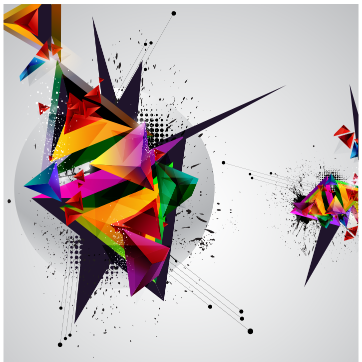

Abstract

Today, higher education faces increased accountability to assess and measure student learning. However, traditional metrics (like standardized tests and graduation rates) fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of exactly what students learn in a contextualized program of study. To address this gap, the researchers piloted a charrette model to bring together students, faculty, and external stakeholders. Current and former students were asked to metacognitively reflect on their learning experiences and share them in a storytelling format. Stakeholders then provided critical feedback to faculty on what they perceived students had learned. Data results showed that external stakeholders were able to assess student learning and to provide actionable feedback on next steps, establishing trust and enhanced understanding between all groups. This model may serve as a viable approach to provide much-needed context to stakeholders on student learning outcomes in higher education.

AUTHORS

Laura C. Hart, Ed.D.
UNC Charlotte

Christine Robinson, Ed.D.
UNC Charlotte

"From the Mouths of Babes": Using a Charrette Model to Assess Student Learning and Engage External Stakeholders

Across the country, the drive for educational accountability – well-documented in the P-12 school sector – is rapidly moving into higher education (Ewell, 2009; Kelchen, 2018; Leveille, 2013). Typical methods of assessment have included quantifiable metrics (such as standardized test scores or graduation rates) to document whether or not learning has occurred. While these methods have had questionable success in accurately gauging student achievement in public education (Popham, 1999, 2016; Ravich, 2013), employing these kinds of metrics in higher education becomes even more problematic. Using traditional quantitative measures as policy to assess the wide variety of learning that occurs in higher education can be difficult (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2016; deBoer, 2016). Accrediting agencies are beginning to implement policies that closely examine proxy measures to assess institutional effectiveness, such as loan default rates and graduation/retention rates (Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, 2018; Kreighbaum, 2016). State policymakers and higher education systems are adopting these measures as part of their strategic plans and setting targets for higher education institutions to achieve (Carlson, 2017; State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 2015). Although these data should be reviewed and considered in the context of the individual institution, they do not tell the whole story. External entities create challenges by holding institutions accountable with assessment measures over which institutions have little control, and which may not align with the specific program learning objectives. Although metrics like standardized test scores, default loan rates, retention rates, and time to degree are universally understandable to stakeholders, the story higher education institutions tell of program-specific student learning outcomes (and the methods to assess these explicit outcomes) are unfamiliar to stakeholders in terms of the language used and practices employed. In a multidisciplinary institution with varying levels of expectations and expertise, clearly communicating exactly what students have learned (outcomes) as compared to what they should be learning (objectives) is more complicated than it sounds.

CORRESPONDENCE

Email
lchart2869@gmail.com

This process becomes more challenging when the various contexts of program-specific assessment are added to the mix. Best practice for data collection mandates using triangulated data sources to allow for the clearest interpretation of results; using multiple measures from both formative and summative assessments provides the most salient information about student performance (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Jones, Carr, & Ataya, 2007). Higher education program assessments may also include periodic reviews about relevance, sustainability, and impact. However, all these dimensions use distinctive metrics with content-specific vocabulary and concepts, making it tricky to assess the effectiveness of the institution overall. For example, many higher education programs note the need for college graduates to demonstrate "critical thinking," rightly noted by Suskie (2016) as an umbrella term that tends to encompass a wide lexicon of broader thinking skills. The problem is that these skills are specific to various disciplines—in fact, context and subject-specific knowledge is essential to developing effective critical thinking habits (Bean, 2011; Jones, 2007; Santos, 2016). How a history program opts to measure critical thinking may involve asking students to review primary source documents to analyze societal change. In comparison, measuring critical thinking in mathematics could include requiring students to solve complex statistical problems; measuring critical thinking for teacher education programs might assess how well students implement and adapt lesson plans to the needs of P-12 classroom learners. One size does not fit all.

The story higher education institutions tell of program-specific student learning outcomes (and the methods to assess these explicit outcomes) are unfamiliar to stakeholders in terms of the language used and practices employed.

Even if programs have content-appropriate measures in place to assess essential skills and knowledge, communicating with stakeholders about how these various assessments are parceled and used by faculty can devolve into a futile exercise. Higher education programs struggle to find a clear, cohesive way to demonstrate program effectiveness to stakeholders. As Suskie (2016) pointed out, "American higher education has failed to tell you … what we do and how we do it …. We have to figure out a way to tell our very complex story in short, simple ways that busy people can digest quickly." Institutions must develop better ways of sharing the impact of higher education on student learning with stakeholders.

