National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment
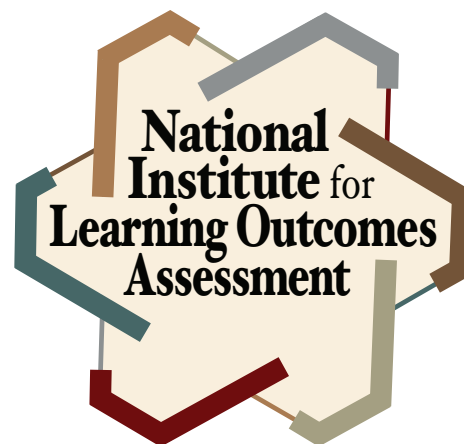
Advances, Contributions, Obstacles and Opportunities in Student Affairs Assessment

A. Katherine Busby & Robert W. Aaron

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Contents

NILOA Mission

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), established in 2008, is a research and resource-development organization dedicated to documenting, advocating, and facilitating the systematic use of learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning.

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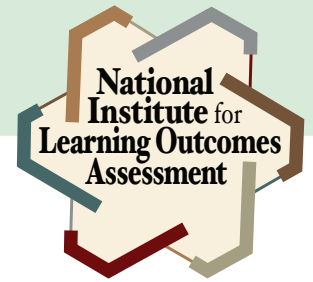
Abstract

Just over ten years ago, John Schuh and Ann Gansemer-Topf authored NILOA Occasional Paper #7, *The Role of Student Affairs in Student Learning Assessment* (2010). The authors identified contributions and challenges for student affairs assessment and called on student affairs professionals not only to develop meaningful programs and services, but also to verify that those experiences add "value to the student experience at the institution" (p. 6). A decade has passed since student affairs professionals were called to demonstrate student learning through their initiatives and some questions come to mind. How did student affairs professionals respond to this challenge? How did they implement their assessment efforts over the past ten years? Moving forward from 2020, how will student affairs professionals respond to the challenges now facing higher education including challenges induced and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and calls to address institutionalized racism? In this paper, we examine some of the advances student affairs assessment professionals have made to student learning, the contributions they made to the field of assessment, the obstacles they overcame, and the opportunities that lie ahead.

Advances, Contributions, Obstacles, and Opportunities in Student Affairs Assessment

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Just over ten years ago, John Schuh and Ann Gansemer-Topf authored NILOA Occasional Paper #7, *The Role of Student Affairs in Student Learning Assessment* (2010). The authors identified contributions and challenges for student affairs assessment and called on student affairs professionals not only to develop meaningful programs and services, but also to verify that those experiences add "value to the student experience at the institution" (p. 6). Schuh and Gansemer-Topf (2010) recommended that student affairs professionals link the student affairs mission to the broader institutional mission and related strategic initiatives to demonstrate student learning, form partnerships with faculty and academic administrators, and share their expertise in the areas of student learning and development with campus partners. The authors recognized the importance of practical matters and acknowledged that leadership, resources, sustainable assessment practices, and collaboration were necessary to advance student affairs assessment. Schuh and Gansemer-Topf (2010) also challenged their audience to ask "more difficult questions" (p. 12) and gather evidence that student affairs initiatives contribute to student learning and development.

A decade has passed since student affairs professionals were called to demonstrate student learning through their initiatives and some questions come to mind. How did student affairs professionals respond to this challenge? How did they implement their assessment efforts over the past ten years? Moving forward from 2020, how will student affairs professionals respond to the challenges now facing higher education including challenges induced and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and calls to address institutionalized racism? In this paper, we examine some of the advances student affairs assessment professionals have made to student learning, the contributions they made to the field of assessment, the obstacles they overcame, and the opportunities that lie ahead.

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Advancing, Aligning, and Assessing Student Learning and Development in Partnership with Academic Affairs

Schuh and Gansemer-Topf (2010) encouraged student affairs professionals to find opportunities to collaborate across student affairs and academic affairs to understand "students' total learning experience" (p. 8). Roberts (2016, 2017) reiterated this point and called on faculty and student affairs professionals to remove barriers that prevent students from maximizing learning opportunities between their curricular and co-curricular experiences. By removing these barriers, faculty, staff, and assessment professionals can more fully capture students' learning and development across these experiences.

