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Abstract

As assessment becomes an ever more critical facet of higher education, it is apparent that some faculty do not always value assessment (Crossley & Wang, 2010; Ebersole, 2009). Further, faculty may react with resistance, particularly when they perceive that assessment is being imposed upon them from external sources (Crossley & Wang, 2010; Marrs, 2009; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). Motivation for faculty to participate in assessment is therefore a critical question. We conducted a qualitative study to explore faculty attitudes towards general education assessment, focusing particularly on faculty motivation for engaging in assessment. General education coordinators were interviewed about their perceptions of student learning outcomes assessment, using a semi-structured interview approach, and then coded by consensus according to Expectancy-Value Theory of motivation (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Wentzel & Brophy, 2014). Implications for future assessment practice are also shared.

Faculty Attitudes toward General Education Assessment: A Qualitative Study about Their Motivation

In today's climate surrounding higher education, one would be hard-pressed to find a university that is not conducting assessment of student learning outcomes. Whether the university has developed a long-standing culture of assessment or is simply conducting assessment for purposes of accreditation, the underlying notion is to systematically and empirically study what students gain from their university experience (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Erwin, 1991; Ewell, 1991). A systematic process of assessing student learning involves at least four steps: (a) defining student learning outcomes, (b) developing curriculum and interventions to promote student growth on learning outcomes, (c) gathering empirical evidence about student learning outcomes, and (d) using the results to understand and improve student learning (Suskie, 2010). The most critical of these steps is the final one, leading to improvement of student learning, which (regardless of an institution's approach toward assessment) necessitates faculty participation. In the current study, we conducted a qualitative investigation to explore faculty attitudes towards engaging in general education assessment.

General Education at the Current Study's Institution

To provide additional context for the current study, we will first outline the structure of general education at the institution under study. The underlying philosophy of the general education program is to help students develop their ability to reason and make ethical choices; to appreciate beauty and understand the natural and social worlds they live in; to recognize the importance of the past and work towards a better future (James Madison University, n.d.). Within this philosophical description, the five areas of general education are highlighted. Specifically, the five areas are (a) *Skills for the 21st Century*, (b) *Arts and Humanities*, (c) *The Natural World*, (d) *Social and Cultural Processes*, and (e) *Individuals in the Human Community*.

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Each of the five general education areas is led by a coordinator who chairs a committee that is comprised of general education faculty representatives and other university staff members (e.g., the university writing center staff participate in the *Skills for the 21st Century* committee). Coordinators are selected for their role through a rigorous internal and/or external search process, and serve a dual appointment as coordinator and as faculty who teach general education courses within their substantive area. Duties of the coordinators are varied and include not only managing the day-to-day operations of their area (e.g., course enrollments), but also organizing and reporting the assessment of student learning outcomes for their area to multiple constituencies. Two of the general education areas also report assessment information to the state higher education council. Hence, assessment is an integral part of the coordinator's duties. The coordinators each lead their respective faculty in developing/refining student learning outcomes and in selecting or developing assessment tools to evaluate each learning outcome. The university assessment center provides support to each of the coordinators in the form of an assessment liaison who participates as an active member of the area committee, collaborating with the coordinator and committee on all phases of the assessment process.

Each committee has the freedom to collect assessment data in any way they choose, although many choose to collect data during one of the university-wide assessment days. Specifically, two assessment days are conducted annually for the primary purpose of assessing student learning related to the general education curriculum. The first assessment session occurs prior to the first day of classes for incoming first-year students. During this session, students are randomly assigned to complete a series of general education content area tests and attitude measures. The second assessment session occurs after students have completed 45-70 credit hours, typically when they are second-semester sophomores. During their second assessment session, students are assigned to take the same tests that they completed as first-year students.

Assessment is valued by university administration, as evidenced by the numerous resources (e.g., time and money) that are allocated to university-wide assessment. General education faculty invest time and effort into developing assessment tools. Assessment liaisons aid in developing, evaluating, and reporting on assessment measures. Finally, students who do not participate in their assigned assessment session are unable to register for classes until their assessments are completed, resulting in a nearly 100% participation rate. Consequently, one may envision that assessment is an integral part of the university's evaluation of student learning, providing useful information for curriculum improvement. One might also anticipate that the general education coordinators would be the champions of student learning outcomes assessment at such an institution. Unfortunately, not all faculty view assessment as a productive endeavor. To help understand why, we review literature on faculty attitudes towards assessment in higher education as well as literature related to motivation theory.

Faculty Attitudes toward Assessment in Higher Education

A number of studies suggest that faculty frequently question the value of assessment (Crossley & Wang, 2010; Ebersole, 2009; Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Kramer, 2008; Marrs, 2009; Sundre, 2005; Yarkova & Cherp, 2013). In fact, faculty may even react with resistance, particularly when they perceive that assessment is being imposed upon them from external sources such as administration or from accrediting agencies (Crossley & Wang, 2010; Marrs, 2009; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). Faculty may become even more resistant if they fail to understand the purposes for assessment. For example, faculty who believe that the purpose for assessment is to scrutinize their classroom practices or prove their worth may become particularly resistant (Kramer, 2008; Linkon, 2005; Marrs, 2009). Additionally, some faculty may view assessment as a threat to academic freedom, either inhibiting their autonomy to choose what they teach in their own classrooms or infringing upon their methods of evaluating their students (Kramer, 2008). One author went as far as describing faculty perceptions of assessment activities as "...a game we can't win" (Linkon, 2005, p. 3).