One possible way to address this need may be to move away from using indirect proxy measures of student learning and institutional quality (like gainful employment and loan default rates, which require little-to-no effort by the students to compile). Instead, programs could engage students in a metacognitive model, one in which students are actively and authentically involved in their own reflective assessment of what they have learned in their program of study. Tom Angelo and Keston Fulcher, both respected experts in the field, indicated that one challenge of higher education assessment is the need to engage current students and graduates about their learning experiences at universities and colleges (personal communication, October 17, 2016). Providing structured opportunities for students to explain or demonstrate their learned subject-specific knowledge and skills to stakeholders would allow for a clearer assessment of learning outcomes. When triangulated with measures already in place, these kinds of "real time," authentic assessments could better educate stakeholders effectively on what students actually know and can do upon program completion (Baer, 2015; Braskamp & Engberg, 2014).

These kinds of interactions also present an opportunity for an additional dimension of program improvement by creating a two-directional relationship with external stakeholders to encourage their feedback. Engaging students in sharing what they have learned directly with stakeholders can provide much-needed clarity to the data and provide a richer understanding of exactly what kind of "education" students are paying for. Asking students to articulate and evaluate their own learning builds critical thinking capacity. In addition, structuring opportunities for external stakeholders to then provide feedback about what they see/hear can build trust between all parties, especially if faculty use the stakeholder feedback as another data source to initiate programmatic change. This would send a clear message that institutions are eager to embrace authentic and viable recommendations. Creating these kinds of direct interactions between external stakeholders, students, and faculty may also combat the notion that institutions are not fulfilling their mission (as assessed on a survey or standardized test). Finally, previous research has established that when assessment is motivated by internal improvement purposes (versus accountability purposes) the assessment results are actually more likely to be used by faculty (Herman & Hilton, 2017). Giving both students and external stakeholders a voice in the assessment cycle could result in increased buy-in from all parties.

The purpose of this paper is to describe how one university/college designed and piloted an event for students, faculty, and external stakeholders based on a charrette model. *Charrette* is a term whose origins are rooted in architectural design but has evolved to define a process intended to integrate purposeful opportunities for stakeholder feedback on the presented product. Our charrette allowed external stakeholders to interact directly with graduates and current students for the purposes of (a) assessing what students know and are able to do; and (b) providing authentic feedback to program faculty for future improvements. The event was deliberately designed to engage students as not only presenters of knowledge but also as reflective practitioners. Stakeholders invited to the event included employers from the regional community familiar with the demands of the profession and therefore able to provide viable feedback. It is the intention of the researchers to present a model that may be replicated by other institutions for future assessment purposes.

Method: Piloting a Charrette Model

The research was conducted at a large university in the southeastern United States. Student enrollment has steadily increased over the last several years with approximately 29,000 students attending in 2017. The College of Education within the university includes approximately 1,300 students enrolled in teacher preparation programs and 1,000 additional students enrolled in graduate-level master's and doctoral programs. The institution is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC); in addition, the college's teacher preparation programs are also accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, formerly NCATE).

Providing structured opportunities for students to explain or demonstrate their learned subject-specific knowledge and skills to stakeholders would allow for a clearer assessment of learning outcomes.

The idea was to pilot a charrette feedback model with stakeholders—a collaborative approach incorporating multiple two-way communication loops—versus a traditional presentation that typically only features one-way communication (like a performer with an audience). The model begins with a presentation of a product to a group of knowledgeable individuals to receive feedback for improvement purposes. The feedback generated via a charrette is expected to be critical as well as laudatory; once feedback is received the product is redesigned ostensibly incorporating the stakeholder feedback results into the revamped product, making it better. Subsequent feedback loops would continue with updated versions of the product as needed. In the context of program assessment a presentation modeled on a charrette design would, by definition, expose the selected program of study to increased critique—which may push some participants outside their comfort zones. Figure 1 illustrates the charrette feedback framework.

Starting the Work

The university Executive Director (EXD) approached the College of Education assessment director (CAD) about piloting the charrette assessment model for several reasons; first, College of Education (COED) faculty were very familiar with an accountability mindset, from their ongoing work with P-12 school partners. Second, COED faculty were experienced with various assessment models and were open to the concept. Faculty are more likely to engage with program improvement if they perceive the assessment is meaningful and valuable (Emil & Cress, 2014). By asking faculty to be part of the charrette process the EXD and CAD theorized that faculty would be amenable to student and stakeholder feedback. Finally, the COED Dean had already initiated an internal data review with faculty and was supportive in involving external stakeholders as a logical next step. Given that the logistics of this event would require resource allocation, the COED Dean and the Senior Associate Provost worked to provide funds for the event. Anticipated costs included logistical monies for food/event space and stipends for student participants.