Student affairs professionals have made notable contributions advancing, aligning, and assessing student learning and development through partnerships with academic affairs. For students to attain institutional learning outcomes via out-of-classroom learning experiences, alignment is necessary between academic and student affairs. Platt and Syegh (2015) offered a practical framework to demonstrate learning outcomes alignment across divisions of academic and student affairs. The framework guides leaders from both divisions to begin with institution-wide learning outcomes and identify those outcomes that both

divisions impact. Once academic and student affairs leaders identify the outcome(s), they can inventory the learning opportunities associated with the outcome through a joint curricular and co-curricular map (Oaks, 2015; Platt & Syegh, 2015). Jankowski and Baker (2020) also provided a practical and informative example of mapping learning in the co-curriculum. Faculty and staff can use such maps as a basis for a robust discussion about the gaps and overlaps in learning opportunities for students, how best to assess learning and interpret those findings, and ways to increase accessibility, scale, or promote such opportunities for students. A few examples of what this might entail are offered below.

Faculty and student affairs professionals at the University of Mississippi (UM) engaged in alignment and mapping conversations about critical thinking skill development within and outside of the classroom. Critical thinking is a general education competency at the institution, and critical thinking learning opportunities exist throughout the curriculum and outside of the classroom. In addition, critical thinking is the topic of ThinkFORWARD (see: https://thinkforward.olemiss.edu/), a current initiative focused on improving student learning and student success (University of Mississippi, 2020). As UM faculty and staff developed ThinkFORWARD, student affairs professionals identified co-curricular programs and opportunities offered by the division through which students could learn, develop, and apply critical thinking skills beyond the classroom. Student affairs professionals informed faculty about their efforts to introduce and reinforce critical thinking in various departments including Campus Recreation, Conflict Resolution and Student Conduct, Fraternity and Sorority Life, and Housing and Residential Life. Staff from student affairs now engage as a partner in developing students' institutional critical thinking skills, especially in the first and second year. These discussions also led to new program assessment efforts in Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) and Housing and Residential Life (HRL) to assess critical thinking skills in alignment with the ThinkFORWARD outcomes. Students participating in the EMERGE Leadership program through FSL developed a leadership philosophy paper which instructors evaluated using a common rubric to assess how emerging fraternity and sorority leaders articulate personal insights about complex issues or problems. The director of student affairs assessment, director of Think FORWARD, and student affairs professionals in FSL worked together to develop the rubric exemplifying the importance of partnership across academic and student affairs. Additionally, the information student affairs professionals shared with faculty inspired the development of critical thinking redesign grants that are available to faculty and staff, including student affairs professionals and librarians, to foster the development of co-curricular initiatives that support the critical thinking outcomes of ThinkFORWARD.

Student affairs professionals at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) engaged in a comprehensive effort to develop Principles of Co-Curricular Learning (PCL's) (Aaron & Davenport, 2014) to complement the institution's Principles of Undergraduate Learning (PULs). The PULs served as the university's shared general education outcome domains until 2018 when the PULs and PCLs were incorporated into the Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, 2020). When preparing for the routine decennial Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation site visit in 2012, the IUPUI faculty mapped all undergraduate courses to a primary and secondary PUL. The goal was to unify assessment of student learning while allowing for individuality among the various academic programs. With a push to

demonstrate learning in the co-curriculum for accreditation purposes, the Division of Student Affairs followed suit. After a rigorous literature review and content analyses of peer institutions, the student affairs staff adapted the PULs to work with the out-of-classroom learning environment by adding two new domains focusing on intrapersonal development and interpersonal relationships, thus creating the Principles of Co-Curricular Learning (PCLs) (Aaron & Davenport, 2014). Then, staff in student affairs identified learning opportunities across the various departments comprising the division and mapped these opportunities to a primary and secondary PCL, mirroring the faculty mapping efforts with undergraduate classes. The result was a seamless link between academic and student affairs across efforts to enable connected student learning both inside and outside of the classroom. The current framework incorporates the learning principles developed by faculty and student affairs professionals signaling an ongoing partnership to align and assess student learning across the curriculum and co-curriculum (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, 2020).