In addition, assessment can be viewed as just another fad or additional responsibility piled on to faculty's already busy schedules (Kramer, 2008; Linkon, 2005; Marrs, 2009). Faculty must continually negotiate competing demands for their time, including teaching, research, and service. If an institution does not incentivize engaging in assessment, faculty perceive

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Faculty from disciplines that embrace constructivist perspectives may lack appreciation for assessment tools that include quantitative data collection and analyses.

assessment duties as one more demand that could be spent on activities for which they receive incentives, such as engaging in scholarship (Crossley & Wang, 2010; Grunwald & Peterson, 2003). Moreover, when assessment is conducted by the institution without much faculty input, faculty may fail to find the meaning or connection to their own classroom (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003).

However, when there is significant resistance to assessment, how do we engage faculty and motivate them to participate, thereby potentially increasing the value they place on assessment?

Faculty from disciplines that embrace constructivist perspectives may lack appreciation for assessment tools that include quantitative data collection and analyses. As one faculty stated, “This problem of misunderstanding and undervaluing knowledge in our disciplines is especially challenging for the humanities. The very idea of measurement is, for many of us, somewhat foreign” (Linkon, 2005, p. 4). Hence, for some, an assessment process (like the four-step process we highlighted at the outset of this article) can conflict with a deeply-held worldview of how best to evaluate learning.

It is important to note that not all faculty respond with resistance. Faculty who engage in the assessment process and gain experience with assessment frequently report that they find the process useful (Crossley & Wang, 2010; Ebersole, 2009; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). Involvement with assessment also has been positively related to support for assessment activities (Kramer, 2008; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). However, when there is significant resistance to assessment, how do we engage faculty and motivate them to participate, thereby potentially increasing the value they place on assessment?

Expectancy-Value Theory

To help answer the question of how to engage and motivate faculty in assessment, we turn to Expectancy-Value Theory. Expectancy-Value Theory is one of the most dominant contemporary theories of motivation (Eccles et al., 1983; Pintrich, 2003; Wentzel & Brophy, 2014). According to Expectancy-Value Theory, motivation to engage and persist in a task primarily depends on three factors: (a) an individual’s anticipated ability to successfully accomplish the task (i.e., Expectancy), (b) an individual’s perceived importance for the task (i.e., Value), and (c) how much an individual perceives that he or she has to sacrifice or give up to accomplish the task (i.e., Cost).

The costs associated with balancing assessment responsibilities along with other responsibilities of teaching, research, and service activities are all too familiar to faculty in higher education.

First, to be optimally motivated, Eccles et al. (1998) argued that an individual needs to say “yes” to the question, “Can I do the task?”, indicating expectancy for the task. Expectancies may be differentiated into two distinct factors: *Ability beliefs* and *expectancies for success* (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Ability beliefs refer to a person’s current sense of competence in being able to complete a task, whereas expectancies for success reflect how successful an individual believes he or she can continue to be in the future. For example, in the case of faculty engagement in higher education assessment, ability beliefs relate to the faculty’s current perceptions of their competence for conducting assessment. Expectancies for success, however, reflect faculty beliefs about being able to successfully improve and develop assessment skills and to carry out various components of the assessment process in the future.

Second, to be optimally motivated, Eccles et al. (1998) argued that an individual needs to say “yes” to the question “Do I want to do the task?”, indicating value for the task. Specifically, Eccles and colleagues proposed four different types of value: *Intrinsic value*, *utility value*, *attainment value*, and *cost*. Three of the four types of value (intrinsic value, utility value, and attainment value) positively influence an individual’s desire to engage in a task. Intrinsic value refers to the interest or enjoyment an individual derives from engaging in the task. For example, a faculty member may volunteer to serve as the assessment coordinator in her department because she finds engaging in assessment work inherently enjoyable or interesting. Utility value refers to the usefulness or relevance of the task to reach some long-term goal or other external reward. A faculty member who engages in assessment because he perceives it as being useful in improving pedagogical practices (and therefore student learning) is motivated by utility value. Attainment value refers to the extent to which a task is congruent with an individual’s identity or beliefs about oneself. For instance, a faculty member may be motivated to participate in assessment activities because it contributes to her scholarly achievements and she identifies as a scholar in her field. In contrast, cost, the fourth type of value, negatively impacts an individual’s willingness to engage in a task. Cost refers to an individual’s beliefs about the negative aspects of engaging in a task, how much the individual

perceives he or she has to sacrifice, or how much the task limits his or her ability to engage in other activities. The costs associated with balancing assessment responsibilities along with other responsibilities of teaching, research, and service activities are all too familiar to faculty in higher education.