The planning committee identified two primary objectives for the project. Objective 1 was *external stakeholders will use candidates' stories/work to assess program effectiveness*. Objective 1 was designed to actively and purposefully incorporate students (both current

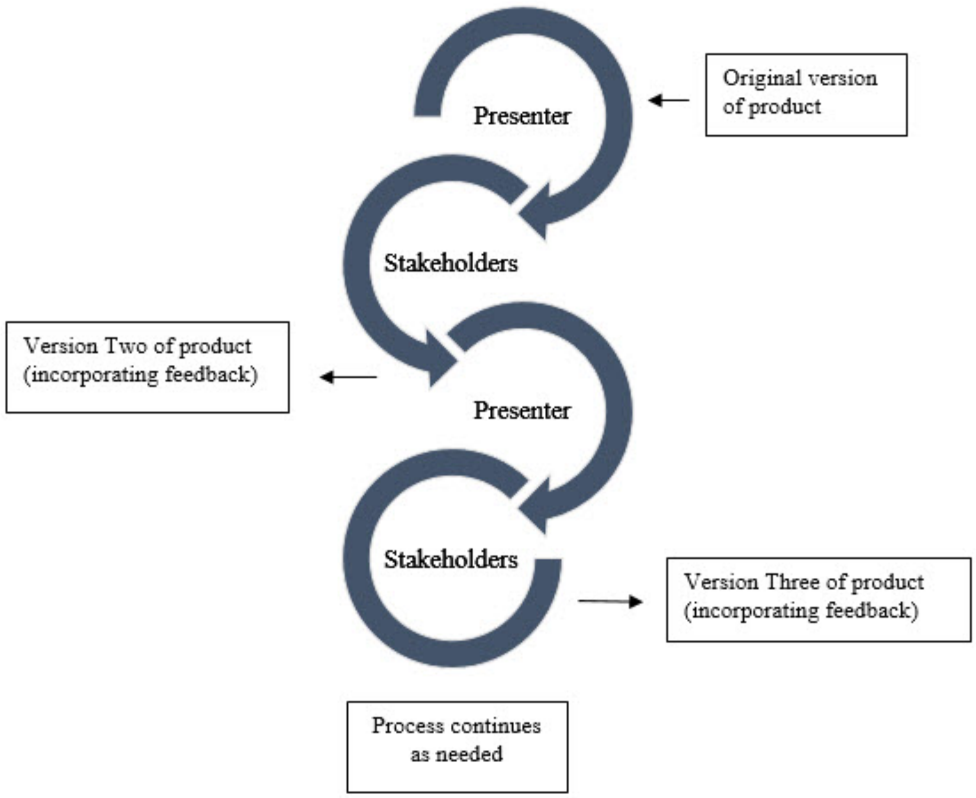

Figure 1. Charrette Feedback Model

students and recently graduated alumni) into the assessment process. This objective addressed the need identified by Angelo and others (personal communication, October 17, 2016) for students to have greater voice in their own assessment. Students were asked to engage in metacognition by reflecting on their own learning and presenting stories about that learning to stakeholders. Stakeholders would then use those stories to assess whether the program had been effective in training teachers for P-12 classrooms. Objective 2 was *external stakeholders will provide actionable feedback to COED faculty for future improvements*. Objective 2 was designed to focus on the next phase of program development. Existing research makes it clear that soliciting stakeholder feedback—especially from employers—can provide a robust data source for university programs (Morgan, 2008; Ulewicz, 2017). Feedback solicited from external stakeholders would identify not only what the COED was doing well but also what the COED needed to improve related to both curriculum and assessment. Both objectives aligned to university assessment and accreditation goals.

Objective 1 was designed to actively and purposefully incorporate students (both current students and recently graduated alumni) into the assessment process.

The committee structured the COED charrette as a one-day event; the morning events would feature students telling their stories about what they had learned during their time in the COED. Afternoon events would provide external stakeholders opportunities to interact with students and with each other, to ask questions, to give critique/feedback, and to assist in developing action strategies for program improvements. The final participant list included 16 current students and eight alumni presenters; 36 external stakeholders representing seven local area school districts and two philanthropic foundations; and 31 College of Education faculty. The external stakeholders were primarily principals and school district leaders who were routinely involved in the clinical placement and hiring of College of Education graduates for employment purposes. They were familiar with the demands of the teaching profession and could speak knowledgeably about the skills teachers need to be successful in their first year.