Contributions of Student Affairs Assessment Professionals

Hundley and Kahn (2019) provide an overview of recent higher education assessment trends as seen primarily from the vantage point of the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, a conference that has served assessment and higher education professionals since 1992. These trends include better understanding of student learning and success, the importance of authentic and inclusive assessment strategies, and the need for ongoing professional development and leadership to advance assessment efforts. Specifically, trends within student affairs assessment exemplify some of the many contributions made by student affairs professionals in three broad areas: advancing the student affairs assessment profession, assessing student development, and collaborating across campus (Busby & Ninon, 2019).

Student Affairs Assessment Profession

Student affairs assessment has grown and developed tremendously since the early 2000s. Researchers have documented the history of student affairs assessment as a profession with a modest yet ambitious start (Busby & Ninon, 2019; Henning & Roberts, 2016; Roper, 2015). In recent years, the field has demonstrated itself to be an integral part of the broader assessment profession in higher education.

Most student affairs assessment efforts at colleges and universities started small, often with one or fewer FTE staff dedicated to the work. Through the call for resources to support assessment and planning efforts, we have seen an increase in the number of professionals and offices dedicated to assessment in divisions of student affairs. The profession has grown from approximately 40 dedicated, full-time student affairs professionals in 1999 to three times that many in 2016 (Henning & Roberts, 2016). Institutions such as University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, North Carolina State University, DePaul University, and University of Alabama were among the first universities to support student affairs assessment positions while Texas A&M University and The Ohio State University developed more fully staffed offices dedicated to studying student life. Today approximately 150 institutions including small, liberal arts colleges as well as large flagship universities, have staff dedicated to student affairs assessment (Student Affairs Assessment Leaders, 2020). It is important to point out that this growth trend occurred over a period of time that included significant economic

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setbacks, including salary cuts and layoffs, in United States higher education due to the Great Recession (Wolinsky, 2009). It is likely that senior student affairs officers chose to maintain or increase the investment in student affairs assessment because they relied on the resulting data to navigate that very difficult time.

In the early 2000s, student affairs assessment professionals found support at national meetings and conferences such as Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and College Student Educators International (ACPA). Student affairs assessment professionals not only presented their assessment practice, research, and scholarship at these conferences, but also provided their peers with valuable professional development opportunities. The Assessment Institute in Indianapolis also developed and expanded a special track for student affairs assessment focusing on student development, diversity, and student programs and services (Busby, 2017). During this time, professionals involved in student affairs assessment formed a grass-roots network through these conferences. That network developed into what is now the Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL) (Student Affairs Assessment Leaders, 2020). SAAL (http://studentaffairsassessment. org/) initially provided a listserv for professionals to exchange ideas, information, and resources and now offers professional development opportunities including structured conversations, webinars, and an online open course.

Student affairs assessment professionals not only established a dedicated professional organization, but also embraced the opportunity to present their assessment work at regional and national meetings focused on assessment and to provide their peers with professional development opportunities. In addition to the annual conferences, NASPA and ACPA both sponsored meetings focused specifically on assessment. The NASPA Assessment, Persistence, and Data Analytics Conference provides professionals the opportunity to share their assessment related practice and scholarship to advance student learning and success (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2020b). Attendees at the ACPA Student Affairs Assessment Institute receive instruction and experiential learning opportunities to help them develop their assessment knowledge and skills (American College Personnel Association, 2020b). Some institutions developed their own campus-based assessment conferences for student affairs professionals. For example, the Center for the Study of Student Life at Ohio State University sponsors the Student Affairs Assessment and Research Conference, an opportunity for area professionals from multiple campuses to gather and share assessment knowledge and research (The Ohio State University, 2020). Northwestern University also hosts an intra-campus conference providing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff (Northwestern University, 2020).