Eccles, her colleagues, and others have measured the impact of adopting different types of expectancies and values in a number of longitudinal studies (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010). A number of findings are worth highlighting. First, although current and future expectancies can be theoretically distinguished, researchers have been unable to separate them empirically in factor analytic studies. As a result, most researchers combine the two types of expectancies into a single measure. Second, in terms of measuring values, most researchers have focused on the positive values. Only recently has work begun investigating the impact of cost and how cost may combine with expectancy and values to influence motivation, specifically that cost may be negatively related to performance (see Barron & Hulleman, in press; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010 for reviews). In addition, because recent measurement studies of cost indicate that it may be a separate and distinct factor from expectancy and value, a number of researchers argue that cost should be considered a separate component in a revised Expectancy-Value-Cost model of motivation (see Barron & Hulleman, in press). Theoretically, motivation is then highest when an individual has high expectancies, high values, and relatively low cost for engaging in a task, which we can represent as $Motivation = (Expectancy * Value) - Cost$.

Using the revised Expectancy-Value-Cost model, this study explored the motivation of faculty serving as general education area coordinators. Specifically, the research question was: do area coordinators' perceptions of expectancy, value, and cost contribute to their motivation to engage in assessment of general education?

Methods

Research Team

The research team for this study consisted of three doctoral students in an educational measurement program, and two faculty members. None of the individuals on the research team have ever served as general education area coordinators. Team members had varying degrees of familiarity with general education assessment at the institution under study.

Participants

The participants in this study were faculty who served as area coordinators for the general education program or as a senior administrator of general education. The area coordinators spend half their time teaching in their discipline, and the other half of their time as area coordinators. Seven individuals were invited to participate, and all but one accepted. The person who declined to participate had recently changed roles in the university, and reported having a lack of time. The six who did participate consisted of the area coordinator for all five general education areas, and a senior administrator with oversight of general education. Participants' experience with general education assessment ranged from 2 to 11 years.

Procedure

We adopted a semi-structured interview approach, which Patton (2002) refers to as an interview guide. Because it is not a standardized procedure or script, a semi-structured interview guide allows the researcher to be flexible during the interview itself, while ensuring that major points are covered. Use of the interview guide approach also allowed the interviewer to follow up on interesting points or ask clarification questions, which we felt was important in this type of research situation. All interviews were conducted in teams of two interviewers, with one primarily responsible for asking questions, and the other primarily responsible for taking notes and monitoring a recording device.

We asked several main questions (Appendix A) to all respondents while leaving room for the interviewer to follow up on interesting responses. The questions were divided into two main categories: The area coordinator's personal perspectives and the area coordinator's perspectives of faculty teaching in their areas. Interviews were conducted between May and

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Our purpose was to understand faculty opinions from a particular theoretical stance, in order to explore how to increase motivation. And, indeed, each component of a revised Expectancy-Value-Cost model of motivation offers practical implications for increasing motivation for assessment.

September; each interview lasted 45-60 minutes, depending on how much the respondent expanded on their responses or what follow-up questions were asked by interviewers. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis purposes.

Results

Overview of Coding

Specifically, institutions may want to consider implementing initiatives that increase faculty expectancies and values, and decrease the costs associated with conducting assessments.

Once interviews were transcribed, data were coded through a line-by-line consensus process (Fonteyn, Vettese, Lancaster, & Bauer-Wu, 2008) according to Expectancy-Value Theory. The research team read through each interview transcript line-by-line, and identified phrases or thoughts that related to a priori codes for expectancy, value, and/or cost; codes were recorded only when consensus between all team members had been reached (Creswell, 2013). As the data analysis commenced, new codes were added as necessary (i.e., emergent coding). For example, although we had a code for utility value, we quickly realized that respondents were not discussing assessment in terms of positive utility value (that is, they did not find results from assessment useful in their day-to-day work). Because all raters agreed that this was important information, we added a code to capture the lack of utility value that respondents were articulating. Furthermore, although previous quantitative research has measured current ability beliefs and future expectancies as a unidimensional construct, we chose to qualitatively disaggregate them. As themes emerged from the data, it became clear that respondents saw their current and future ability as two separate things, which we felt was important to reflect in the coding. We also saw a situational-expectancy theme emerging from the data, in which faculty felt competence in one area of assessment (such as the assessment of their major) but not in another (such as assessment of general education). A complete codebook can be found in Appendix B. In addition to the qualitative phrases identified for each code, frequencies of each code were calculated as a pseudo effect size, which helps demonstrate the practical significance of the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Maxwell, 2010). As an indicator of the relationship between self-reported competency in assessment and amount of experience, number of years of experience and competency were plotted (Figure 1).

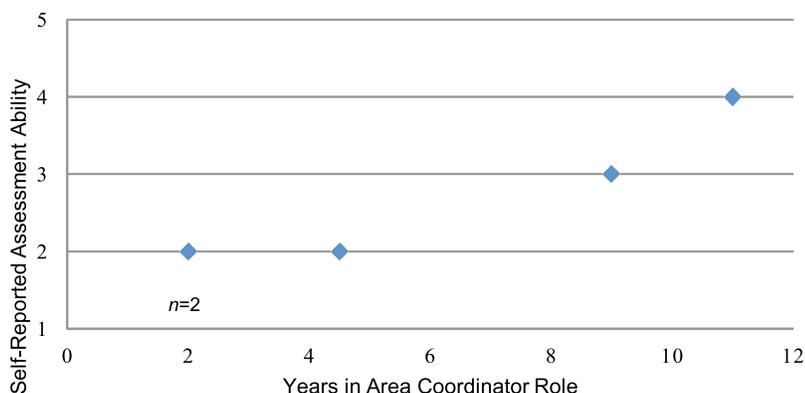


Figure 1. Relationship between years in coordinator role and perceived ability rating.