Engaging Students in Telling their Stories

Two groups of students were asked to participate: current students and recent graduates. The faculty committee debated on whether to share student work samples representing a wider range of student capabilities but finally opted to select students who both produced high-quality work and could be relied upon to complete the work on time. The faculty reasoned that asking less-than-stellar students to participate in this project could create additional logistical issues; in addition, if stakeholder feedback indicated concerns based on the work of our best students, then the committee surmised that faculty would be more likely to take the feedback seriously when considering improvements. Both current students and recent graduates represented a variety of subject areas and grade levels in their respective groups, including birth-kindergarten, elementary, middle grades (6-9), secondary (9-12), and special education. Students were invited to participate and received a small stipend for their work. Designated faculty agreed to serve as mentors for students to answer questions and assist with projects as needed.

The morning sessions focused on students telling their stories about what they had learned… In the afternoon the focus shifted to a critical lens.

Current students. The current students included 16 candidates from a range of points across the program of study. These students created poster presentations designed to showcase a variety of program features from the students' perspectives. A faculty subgroup from the charrette committee worked to develop the presentation framework for consistency but students determined the content of the presentation. The four-part framework for poster presentations provided to current students included the following guiding questions:

A. *What is your story? Think about areas that you feel are strengths for you related to teaching, things that you feel comfortable talking about. What specifically have you learned in your program that has improved your skills and knowledge in one or more of the following:*

- *"how to teach _________" (i.e., "how to teach fractions", "how to teach reading", "how to teach science inquiry to middle school students," etc.); incorporating research into practice; teaching diverse populations; working with families; building global competency and awareness; written communication*

B. *How / when have you had opportunities to put this knowledge into practice? Describe these experiences in the context of one of the following:*

1) In courses through class projects/presentations;

2) In clinicals prior to student teaching;

3) In student teaching internships.

C. *What data do you have that you are using evidence-based practices in practicing this knowledge/skills? Based on the idea(s) you selected to discuss in Part A above, explain how this is a strength for you. Why is it your strength? How do you know? What evidence to do you have to show that you are becoming more knowledgeablein this area? What opportunities to practice these skills have you had so you know you have improved?*

D. *What is your plan going forward? How do you plan to use the success you have experienced?*

From this framework, a wide array of student presentations were developed. For example, candidates reflected on their clinical experiences in contrast to their university classroom activities; others explored action research projects completed as course assignments; some shared specific things they had learned in their classes, such as why one instructional approach was better than another. Current students received a $200 stipend for their work and time.

Recent graduates. The second student group included eight recent graduates who had completed the program within the last two years and were now employed as classroom teachers. These individuals were involved more deeply in the charrette than current students, as they could speak to both the student and practitioner experience. Instead of poster presentations, the alumni group developed a five minute "TED-like" Talk with the following prompt: *Consider your teacher preparation at [this institution]. What aspects of your program were done well? Reflect on an experience, give personal examples, tell your story. Describe your experience in the context of application in clinicals and now in your classroom. Limit to your talk to 5 minutes*. Faculty mentors provided guidance as needed, but the individual presenters determined the content. The recent graduates also served on an alumni panel to answer unscripted questions about their learning experiences directly from the external stakeholders. Finally, the alumni participated in roundtable stakeholder feedback groups. Alumni received a $500 stipend for their assistance for the entire day.

Structuring the Charrette

Morning sessions: What we do well. The morning sessions focused on students telling their stories about what they had learned. These were primarily positive stories that highlighted good things happening in the COED. The morning session was divided into two rounds of presentations: half (eight) of the poster presentations by current students were shared. During this time, external stakeholders rotated among the presentations, heard the students speak, and asked questions directly to individual students about what they saw/heard. The groups were then asked to turn their collective attention to the stage, where half (four) of the alumni presented their five-minute TED Talks in succession. Stakeholders were provided with Post-it Notes on the tables to record any questions or comments they had about what they heard. These Post-it Notes were collected and incorporated later as questions for the alumni panel in the afternoon. After a brief break, the second round of presentations began, with the rest of the students/alumni presenting their posters/TED Talks. Including the welcome and transitions, the morning session lasted about two-and-a-half hours.

Afternoon sessions: What we need to improve. In the afternoon the focus shifted to a critical lens. Although the positive vibe established in the morning was still present, the afternoon activities specifically queried external stakeholders to identify ways the COED needed to improve their teacher training practices. To ease this transition, the first activity was an alumni panel. Questions were brainstormed in advance but also generated by stakeholders during TED Talks (via the Post-it Note comments) and from the floor. The alumni panel lasted about 45 minutes.