Student affairs assessment professionals advanced their work through the NASPA Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2020a) and the ACPA Commission for Assessment and Evaluation (American College Personnel Association, 2020a). Following the publication of the ASK (Assessment Skills, and Knowledge) Standards in 2006 (American College Personnel Association, 2006) and the competency areas of the Joint Task Force on Professional Competencies and Standards in 2010 (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2010), ACPA and NASPA (2015) adopted the revised *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* which includes Assessment, Evaluation, and Research as a competency, and published accompanying rubrics (American College Personnel Association & National

Association of Student Personnel Administrators, n.d.). These documents have served as a basis for professional development and graduate education. The number of higher education graduate programs adding elective or required courses in assessment evidences the influence of these efforts.

Student affairs professionals, assessment scholars, and faculty also made important contributions to higher education literature and assessment practice over the past decade. Assessment-related articles appear in student affairs journals as well as higher education assessment publications. The Winter 2013 issue of *Research & Practice in Assessment* and the November-December 2016 issue of *Assessment Update* both focused on assessment in student affairs. The founding of the SAAL-sponsored *Journal of Student Affairs Inquiry* (http://studentaffairsassessment.org/journal-of-student-affairs-inquiry) in 2015 marked an important advancement in the field of student affairs assessment welcoming a journal dedicated specifically to assessment and research in student affairs.

Sharing Expertise with Campus Partners to Assess Student Development

Student affairs professionals have the opportunity and responsibility to share their expertise in student development with campus partners. Those who are engaged in student affairs assessment work are uniquely positioned to apply student development theory to campus assessment efforts thus grounding the work in theory and enhancing interpretations of assessment results. Student affairs assessment practitioners are often called upon to be leaders or partners at campus-wide committees working to conduct broad surveys on various aspects of the student experience. Though typically set in a division of student affairs, the work of student affairs assessment has implications far beyond student affairs staff alone.

Student affairs professionals also use their experience and expertise to inform broader campus discussions regarding investments in programs, services, technology, and infrastructure. For example, the University of Albany facilitates several programs widely considered to be high impact educational practices (HIPs), including living-learning communities (LLC) (Christakis, 2016). High impact practices are educationally effective tasks that correlate with student retention and student engagement (Kuh, 2008). Through their assessment efforts, University of Albany student affairs professionals demonstrated the effectiveness of their LLCs and shared those results with academic affairs leaders. Presenting the data and helping faculty understand this information with respect to student development led them to scale their LLCs in partnership with academic affairs (Christakis, 2016).

Student Affairs Assessment Today

Student affairs professionals have demonstrated through consistent and continually improving assessment practices various ways in which divisions of student affairs are partners with academic affairs in student learning and institutional strategic initiatives toward student success. The student affairs assessment profession continues to mature and practitioners make important contributions to assessment scholarship and practice. Today's professionals also undertake their work with a renewed focus on handling challenges in assessing co-curricular learning, available technology, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and promoting racial justice, equity, and inclusion.

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Challenges in Assessing Co-Curricular Learning

Over ten years ago, accreditors began to call upon universities to incorporate assessment data from divisions of student affairs into routine accreditation activities. In other words, the accreditors began to require institutions of higher education to provide evidence of student learning in the co-curriculum for the first time (Aaron & Davenport, 2014; Busby, 2015). In turn, senior institutional leaders worked with student affairs staff to determine the intersections between co-curricular and curricular learning. Together they established measures and collected data in order to provide evidence that student affairs programs offered more than just fun social activities (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010). Student affairs professionals found themselves with an opportunity to contribute directly to the central and essential academic process of accreditation by way of an emphasis on the assessment of student learning. The requirements of the accreditors helped to bring student affairs assessment to important decision-making tables in terms of determining what is important to student learning as exemplified at IUPUI prior to the 2012 accreditation site visit regarding development of the Principles of Co-Curricular Learning, as mentioned earlier in this article (Aaron & Davenport, 2014).

