 2019 (p. 12)

Methodology Choices:

- **Way back when, we chose volunteerism as a key principle, precluding "Random Sampling" of classes or students.**

- **Justifiable Generalization requires *adequate sample size* and *representativeness*.**

- **The move to asynchronous deployment has led to problems with the latter in *at least* our last two assessments.**

"[Learning] is almost certainly a different experience for every student…with different instructors, different courses in a different sequence, different starting preparations, and many other important variables that can affect 'program outcomes.'

Additionally, each student is different, with unique academic strengths and interests, and so on. Since none of these variables is usually accounted for, only large effects could possibly be detected, and even then we may fool ourselves as to the cause.

This is a hopeless situation… ***Even in cases where a curriculum is highly structured (e.g. cohort-based with a fixed course sequence), it is necessary to take into account student traits when trying to understand the cumulative effect of the curriculum."***

Eubanks, David. "A Guide for the Perplexed." *Intersection.* http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.aalhe.org/resource/resmgr/docs/Int/AAHLE_Fall_2017_Intersection.pdf (Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education; Fall 2017), p. 10:

Another Persistent Problem:
"Outputs without Inputs"

- **Student Starting Points & Data Interpretation**

  - **Course Credit Proxy = Invalid**
    - Natural Science Assessment Report, 2016 (p.7)

  - **Limited OpenBook Effectiveness because Regression Sample Sizes = No confidence**
    - Humanities Assessment Report, 2019 (p. 16-18)

  - **Interpretive Problems**
    - e.g., Survivorship bias

"The implementation of Openbook has provided this assessment with the most accurate, detailed, and exhaustive view of a students' academic histories. **However, even with this data, it is still difficult to arrive at strong quantitative conclusions.**

"The students entering Harold Washington College fall along a long spectrum of academic preparedness, access to recourses, and outside support. Their learning in the natural sciences is directly affected by the diversity of the curriculum, as well as their quantitative literacy, and reading comprehension. **They enter our college at multiple points, and their academic paths are nonlinear.**

Due to the inherently nonlinear, multi-variant, highly correlated structure, **it is imperative that caution be used when making generalizations regarding learning, and even more so when applying policy.** While the data ascertained here elucidates our understanding of student learning in the Natural Sciences, its interpretation was **only possible with multiple conversations with natural science faculty** members. Without this context, this assessment would not have been possible…"

Recommendation: Unit-level assessment liaisons should continue to work with faculty members to ensure these objectives and outcomes are incorporated into the curriculum.

SOURCE: Phil Vargas, Natural Sciences Report, 2016, (pp. 6-7).

Another Persistent Problem:
## "Outputs without Inputs"

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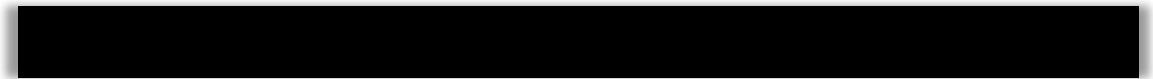   - e.g., Survivorship bias

Exciting findings!

Direct Assessments that Matter!

Actionable, specific recommendations!
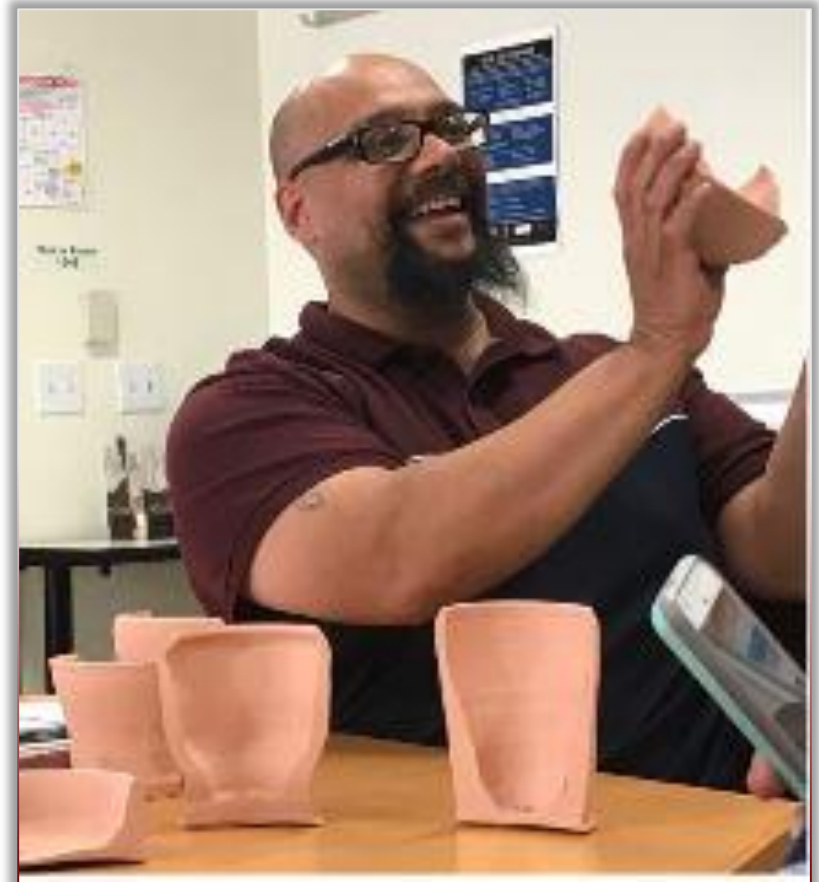
What to do?

o Keep doing what we're doing.

o Give up one of our principles

o Try something new.

So we did.

Proposal for New Conceptual Scheme
Proposal for New Process

New Process?

Old:
Define Objective, Outcome, Assessment, Interpretation, Discussion, Repeat

New*:
Discussion, Interpretation, Connections to Objectives & Outcomes, Data Plan, Interpretation, Repeat

*Approved for Pilot: December 2019