After the panel, roundtable groups were convened with the primary purpose of generating problem-solving conversations between external stakeholders and university faculty, based on everything seen/heard so far. Participants were assigned to groups, ensuring a diverse mix of perspectives at each roundtable. The groups had structured questions to guide the conversation, generated by the planning committee in advance with input from the dean and at-large faculty. The roundtable questions posed to stakeholders were as follows: *1) How can P-12 and Higher Education work together to address the needs of both groups?; 2) What has impressed you about what you've heard today?; 3) How can we facilitate/further support P12 partners learning more about edTPA (a key candidate assessment required for licensure in our state)?; 4) How can we help principals feel more comfortable about hosting/mentoring teacher candidates in their schools?; and 5) How do we resolve the tension between candidate quality and candidate demand?* Each roundtable group briefly shared with the larger group and the individual roundtable data were collected. The entire process took approximately 65 minutes.

External stakeholders were also able to articulate their impressions of the overall quality of the candidates, and by extension, of the program.

As the last activity of the day, all participants completed an *exit ticket* before leaving the event. The purpose of the exit ticket was to gather stakeholder reaction to what they had heard/seen and collect recommendations for future program improvements. The exit ticket asked three open-ended qualitative response questions, followed by four quantitative questions asking participants to respond to a statement on a Likert scale from 1 to 6, with

1 being *strongly disagree* to 6 being *strongly agree*. The three open-ended responses were: *1) What did you hear or see today that impressed you?; 2) What did you not see or hear but wish you had?; and 3) What did you see or hear that worried you, and why? The four quantitative questions with the 1 to 6 rating scale were: 4) I am glad that I attended this event; 5) I felt that the event was well organized and well planned; 6) Activities were helpful in understanding the education programs; 7) The College of Education (COED) is effective in preparing good teachers.* A final open-ended response space allowed for any additional comments participants wished to provide.

External Feedback for Program Improvement

After the charrette, all the data sources were reviewed to determine if the charrette project objectives where met. Written responses (like the roundtable notes and the exit tickets) were compiled and coded thematically. Most of the data was qualitative in the form of responses to open-ended questions but there were some quantitative data collected from questions 4–7 on the exit tickets. Coding was completed by the CAD and the COED Associate Dean independently and then reviewed for accuracy.

Stakeholders found the activities to be impactful on the overall assessment process and helpful in building cohesive relationships between the COED and the stakeholder community.

In determining whether Objective 1 was met *(external stakeholders will use candidates' stories/work to assess program effectiveness)*, data results indicated that stakeholders were able to (a) ascertain some of what candidates were learning/had learned during the program of study; and (b) gain an overall impression of the quality of candidates being produced by the program. Participants' responses included specific information that stakeholders had gleaned from candidates' stories and presentations. In response to roundtable and exit ticket questions asking *What did you hear or see today that impressed you?*, one participant said, "[I] really enjoyed the poster presentations that showed a pre-assessment, intervention, and post-assessment with one or a group of students … specific and concrete examples." Another said she was impressed by, "The focus on relationships and culture as critical components of effective classroom practice." A third stakeholder noted that it was impressive to see, "Alumni and candidates knowing how to use assessment data to inform instruction." A fourth added, "Pleased to hear about the number of early opportunities that teachers [candidates] have to be in the schools." In addition to these specifics, external stakeholders were also able to articulate their impressions of the overall quality of the candidates, and by extension, of the program. Many of the written responses included complimentary comments about the quality of the candidates and their stories. "I really appreciated the candidates' stories in the TED Talks," wrote one stakeholder. "I was extremely impressed with hearing about other student's experiences and learning about the different issues from several different perspectives," added another. A third participant commented, "So impressed with stories I heard from alumni. Excited for future collaboration opportunities."

Not all of the external stakeholder feedback was laudatory. For example, stakeholders noted that, based on what they observed during the charrette, classroom management was an area where candidates may need additional support. "What is [the college] doing to prepare teacher candidates for better classroom management?" asked one participant. "Student [poster presenter] said relationships were only important for impoverished students," noted another. Technology was another area specifically noted for possible improvement. "More on technology integration," stated one participant, while another noted, "I'd like to hear more about what alumni think of integrating technology in the classroom." They also noted the need to engage candidates in opportunities to practice their knowledge prior to entering the classroom. "I worry a little bit that candidates are better at writing lesson plans than they are at teaching practices," one participant said. Another perceived that students might not be getting appropriate feedback from faculty on their performance: "I asked a couple of student teachers what specifically they were working on to improve their practice and none of them could name one or two things specifically (they said 'everything'). Wondered what kind of targeted feedback they are getting."

Responses also indicated that stakeholders found the activities to be impactful on the overall assessment process and helpful in building cohesive relationships between the COED and the stakeholder community. One respondent said, "I appreciate the transparency.

It was a risk to have an alumni panel. It shows me that [the college] wants honest feedback to improve." Another said it was impressive to see, "COED's commitment to growth and improvements. [They are] not complacent in success." A third noted, "Relationships matter. [I am impressed by] the willingness of [the college] to elevate, risk getting feedback." Finally, stakeholders were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statement: "These activities were helpful in understanding COED programs (exit ticket question 6)." On a 6-point scale, 94 percent of participants (51 of 54) rated the item as either a 5 or 6, with 6 being the highest level of agreement.