Assessment of student learning became the ticket to opening doors for academic and student affairs partnerships (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010). However, assessing student learning is very complex. At its best student learning assessment involves having a mix of direct and indirect measures to build a data profile that expresses where, when, and how learning occurs (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Roberts, 2015; Shefman, 2016; Suskie, 2018). Achieving this mix can be difficult outside the classroom. Within courses, faculty can develop direct measures of learning such as papers, tests, presentations, and the like. Faculty also incorporate indirect prompts for students to reflect on what they have learned within courses and at the end of an academic program. The two types of measures blended together provides a solid foundation for assessing student learning. However, in the co-curriculum there tends to be a dearth of natural assessment opportunities, especially for employing direct measures of student learning where students are motivated to give their best effort. Whereas students are often required to demonstrate learning in the classroom, student involvement in learning outside the classroom is optional, so it can be difficult to identify opportunities to demonstrate learning that are perceived to be robust enough to be used for assessment purposes. In fact, student affairs professionals sometimes create circumstances for performances or activities for the purpose of gathering direct assessment data. These activities often do not occur unless there is an intentional assessment program in place. For example, a leadership development curriculum may involve sessions teaching emerging leaders specific tasks like running student organization meetings. Assessing the success of this program can involve an indirect measure, like a self-reflection paper, but a more robust form of assessment would be a direct measure of setting up an opportunity to actually observe the student's leadership skills in action. This requires pre-planning, creating an observation rubric, finding observers, and essentially contriving the environment suitable for collecting data of this direct assessment measure. The results of these assessment efforts have the potential to be quite rich, but unfortunately the model may not be sustainable over time due to its difficulty in implementation. There is a high level of turnover in student affairs staff, and finding people and resources to sustain these direct measures can be daunting, even in the best of times regarding staffing and monetary resources.

Regarding indirect measures, many institutions have an assessment routine for running large-scale surveys, however this may not be sustainable across all institutional types, and more important, it may be difficult if not impossible to attribute gains in larger-scale surveys to specific activities in the co-curriculum without additional analyses or sources of data. In addition, while some institutions may be equipped to conduct program evaluations of individual co-curricular programs and services, thus providing a decent set of indirect measures for digging into co-curricular learning, not all are equipped to do so regularly. Without dedicated assessment staff in student affairs, a regular assessment routine is not necessarily sustainable over time due to aforementioned reasons like staff turnover or changes in funding. In short, assessing student learning in the co-curriculum, even as important as it is, may not always be viable due to its complexity, the difficulty with finding consistent direct measures, and the ability of institutions to sustain the work over time even after key staff members leave the institution. It is possible, however, for the use of more sophisticated technologies to help fill in some of the gaps.

Role and Use of Technology

Although Schuh & Gansemer-Topf (2010) encouraged student affairs professionals to extend beyond the early iterations of assessment work that revolved largely around tracking participation and satisfaction, advances in technology allow practitioners to reinvent the initial mere tracking of participation into a unique form of data analysis. Researchers demonstrated that participation in educationally effective activities can foster student engagement (Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2005). That participation, as captured through advanced systems of student participation tracking, can and should be coupled with the data gathered through direct and indirect assessment measures to provide a rich data set that assessment professionals can use to examine more complex questions about student participation and learning.

Previously in this paper we discussed the importance of academic and student affairs partnerships to understand and foster student learning and development. However, we must not overlook the importance of partnerships among student affairs, information technology, and institutional research. Schuh and Gansemer-Topf (2010) discussed the need for student affairs professionals to be a campus partner and leader when it comes to making decisions about programs and services, and this idea should include decisions related to technology. Many campuses are developing or purchasing tools such as customer relation management (CRM) systems and student success platforms designed to identify and serve prospective and current students. Many of those platforms utilize institutional data such as student demographics, credit hours attempted and earned, and data from learning management systems (LMS) such as engagement with the platform and class participation. Student affairs professionals must also be included in planning and early-stage implementation meetings for such tools to ensure the institution maximizes the investment of the system. Data collected by student affairs professionals such as participation in campus activities and card swipes at campus venues in addition to direct and indirect student learning data can be used to determine interventions to promote student learning and success. Data scientists, employed by either student affairs or IT, fill an important role in combining and analyzing institutional data. They can access both institutional data and student learning data that may be stored in several different databases maintained by various functional units on campus. The data scientist can combine data sources, ensure student learning data are included with institutional data, maintain student privacy laws and ethical standards, enhance how these data are reported,

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and promote the use of the data in a variety of ways toward continuous improvement of programs and services.