Coding Analysis

The results of the interviews and the subsequent qualitative data analysis via line-by-line consensus coding showed a clear pattern that aligned with a revised Expectancy-Value-Cost model of motivation. The relationship between expectancy, value, and cost had clear implications for respondents' motivation to invest (or not invest) significant effort and energy into assessment. Table 1 summarizes the frequencies of each qualitative code in this sample of interviews (for an expanded table that also includes representative phrases drawn directly from the interviews for each code, see Appendix B). The codes with the highest frequencies were V5: Lack of utility (n=41); V2: Utility (n=33); C1: Task-related effort (n=23); E1: Ability (current; n=21); and E4: Low expectancy (n=18). This frequency pattern was consistent across respondents.

Table 1
Qualitative Codes and Frequencies

Code	Frequency
E1: Ability (current)	21
E2: Expectancy (future)	11
E3: Expectancy (situational)	8
E4: Low expectancy	18
E5: Negative situational expectancy	3
V1: Intrinsic value/interest	7
V2: Utility	33
V3: Attainment	1
V4: Lack of intrinsic value	7
V5: Lack of utility	41
V6: Lack of attainment	3
V7: Value (other)	6
V8: Lack of value	16
V9: Extrinsic value	13
V10: Situational value	6
C1: Task-related effort	23
C2: Task-unrelated effort	6
C3: Loss of valued alternatives	11
C4: Negative Psychological Experiences	3

Note. Expectancy codes are E1-E5; Value codes are V1-V10; Cost codes are C1-C4

Discussion

Our research question for this study is: “Do area coordinators’ perceptions of expectancy, value, and cost contribute to their motivation to engage in assessment of general education?” Recall that according to a revised model of Expectancy-Value-Cost motivation (Barron & Hulleman, in press), an individual’s motivation to engage and persist in a task depends primarily on three factors: (a) an individual’s expectancy to successfully accomplish the task, (b) an individual’s perceived value for the task, and (c) how much the individual perceives he or she has to sacrifice or give up to accomplish the task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Indeed, each person who was interviewed offered responses that directly expressed expectancy, value, and cost. The most frequent expectancies were related to ability or lack of ability to conduct assessment. As one respondent stated, “I think that many faculty are just baffled by the idea of assessment.” Not only do faculty lack expectancy for assessment tasks, but respondents consistently expressed that faculty do not appreciate or value the usefulness (utility value) of assessment. One respondent went so far as referring to assessment as “a waste.” In addition to low expectancies and lack of utility value, a recurrent theme was that assessment requires time and therefore significant cost. For example, one respondent discussed barriers to assessment as “Resources. Time. The big, the big resource is time, and that’s time at every single level.... time to develop instruments, time within the classroom, time in processing the instrument, time in reporting, time in workshops, time, time, time, time, time, time.” Moreover, the time required to do assessment is done in lieu of other valued alternatives, such as research or class preparation. As another respondent expressed, faculty time is a “finite pie.”

If motivation is a function of the product of expectancies and value, minus cost [i.e., $Motivation = (Expectancy * Value) - Cost$], low motivation for assessment is not surprising. Furthermore, if expectancy or value for assessment equals zero, the motivation equation starts at zero. If we then subtract cost, a negative value quickly results. In the context of the current study, faculty expectancies and value were both low and cost was high, resulting in low to absent motivation for assessment.

Although we discovered many negative attitudes about assessment in our interviews, it is important to emphasize that the majority of respondents who were actively engaged in the assessment process also expressed appreciation for assessment. For example, as one respondent noted, “Well, the attitudinal assessment we did in the department actually led to some changes in the curriculum, and I made some changes in my personal teaching style based on that. So, it’s been useful in changing instruction, even though it was not competency based and was just attitudinal.” In other words, not all respondents thought that assessment was “a waste”; in fact, as shown in Table 1, there are several high-frequency codes related to

We most frequently heard that faculty do not see the relevance or usefulness (utility value) of assessment in their day-to-day work with students. As one respondent stated, ‘I’ve had faculty tell me, how is this supposed to help me improve my teaching? How is this supposed to improve student success? There’s a huge disconnect...it’s not relevant to the individual faculty member.’

positive perceptions of both expectancy and value. Our purpose was to understand faculty opinions from a particular theoretical stance, in order to explore how to increase motivation. And, indeed, each component of a revised Expectancy-Value-Cost model of motivation offers practical implications for increasing motivation for assessment. Specifically, institutions may want to consider implementing initiatives that increase faculty expectancies and values, and decrease the costs associated with conducting assessments.

Suggestions for Improving Faculty Motivation

Course-embedded assessments ‘close to home’ for the faculty member also have the potential to be more relevant than assessments in which the faculty member is not at all involved.