In evaluating whether Objective 2 *(external stakeholders will provide actionable feedback to COED faculty for future improvements)* was met, data results indicated that external stakeholders were able to provide specific feedback to faculty that could be used in the next phase of program changes. In addition to the areas already noted, two additional themes emerged from the analysis: the first was categorized as *P-12 Partner Involvement/ Collaboration*, and the second as *qw*. Each of these themes provided possible avenues for improvements in different ways. The first identified theme, P-12 Partner Involvement/ Collaborations, provided information on how to better engage school stakeholders, particularly cooperating teachers who work directly student teaching candidates. Stakeholders noted that hearing from cooperating teachers about what candidates know and are able to do would be impactful. "Would have loved for CTs [cooperating teachers] to have participated and also been present," noted one participant. "I wish I had heard more about coaching professional development and support to coordinating teachers/district support staff, to provide beneficial reflection feedback to candidates." Other responses coded to this theme indicated a desire to deepen and extend collaborations between P-12 partners and the COED. "We need to continue to develop tight alignment between P-12 and university partners," one participant wrote. "I'd like to see more specifics with how districts can be better partners with university," stated another.

As current students and recent graduates came together with external stakeholders and faculty to tell their stories, a collective narrative emerged that was informative and purposeful.

The second improvement theme identified, Concerns About the Profession, reflected participants' concerns about the obstacles they perceive are in place to hinder teacher development and recruitment. For example, several of the alumni had commented that during their early clinical experiences as candidates at least one or more practicing teachers had encouraged them to consider another profession. External stakeholders seemed to view this as the result of policy decisions, including an inadequate salary scale and increased accountability demands. One participant wrote, "It's concerning that students considering entering the teaching field are being deferred or deciding not to enter the teaching field because of negative experiences. There are a lot of great teachers being lost at the early stages." Another added, "I am concerned with college/graduate students getting the message from the outside world that teaching is not a place to go." These comments were framed in the context of the current teacher shortages in the state: "[This is] reaffirmation that there is a very real shortage of future teachers." Several participants noted that next steps should include policymakers: "Seems like a bigger picture charrette to include policy and decision makers would be a good next step."

Discussion

How do we measure the impact of a college education? Universities and colleges have long wrestled with this question. The concept of what it means to be well-educated is highly subjective and content specific. The easiest measures to collect, such as graduation and loan default rates, do not necessarily reflect the complex nuances inherent in the teaching and learning process. One way to address this gap is to allow students and external stakeholders to engage one another in discussions of what students actually have learned and are able to demonstrate. Further, by using a charrette model—a model purposefully designed to solicit feedback for improvement purposes—another layer is added to the student-faculty-stakeholder interactions. What could begin as a show-and-tell experience can evolve into a multi-faceted conversation, one that celebrates the good aspects of a program and asks for authentic feedback about program improvement from external stakeholders.

The charrette alone would be ineffective in assessing all students, but the charrette could be effectively utilized as one data set in a larger assessment model for program evaluation

This was indeed the outcome of our pilot charrette focusing on student stories as a method of assessing College of Education academic programs. As current students and recent graduates came together with external stakeholders and faculty to tell their stories, a collective narrative emerged that was informative and purposeful. Feedback regarding specific programs and the program/college as a whole was provided. Much of the feedback was positive; however, the nature of the data collection does raise questions about the authenticity of the feedback. Would the feedback have been less positive if the participants' perceptions had been collected in some other fashion? This is difficult to determine. The COED also presented work from some of our best students, which also muddies this question. This is why the structure and setup of the charrette are so important. By taking the initiative and asking for critical feedback from stakeholders, faculty send a clear message that they seek to improve. The charrette identified areas of celebration as well as areas for improvement. In fact, because the afternoon sessions specifically requested a critical lens, the shared information allowed external stakeholders to witness first-hand the commitment of faculty in making authentic, data-based decisions. Students also benefitted from participation in these events. By using a metacognitive approach that allowed them to reflect on what they had learned, students gained valuable experience with critical thinking and with presenting their thought processes to others.

Data collected and analyzed indicated that both objectives for the project were met; external stakeholders were able to assess the current academic program and they were able to provide actionable feedback to faculty for future improvements. The impact of the narratives was powerful; framing the narrative with the charrette model communicated to stakeholders the eagerness and sincerity of faculty to engage them as partners in the improvement cycle. The COED faculty used the feedback provided in this pilot (along with other sources) to write a grant funding a collaborative summer institute for faculty and the teachers who mentor our candidates. This summer institute (now in its second year) focuses on breaking down silos between faculty and P-12 partners to strengthen and collaborate on teacher preparation practices. The charrette pilot was a first step in this process. In addition, while the COED has not replicated the charrette event in its entirety, we have seized on the momentum with our P-12 partners to conduct annual data days with stakeholders, where we replicate parts of the charrette model by sharing COED candidate assessment data and asking for critical feedback. These have been highly successful and strengthened our relationships with stakeholders in the region.