Student Affairs Assessment During the Global Pandemic

Student affairs assessment professionals experienced unexpected and dramatic changes to their work when the COVID-19 global pandemic struck the United States in spring 2020. These professionals typically would be involved in a routine of data-collection efforts to assess the operations, programs, and learning opportunities of student support services, but spring 2020 was anything but typical. Because student affairs professionals are well positioned to have close connections with students and understand student concerns, they responded to the ever-changing crisis by meeting the immediate needs of students during the disrupted term. Next, they were called upon to provide information and insight regarding the impact of the pandemic on operations planned for the fall term. Throughout the fall, student affairs professionals executed operations as planned whenever possible or with necessary modifications due to changes in student participation, COVID-19 protocols, and/ or institution, local, or state requirements. Student affairs professional now have experience executing their operations during the pandemic and will use that experience to improve the delivery of services and co-curricular learning opportunities in Spring 2021. In between, they postponed or modified existing assessment projects in lieu of immediate pandemic-related priorities, initiated new studies of the impact of the crisis on students, and examined existing data, even though almost every metric would need to be marked with an asterisk to represent the differences in trends due to COVID-19. Student affairs assessment professionals remain as nimble as ever to keep up with ever-changing demands. In other words, student affairs assessment must be resilient. "Resilient assessment requires planning, collaboration, flexibility, and focus on the elements necessary to understand student learning and development to be successful through any possible disruption" (Busby, 2020).

In spite of the instability created by the pandemic, it is essential for the student affairs assessment profession to continue with its planned assessment work, and share its expertise to the greatest extent possible. Student-focused needs assessments are more important than ever before and understanding the student experience during these times remains of paramount importance. Recent national trends are pointing to what many of us are seeing at our home institutions: the pandemic situation is tougher for marginalized populations than it is for the majority (Jankowski, 2020). Student affairs assessment professionals understand these nuances because they see systematic differences when disaggregating data. Therefore, they may be called upon to conduct focused needs assessments beyond those in the typical annual routine. Alongside the expertise of professionals in diversity, equity and inclusion—education work typically found in student support services at colleges and universities—student affairs assessment professionals support this important work by collecting and analyzing relevant data to help determine needs in the moment for student support. For example, some institutions conducted short needs assessments at the beginning of the stay-at-home orders in March 2020 and they also conducted similar ones immediately prior to when students returned in the subsequent fall and winter terms. While data were collected at a higher frequency than normal, student needs are constantly changing, and it is important for college and university administrators to have the latest information.

Similarly, student affairs assessment professionals may find themselves involved in the more technical aspects of gathering, analyzing, and reporting COVID-19 related data such as tracking individual student whereabouts for purposes of contact tracing or determining the numbers of students who seek housing on campus. At times, the reasons for needing housing are different from what one would expect. For example, just prior to spring break in 2020, Northwestern University tracked its 4,000 residential students to determine their housing needs for the upcoming spring quarter, after the decision was made to offer spring classes in an online modality. A team of student affairs professionals analyzed the results of a survey looking into the reasons for why students requested remaining on campus during the stay-at-home orders. Through deep analyses and extended discussions with individual students, the team was able to dig into data supplied by student affairs assessment staff to help students with individualized needs related to health and wellbeing, assisting the university's crisis intervention efforts for its students.