Expectancy. Institutions may want to consider investing in initiatives that increase faculty expectancies for assessment. Specifically, initiatives may include training or collaborations that increase faculty capacity for writing goals and objectives, developing measures, analyzing the data, and interpreting findings. Providing support from trained professionals who are clearly in a supportive role (rather than an authority role) can also increase positive faculty expectancies. As one respondent stated, “I think the number one resource is to have a flesh-and-blood human being who knows how to establish learning outcomes and establish protocols for whether those learning outcomes are being achieved.” On our campus, programs who engage more with consulting services also routinely conduct higher-quality assessment than programs who do not (Rodgers, Grays, Fulcher, & Jurich, 2013).

Institutions that have the capacity may want to consider offering intensive hands-on support. Our institution offers intensive sessions focused on assessment through our faculty development center. Additionally, we offer an assessment fellowship for one month during the summer, in which faculty are paid to intern within our assessment center to work on a project related to their assessment practice. During the assessment fellowship, faculty and student affairs professionals receive assistance and support from assessment specialists. Experiences such as these increase the assessment efficacy of all involved. Although it is common for fellows to initially express fear and inadequacy related to assessment, faculty participating in the fellowship routinely express greater efficacy after the fellowship. A clear example of the efficacy built is illustrated by one respondent who said in relation to the assessment fellowship and similar programs: “...those things have just really made it to where faculty can go back and say ‘Wow, what we’re doing is...’”

That is, if we want to increase motivation for assessment, we need to actively pursue ways in which we can connect assessment with the discipline, thereby making the assessment relevant to the users of the information.

Another aspect of expectancy is perceived situational expectancy; that is, the respondents frequently stated that faculty lack expectancies for broad program-level assessment yet appreciate and are capable of conducting their own classroom or discipline-related assessment. If we are able to relate our broader assessments to what faculty do in the classroom, faculty expectancies to successfully participate in assessment activities may increase. Applying faculty-created, course-embedded assessments to program assessment may increase the expectancy (and value/relevance) for assessment. Faculty in disciplines that do not value a quantitative approach toward assessment may feel more comfortable with being exposed to a variety of assessment methods, such as performance assessments or dynamic criterion mapping (Broad et al., 2009), thereby increasing efficacy, interest, and relevance. Note that it is difficult to tease apart efforts to increase expectancy from efforts that increase relevance or utility (i.e., value) for assessment. Indeed, they appear to be related, and research indicates that expectancies and values are moderately correlated (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995); building efficacy is likely to increase value, and vice-versa.

Value. We most frequently heard that faculty do not see the relevance or usefulness (utility value) of assessment in their day-to-day work with students. As one respondent stated, “I’ve had faculty tell me, how is this supposed to help me improve my teaching? How is this supposed to improve student success? There’s a huge disconnect...it’s not relevant to the individual faculty member.” In order to combat the feeling of uselessness, one suggestion is to involve faculty gradually and in small steps, in assessment projects that are related to their own disciplinary interests (Kramer, 2008). Course-embedded assessments “close to home” for the faculty member also have the potential to be more relevant than assessments in which the faculty member is not at all involved. For example, some institutions that have implemented a course-embedded strategy for assessing general education have reported greater faculty endorsement of assessment, because it puts assessment in the “hands of the faculty” (Gerretson & Golson, 2005, p. 144). Doing so may make the implicit benefits of assessment more explicit.

Faculty also need to become involved at the very beginning of the assessment process, creating and evaluating their student learning outcomes. Otherwise, and particularly if the faculty do not even know what the student learning outcomes for their program are, it is no wonder that faculty do not find relevance in the assessment findings. Assessment professionals need to engage faculty in the creation or evaluation of their current student learning outcomes, posing questions such as: “What is it that you hope students are learning?” “What would be useful information for you to know about your students’ knowledge, skills, and abilities?” “What do you most passionately desire for your students to learn?” “What is the most important thing that you try to convey to students?” In other words, it is crucial to try to capitalize on inherent curiosity of the faculty and to help them tease out the most relevant pieces of information such as the situation described by one respondent: “I’m trying to work with faculty on things that help the faculty, and I think that processing the assessment data that we’ve been getting is something that captures their imagination.”

When faculty can state their learning outcomes and objectives, it is important to ask questions, such as, “Once you have information about whether your students know this, what will you do with that information?” In other words, utility or relevance must be included in the planning or reevaluation stages of the assessment process. Moreover, including faculty in this process increases their autonomy and ownership related to assessment, increasing value for the process. In the case of our university-wide assessment day, one respondent astutely observed that we do not currently involve general education faculty in assessment day. If general education faculty participated in assessment day, as proctors in the examination rooms or even in the general planning of assessment day, they may begin to develop greater value for the process or begin to see more clear connections to the results of the assessments and the work they do in their own areas. Engaging faculty in performance assessment rating has also increased faculty acceptance of assessment. One coordinator pays faculty for rating students’ writing assessments and critical-thinking assessments. Following each rating session, a brief focus group is conducted to review the outcomes and objectives for the respective assessment. Faculty raters are specifically asked, for example, “After going through today’s rating, what do you know about students’ critical thinking that you did not know before? What can we say about critical thinking?” Questions such as these are specifically related to increasing the relevance of the assessment. And if the faculty do not find the ratings relevant, they are provided the autonomy to help change the goals/objectives or assessment methods.