Suskie (2016) and others point out the need for higher education to simplify the complexity of program assessment for stakeholders. As funding for higher education becomes more anchored in accountability, this need is a practical as well as a moral one. The Spellings Report on the Future of Higher Education (U. S. Department of Education, 2006) noted the need for higher education to better document student outcomes, ensuring that taxpayers and the students themselves are securing a return on their investment of education dollars. Student learning outcomes are rapidly being pushed to the background as quantifiable metrics take center stage. In this context, creating a model of assessment where: student outcomes are the focal point; a variety of student work samples and interactive sessions are presented; and external stakeholders can engage directly with students and receive real-time feedback on what students know and can do; then, would seem to embody high-quality outcome-based assessment.

Astin and Antonio (2012) advocate for a talent development approach to assessment, one where both students and faculty improve their work product as a result of direct, actionable feedback. Taking the additional step of engaging with external stakeholders in a charrette to solicit actionable (and perhaps critical) feedback to improve the quality of the program can also build trust among university faculty and external stakeholders. There are several possible avenues to explore in considering how to build upon this pilot project moving forward. While our charrette included only external stakeholders who were also employers (e.g., principals, school district leaders, etc.), a next logical step might be to include policymakers as an additional external stakeholder group for future charrettes. It would be interesting to learn if the different external groups (policymakers versus employers) would arrive at similar conclusions. The COED faculty have discussed another charrette in the future that does engage policymakers as well as P-12 school district stakeholders but some faculty have expressed reluctance to pursue this, due to the changing political landscape related to teacher preparation and accountability. If offered, resources would need to be set aside specifically for this work, including funds to cover logistical costs (food, event space, posterboard printing) and stipends for student participants. We have agreed to revisit the issue moving forward.

Limitations of the charrette pilot

Some limitations do exist with this model as we piloted it. A limited sample of students were directly assessed in the charrette; however, in considering the goals for our project, our focus was on engaging external stakeholders through students' stories for program evaluation and feedback. We were not attempting to assess individual student proficiency. The charrette alone would be ineffective in assessing all students, but the charrette could be effectively utilized as one data set in a larger assessment model for program evaluation. The students who presented at the charrette may not be representative of all students in a program, and their experiences may not reflect the viewpoints of other students in the college/program. We also selected top-tier students to participate, those considered by faculty to be capable of producing good work in a timely fashion. This was a deliberate choice on our part; first, we wanted to ensure we had good work to present to stakeholders and we were on a timeline—we needed students who could be relied upon to assist. This was a realistic logistical consideration; the faculty work group did consider inviting less-proficient students to participate, but reasoned that by showcasing our best student work and then asking for critique, the feedback would still be quite informative; any perceived gaps among our best-and-brightest would be taken more seriously by faculty. This choice did create the possibility, however, that there are weaknesses in our programs that were never exposed for charrette participants. While our pilot project objectives would still be met, additional or different areas of candidate growth may have been identified if we had included less academically proficient students in the charrette. This is one additional reason why triangulation of program data outcomes is a critical part of program evaluation work; the charrette can serve as one source of information, but multiple sources should be considered in making decisions about program improvement.

As the accountability movement continues its march into the world of higher education, questions regarding how to best assess learning for a college graduate (and effectiveness of college programs) will remain.

The charrette primarily produced qualitative data, which could reflect a biased perspective from some stakeholders. The data produced are valid only to the extent that the participants truthfully responded to the questions. Much of the feedback received was actionable for the COED faculty because our programs follow a similar course trajectory. However, some participants did provide program-specific feedback but neglected to note which areas of improvement from the roundtable questions and exit tickets best applied to specific programs. It would be helpful if the question formats in any future projects were revised to require stakeholders to indicate exactly which programs they were talking about with their feedback. Although COED faculty in this project were receptive to external stakeholder feedback, not all faculty may be as welcoming to outsiders commenting on their programs. Some additional conversations or professional development may be needed to generate faculty buy-in prior to implementation. The results generated by the charrette are not part of the established metrics typically used to assess higher education; some additional context might be needed to frame the results cleanly for external stakeholders.