Institutionalized Racism

In addition to the global health pandemic, we find ourselves facing the painful reality of racial injustice as related to a long history of institutionalized racism in the United States. As has long been stated, institutional research staff are often among the first to see evidence of institutionalized racism in a variety of data sources they maintain (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). In institutional research work specific to student affairs, there is an even deeper commitment to social justice, as the work around diversity, equity, and inclusion education is often embedded into divisional strategic plan values statements that provide a theoretical foundation in support of students in the co-curriculum (Aaron & Busby, 2016). It is imperative that student affairs assessment professionals take a leading role in discussions with institutional assessment and research partners around disaggregation of data by race/ethnicity, gender identity, ability, religious affiliation or spiritual practice (Ballysingh et al., 2018), especially when mainline institutional practice does not automatically support this level of analysis.

American higher education institutions are required to report statistics on race/ethnicity to the federal government by way of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Database System (IPEDS). Unfortunately, the categories used by the federal government can be difficult to interpret. For example, when students are given the opportunity to identify their race/ethnicity on an admission application, they are often encouraged to "mark all that apply" to a variety of categories through which they can report multiple races or ethnicities. This is good in practice and intent, but unfortunately federal government requires anyone with more than one race/ethnic identity category to be grouped into the generic "two or more races" category (mirroring race/ethnicity categories in the US Census). Therefore, a student who identifies as Asian and Latinx is categorized alongside someone else who identifies as Black/African-American and White, and yet the lived experiences of these two individuals in the United States are likely quite different. While the IPEDS race/ethnicity categories may be easier to understand and analyze logistically, they also contribute to erasing intersectionality in racial identity. Student affairs assessment staff are obligated to bring out the student voice as accurately as possible in order to support important work around social justice and anti-racism (Jankowski, 2020; Kendi, 2019). When data sources are disaggregated properly with adherence to the students' lived experiences, student affairs assessment can help engage in important discussions around anti-racism and take necessary action.

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Right Place and Right Time: The Opportunities Ahead

In 2010 Schuh and Gansemer-Topf described the role of student affairs in assessment and challenged student affairs professionals to uniquely contribute to the assessment of student learning and development at their institution. Since that time student affairs assessment professionals have engaged with academic affairs in assessing student learning and development, advanced their profession, and contributed widely to their campus decision making and higher education scholarship. Much has been done, but more remains and this is the right place and right time to seize the opportunities that lie ahead. Building on the foundation that has been set, student affairs professionals have the opportunity to:

- foster true partnerships not only with academic affairs, but also institutional research and information technology;
- disaggregate data to better understand the impact of programs and services; and
- align participation/satisfaction data, student information, and student learning data to foster student success.

A partnership between academic affairs and student affairs requires that both parties contribute to the association. We encourage faculty and academic administrators to understand fully the knowledge and expertise student affairs professionals offer related to student learning and development. Assessment professionals working within offices of assessment, institutional research, institutional effectiveness, or planning also have a responsibility to connect with student affairs professionals when they are designing assessments of student learning. With disaggregated data in hand student affairs professionals can help campus partners go beyond the numbers that define retention and persistence to help inform the work of academic and administrative leaders in advancing student success for all students. Student affairs assessment professionals should make the most of the opportunity to lead efforts toward the shared enterprise of institution-wide student data despite any limitations seemingly imposed by organizational structures and use those data to improve student learning and student success.

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About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.

- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.

- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org.

- NILOA supports institutions in designing learning experiences and assessment approaches that strengthen the experience of diverse learners within a variety of institutional contexts.

- NILOA works in partnership with a broad range of organizations and provides technical assistance and research support to various projects focused on learning throughout the U.S. and internationally.

- NILOA's Vision is to broaden the dialogue and conversation on meaningful and sustainable assessment practices that address issues of design and implementation, and position institutions, organizations, and individuals to achieve their goals.
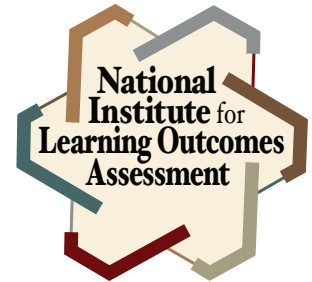
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