Creating assessment reports that are accessible and digestible are also key to increasing relevance. As one respondent mentioned:

I’m a cluster¹ duster. I dust the cluster and move on...I have to laugh at this... mentioning statistics and numbers to [members of my discipline] and most of us are like, holy [expletive]...it goes right over us...I know when we have the assessment meeting, you see people turning around and it’s like “I don’t know what to make of all this!”

It behooves assessment professionals to actively collaborate with faculty in creating digestible and useful reports that appeal to the perspective of the discipline. That is, if we want to increase motivation for assessment, we need to actively pursue ways in which we can connect assessment with the discipline, thereby making the assessment relevant to the users of the information.

Another value-related issue pertains to the intrinsic versus extrinsic motives for assessment. That is, if faculty feel that assessment is externally imposed, they are likely to become resistant (Crossley & Wang, 2010; Marrs, 2009; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). There is support for the notion that faculty are more likely to embrace assessment when their institution portrays an intrinsic desire to learn from assessments, rather than an extrinsically-imposed accreditation perspective (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). It is crucial that upper-level administrators convey an intrinsically-driven motivation for assessment at the institutional level. Appreciation for the relevance of assessment for institutional excellence is imperative for faculty to embrace assessment practice. As one respondent stated, “...I think for me to use assessment as effectively as I’d like to use it, and for the things that I’d like to use it for, I would need a culture that values it.”

¹ Cluster refers to the area of general education which the respondent is responsible for coordinating.

Given that faculty typically identify as scholars, counting assessment toward scholarship may further increase attainment value.

Autonomy, relevance, and ownership are all increased when faculty are involved to develop the assessment plans.

Initiatives that increase efficacy, capacity, and the relevance/utility of assessment may help to lessen some of the perceived costs associated with conducting assessment. Our findings indicate that given the opportunities and resources to build individual capacity and efficacy, faculty will wholeheartedly engage in student learning outcomes assessment at the program level.

Faculty also need to become involved at the very beginning of the assessment process, creating and evaluating their student learning outcomes. Otherwise, and particularly if the faculty do not even know what the student learning outcomes for their program are, it is no wonder that faculty do not find relevance in the assessment findings.

Institutions can demonstrate value for assessment in other ways as well. For instance, investing monetary resources into assessment efforts sends the message that the institution values assessment. Providing resources such as intensive workshops, assessment fellowships, and summer grants for assessment work demonstrates institutional value for assessment. It is important to note that assessment resources do not need to be monetary. As Sundre (2005) noted “Vision, high standards, and commitment cost nothing, but they mean everything to the development of a quality institution of higher education” (p. 43). Offering university-wide assessment excellence awards also sends the message that assessment is important (Sundre, 2005). Awards for assessment may, in turn, increase attainment value for the recipients. Another approach would be to count assessment activities as scholarship. Given that faculty typically identify as scholars, counting assessment toward scholarship may further increase attainment value.

By including faculty in assessment, they may experience greater autonomy. One respondent astutely noted that, rather than participating in an assessment fellowship herself, it is valuable for her to encourage general education faculty to attend the fellowship. She stated that she says, “Oh look, you come do this wonderful thing;” she felt that it was worthwhile to her to give up a fellowship in order to bring other faculty into the fold. Autonomy, relevance, and ownership are all increased when faculty are involved to develop the assessment plans. Moreover, increasing expectancies and value for assessment may also minimize some of the perceived cost associated with assessment.

Cost. Throughout the interviews, we heard themes of cost related to the effort required to conduct assessments, and often in place of other valued activities. One respondent observed, “Assessment isn’t just ‘oh we’re giving a test’, right? It’s the development of the test, it’s the giving of the test, it’s the reporting of the test, it’s the workshops that you’re going to do to help develop a new test.” Clearly faculty see the amount of time and effort required to conduct quality assessment, and many are not willing to invest their time in that way. Initiatives that increase efficacy, capacity, and the relevance/utility of assessment may help to lessen some of the perceived costs associated with conducting assessment. In other words, it takes less effort to do the things that we are good at and we value; if faculty begin to feel efficacious about conducting relevant assessments, they may begin to embrace assessment.

One respondent offered direct suggestions for decreasing the costs associated with assessment. Specifically, the respondent stated that currently academic departments differentially reward assessment efforts. The departments that value assessment tend to offer incentives that lessen the cost of engaging in assessment. For example, some departments offer a reduction in course load for those who are actively engaged in departmental assessments. In doing so, the department lessens the cost related to loss of valued alternatives, and is in essence paying the faculty for conducting assessment. As this respondent noted, “If the department head is rewarding assessment, then I think the faculty see the value.” The same respondent suggested that the incentive needs to become consistent across the university, perhaps by offering consistent financial rewards (e.g., “\$5,000 bonus”) and/or course load reduction for assessment. The respondent further suggested that summer grants to conduct assessment are ideal, given that the assessment work can be rewarded during the time that faculty are most free.

Limitations and Future Study

The current study included a small sample size that was appropriate for the intensive nature of qualitative research. In fact, we had reached saturation on many of the concepts that we heard from the respondents. Future research investigating experience and efficacy for assessment with a larger sample of faculty would be warranted. Given the academic structure at our institution, it made sense to begin by interviewing the general education leaders on campus. Our next steps will be to employ “snowball sampling” to follow up with general education faculty other than area coordinators; in other words, we will identify “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (Creswell, 2013, p. 158).