Conclusion

As the accountability movement continues its march into the world of higher education, questions regarding how to best assess learning for a college graduate (and effectiveness of college programs) will remain. Engaging with current students and recent graduates as they share their own stories of what they have learned (or not learned) can inform external stakeholders as to exactly what occurs in program coursework and where potential gaps/areas of improvement persist. This kind of feedback is context and program specific, and provides more actionable information for faculty than other broad measures, such as the results of a standardized test or graduation rates. Faculty and stakeholder buy-in for this kind of story-telling assessment narrative may also be greater—and the information more valuable—than with other forms of assessment. As institutions face increased pressures to better assess and improve their programs, engaging stakeholders with students in the charrette model may be a viable and much-needed option for higher education assessment.

References

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2016). *Trends in learning outcomes assessment: Key findings from a survey among administrators at AAC&U member institutions*. Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/ 2015_Survey_Report3.pdf.

Astin, A. W. & Antonio, A. L. (2012). *Assessment for excellence: The philosophy practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc.

Baer, L. (2015). *Quality, accountability and action* [White paper]. Retrieved from the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools website: http://www.acics.org/ contact/content.aspx?id=6382.

Bean, J. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2018). Classroom assessment and pedagogy. *Assessment in education: Principles, policy, & practice*. Advanced online publication.

Braskamp, L. A., & Engberg, M. E. (2014). *Guidelines for judging the effectiveness of assessing student learning*. Loyola University Chicago: Chicago, IL. Retrieved from http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/BraskampGuidelines.pdf.

Carlson, K. (2017, December 17). State approves new performance-based funding measures for higher ed [Online article]. *The Missourian*.

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. (2018). *A one-year review of the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions' graduation rate information project*. Retrieved from http://download.hlcommission.org/C-RAC_Grad_Rate_Study_2018-02.pdf.

deBoer, F. (2016). *Standardized assessments of college learning: Past and future*. Retrieved from New America website: https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/12843-standardized-assessments-of-college-learning/Assessment-White-Paper. 72b9bbb2cf0447b4aacaabe6e6ea1824.pdf.

Emil, S., & Cress, C. (2014). Faculty perspectives on programmed curricular assessment: individual and institutional characteristics that influence participation engagement. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 39*(5), 531–552.

Ewell, P. T. (2009). *Assessment, accountability, and improvement: Revisiting the tension* (Occasional Paper No. 1). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

Herman, J., & Hilton, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Supporting students' college success: The role of assessment of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. A consensus study report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Jones, A. (2007). Multiplicities or manna from heaven? Critical thinking and the disciplinary context. *Australian Journal of Education, 51*(1), 84–103.

Jones, P., Carr, J. F., & Ataya, R. (2007). *A pig don't get fatter the more you weigh it: Classroom assessments that work*. New York, NY: Columbia Teachers Press.

Kelchen, R. (2018). Higher Education Accountability. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kreighbaum, A. (2016, September 21). Tougher scrutiny for colleges with low graduation rates [Online article]. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/09/21/regional-accreditors-refocus-institutions-low-grad-rates.

Leveille, D. E. (2013). Accountability in postsecondary education revisited. UC Berkeley Research and Occasional Papers Series. Retrieved https://escholarship.org/uc/item/ 61h1b3p3

Morgan, H. (2008). How place managers can harness the power of stakeholder feedback to improve satisfaction. *Journal of Place Management and Development, 1*(3), 307–314.

Popham, W. J. (1999). Why standardized tests don't measure educational quality. *Educational Leadership, 56*(6), 8–15.

Popham, W. J. (2016). Standardized tests: Purpose is the point. *Educational Leadership, 73*(7), 44–49.

Ravich, D. (2013). *Reign of error: The hoax of the privatization movement and the danger to America's schools*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Santos, P. (2016). *Teaching critical thinking skills in a disciplinary context*. Retrieved from Teachers of English as a Second Language Association of Ontario website: http://contact.teslontario.org/teaching-critical-thinking-skills-in-a-disciplinary-context/.

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. (2015). *Measures, targets, and related indicators (statewide strategic plan for higher education 2014-10-28)*. Retrieved from http://www.schev.edu/index/statewide-strategic-plan/measures.

Suskie, L. (2016, April 10). A response to Bob Shireman on "inane" SLOs [Web blog post]. Retrieved from http://www.lindasuskie.com/apps/blog/show/43910127-a-response-to-bob-shireman-on-inane-slos

Ulewicz, R. (2017). The role of stakeholders in quality assurance in higher education. *Human Resources Management & Ergonomics*, XL, 93–107. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317301877.

U.S. Department of Education. (2006). *A test of leadership: Charting the future of U. S. higher education*. Washington, DC: USDOE. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/ bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/final-report.pdf.

AUTHORS NOTE

Laura C. Hart, Office of Assessment and Accreditation, Cato College of Education, UNC Charlotte; Christine Robinson, Academic Affairs Assessment Office, UNC Charlotte.