One strategy for increasing faculty motivation for assessment would be making concrete connections between classroom and program assessment. Doing so increases the

utility for faculty. Strategies, such as course-embedded assessment have aided in making this connection (e.g., Gerretson & Golson, 2005). As another example, at our institution, involving faculty members in rater training sessions have also aided in bringing assessment findings back to the classroom.

Summary

Although it is tempting to conclude that the overwhelming majority of faculty do not and will not value assessment, we do not believe this is a static situation. Our findings indicate that given the opportunities and resources to build individual capacity and efficacy, faculty will wholeheartedly engage in student learning outcomes assessment at the program level. Faculty in our study felt strongly about being able to improve their teaching, and in turn, student learning. One respondent stated that “we just need to keep concentrated on the value of it for the student, not the value of it for accreditation.” Statements like these indicate that if faculty can see the value of assessment for improving student learning, then the cost associated with conducting good assessment is worthwhile.

The suggestions we offer here are simply that: suggestions. However, based on what we heard from our respondents, these are important considerations for assessment practitioners and administrators to consider when tackling the question of how to motivate faculty to engage in assessment. We need to find ways to make more people identify with a statement that one of our respondents made, that “the assessment data that I’ve seen has really helped me have confidence in why I’m doing what I’m doing and understand why I’m doing what I’m doing, and helps me convince others that this might be a reasonable path to go down.”

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What does assessment mean to you?
2. What are some examples of assessment?
3. What is your experience with assessment?
4. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being novice and 5 being expert, how would you rate your level of expertise with assessment?
5. How long have you been a cluster coordinator?
6. How did you get into assessment?
7. What keeps you engaged in assessment?
8. Have you had any specific training in assessment?
9. How do you become a cluster coordinator?²
10. What do you gain from your role as cluster coordinator?
11. How much of your role as cluster coordinator is related to assessment? How much of it is other stuff? Estimate time spent on assessment.
12. What resources, personally and institutionally, does it take to do this assessment work?
13. What impact do you think this assessment work has (for you, for our students, for the institution)? In what ways?
Clarification question: In what ways has assessment been useful?
14. Is assessment driven by faculty or by administrators?
15. How competent do you feel in carrying out the assessment process?
16. What are the barriers to doing assessment? (i.e, carrying out, completing, improving, using results)
17. What do you hear faculty say about assessment? We are really interested in faculty engagement, both positive and negative.
18. How competent do you think faculty members feel in carrying out the assessment process?
19. What are the barriers for faculty members in doing assessment?

² This question was not asked to respondents other than the general education administrator, as it was answered fully during that interview.

Appendix B

Example Statements and Frequencies for Each Qualitative Code: Expectancy

Code	Frequency	Representative example	Representative example
E1: Ability (current)	21	“I think there’s a lot of faculty that truly understands what they’re doing, why they’re doing it.”	“And I feel like I can talk about any aspect of [area] now more cogently, more ah specifically, um, than I ever could have before.”
E2: Expectancy (future)	11	“I set out to really try to get a handle on assessment, and it was really hard to get a handle on it. So, I spent time with [the assessment liaisons] trying to work through the existing instruments, trying to figure them out and what they were measuring.”	“I think there’s others that don’t have the training, don’t know where to go, and I think we’re doing a lot better making sure that faculty have liaisons they’re working with.”
E3: Expectancy (situational)	8	“I think if you put me in charge of something I could get it done really well, but if you ask me to do it, I don’t think I have the skills that the assessment people [do].”	“They think assessment is CARS, and they’re not competent in that – locally they feel good about it.”
E4: Low expectancy	18	“They probably have the same kind of self-doubts that I had in my writing, in my classroom.”	“I think that the skills that are required to do good assessment are far beyond where I am right now.”
E5: Negative situational expectancy	3	“The main barrier is coming to some kind of consensus or agreement about what it is that we’re trying to accomplish.”	“If I were teaching people how to sell real estate, I could design an assessment because I think I know the technical steps that you have to do. But, in the [discipline] I don’t know what to do. There are some things that you can assess the outcome. If you’re building a boat, the question is whether it floats or not. And, if you’re doing heart surgery, the question is whether the patient survives. But, in the [discipline], it’s not that clear what that is that is the indicator of success.”

Example Statements and Frequencies for Each Qualitative Code: Value (1)

Code	Frequency	Representative example	Representative example
V1: Intrinsic value/interest	7	"I'm trying to work with faculty on things that help the faculty, and I think that processing the assessment data that we've been getting is something that captures their imagination."	"Right now I'm involved in a really exciting project. What's exciting about it is that we're doing something that, ah, most institutions, or no other institution has started to do – assess the [discipline]. And, I think that's a real opportunity."
V2: Utility	33	"Well, the attitudinal assessment we did in the department actually led to some changes in the curriculum, and I made some changes in my personal teaching style based on that. So, it's been useful in changing instruction."	"That amazingly enough that process of developing that scale informed my teaching more than anything I have ever done."
V3: Attainment	1	"I also began following the [discipline-specific] education research literature, and it's taken for granted in a lot of places that, sort of, these more modern pedagogies that are being developed ...on how to teach [discipline] are better, but, really, it's a controversial statement in a lot of corners. And, um, dealing with scientists, having data can be very powerful and persuasive."	N/A
V4: Lack of intrinsic value	7	"If you just ask the regular person that's not involved at all, who doesn't understand it, I think they're going to say we have to do it. None of them really understand."	"I wish it was resources driven, I wish that it, that the reporting did something else, um, but I, I think that much of the initial impetus is the reporting piece."
V5: Lack of utility	41	"Not gonna say I got interested, but was sort of forced to where we had to do a good job."	"The people who have the hardest time understanding this is [sic] the ones that cannot see how assessment in general education touches their class."

Example Statements and Frequencies for Each Qualitative Code: Value (2)

Code	Frequency	Representative example	Representative example
V6: Lack of attainment	3	“The personal resources that I have tried to develop are probably twofold. One, creation of boundaries. I am not the test, I am not the assessment, I am not the report, I am not the workshop, right? I am, I am, I am me!”	“‘And, it tries to force my teaching into some kind of a box that can be measured.’ That’s my sense of the general faculty account of what assessment does. It forces me into coming up with something that can be quantified and ignores what I do to raise people’s spirits and aspirations.”
V7: Value (other)	6	“Each one of them have taught me an immense amount about assessment, about negotiating with faculty, um, and have taught me that being in a leadership position is really a partnership with the people that you work with not a dictation and that the biggest benefit that I have gotten from CARS is the partnership and the feeling that I have always gotten of legitimacy, right? Um, from that relationship. And I feel like I can talk about any aspect of [area] now more cogently, more ah specifically, um, than I ever could have before. And that’s a direct relationship with the development of a set of questions and attitudes and belief processes and thinking related to assessment.”	“It’s a non-entity, because we’re not involved. It happens before we show up.”
V8: Lack of value	16	“My sense is that the assessment done for [area] has not had much of an effect on the university or on the [area] faculty.”	“If the assessment were something that was required for graduation, it might be more relevant, but to me, it’s a waste of a day, it’s a party day. It’s a waste of a day to do that, when it’s not really utilized with respect to anything that has to do with a student’s college career.
V9: Extrinsic value	13	“At the program and institutional level, assessment is driven by administrators; at the [area], department and course level, it’s driven by the faculty.”	“Pay them a couple hundred bucks. Money motivates, tragically.”
V10: Situational value	6	“The closer it hits to home, the more it’s valued.”	“We’ve certainly not had any gen ed discussions in the department of [discipline]...we do about the major, but not gen ed.”

Example Statements and Frequencies for Each Qualitative Code: Cost

Code	Frequency	Representative example	Representative example
C1: Task-related effort	23	<p>“I think we spend too much time on it. All we do is ever talk about it, we don’t use it, it’s not important enough, I mean...in the big picture of a student’s academic career, assessment is less than one percent. It’s not that important, and I know that CARS, that’s what they’re all about, but across the nation when I go to other conferences and we talk about assessment, nobody knows how to use those results, and XXX doesn’t either. So I think we spend a lot of time and money on a process that doesn’t really inform us to the level that it changes what we do with students, and so, you know, you folks all have jobs, and that’s wonderful, but I just don’t see that it’s as important, I don’t see it garners the importance of [garbled] more than anything else. And we do spend a whole lot of time and money on assessment at this institution, and to what end? We’re not graduating students any faster, they’re not getting any more knowledgeable than anybody else, so what are we trying to prove with doing assessment? That’s my perspective.”</p>	<p>“And what I think that faculty hostility is about now tends to be more this is a lot of work and we’re not getting a lot out of it. Right? So I’m tired of talking about assessment right, you haven’t shown me anything that we’ve gotten from doing this, right. And even if I can point back to the early days of [major], it’s the sort of the ‘what have you done for us lately?’ Right? And OK that worked for [major], but how’s that going to work for [another major]? ... But I can say, do you know why we have the... kind of technology that we have? In [major]? It’s because of assessment! Right? So you know while I can point to things, they’re not pedagogical or curricular improvements that faculty are hungry for.”</p>
C2: Task-unrelated effort	6	<p>“I would *like* to use it more in my own day today with what I’m doing, but there’s sort of a finite pie problem here.”</p>	<p>“Faculty are pulled in so many directions. You’ve got to be a good teacher, which takes enormous amount of time. You’ve got to be a scholar, you’ve got to have a commitment to the university in terms of service. So, how do you give assessment a higher priority than it currently has? Which is pretty far down, okay?”</p>
C3: Loss of valued alternatives	11	<p>“I think we spend a whole lot of money on it, I really do, and I’m not convinced it’s money well spent. You know, could we spend that money elsewhere?”</p>	<p>“I think we put way too much focus on assessment at the general education level and less focus on student success, and that’s truly what we’re looking at, is student success. And that’s what we should be engaged in, not how they performed on a test that really doesn’t measure a whole lot of anything.”</p>
C4: Negative Psychological Experiences	3	<p>“And then doing the [area] assessment test was very painful.”</p>	<p>“Most everybody who has been on the [area]...committee has been on the committee for a long time and they remember the scars of when we did this before.”</p>