



# Excellence in Assessment Designation: Sharing our Success Stories



2016 SACSCOC Annual Meeting  
Atlanta, GA  
December 3-6, 2016



## Overview

- Introduction to the Excellence in Assessment Designations
- Lessons Learned from 2016 Campus Applications
- SACSCOC Alignment with EIA Criteria
- Panel Conversation with EIA Expert Reviewers
  - Keston Fulcher
  - Loraine Philips
  - Lee Rakes
- Audience Q&A /Discussion



## Excellence in Assessment Designations

- National recognition program for campus assessment leaders
- Sponsored by VSA, NILOA, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U)
- Evaluation based on the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) Transparency Framework
- Focus on campus-wide assessment – including student affairs & external stakeholders

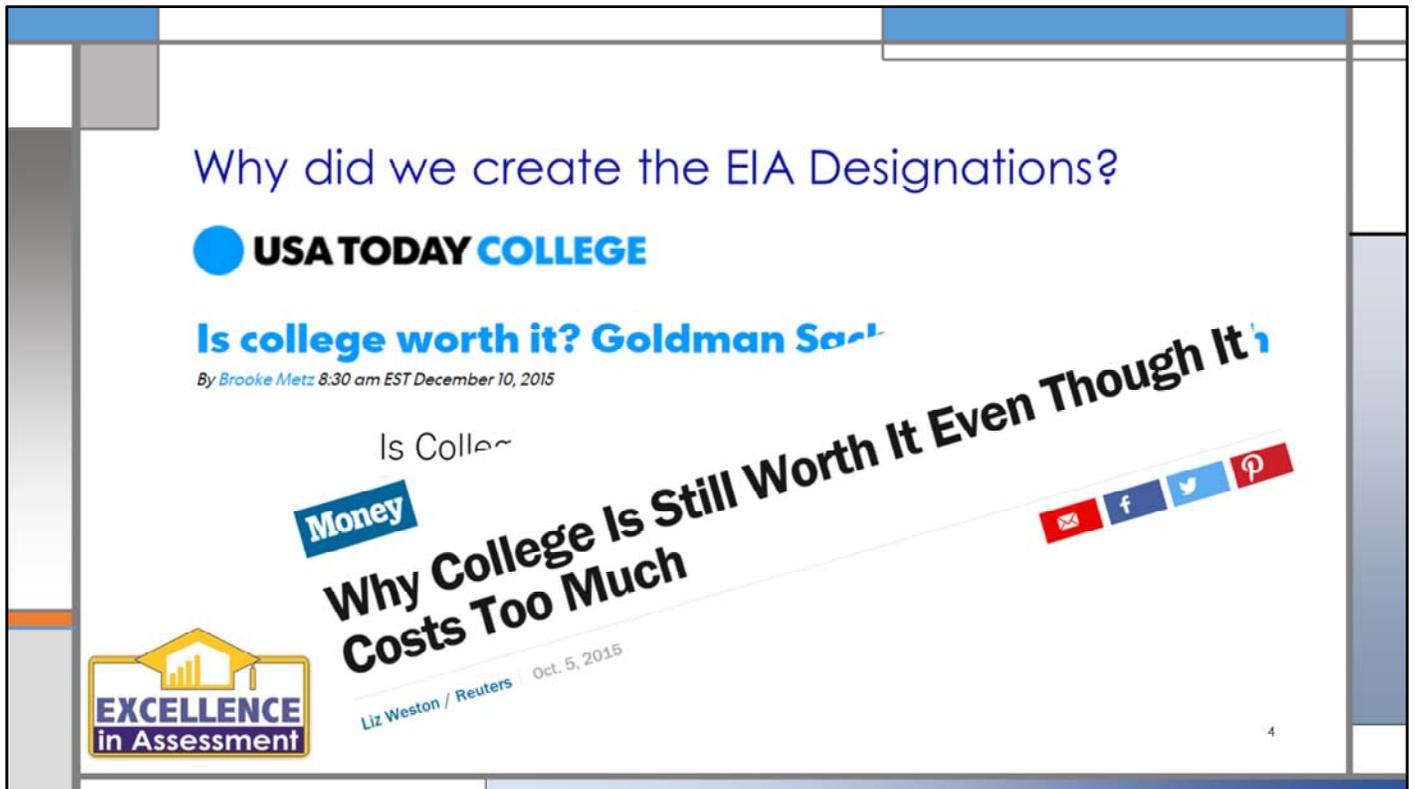


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VSA – joint project of APLU & AASCU (American Association of State Colleges & Universities)

Raising visibility of work campuses are doing with assessment since 2008; emphasis on institutional storytelling – communication!

VSA process has evolved over time – started with reporting outcomes from value-added assessments as a pilot, evolved to include more information on campus context, now NILOA Transparency Framework



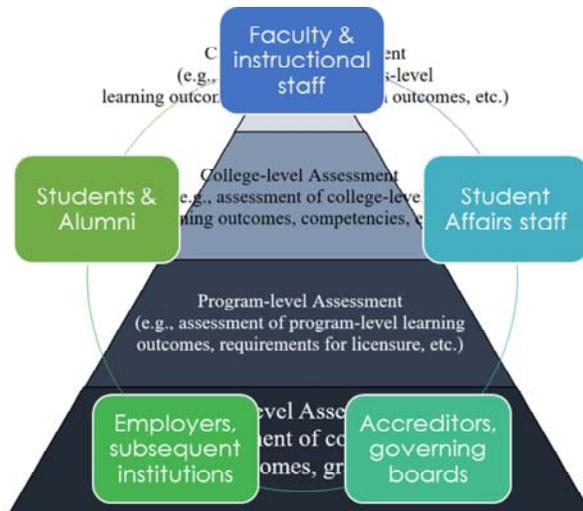
The ability of a campus to clearly and convincingly communicate the learning outcomes of all their graduates, regardless of program of study, is paramount to the success of our students, institutions, and larger national economic and competitive priorities. **Policymakers and external stakeholders are increasingly questioning the value of higher education experiences as a whole, focusing on labor market outcomes to hold certain types of programs or majors up as preferred. Institutions and the higher education industry as a whole have struggled to push back on these claims, citing the complexity of evaluating student learning across varied and disparate programs in easily comparable ways.**

See for example: USA Today College (December 10, 2015). "Is college worth it? Goldman Sachs says not so much":

<http://college.usatoday.com/2015/12/10/is-college-worth-it-goldman->

[sachs-says-not-so-much/](#); The New York Times TheUpshot (May 27, 2014). "Is College Worth It? Clearly, New Data Say": <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html? r=0>; and Money (October 5, 2015). "Why College is Still Worth It Even Though It Costs Too Much": <http://time.com/money/4061150/college-degree-worth-it/>. Carnevale, A.P., Cheah, B., & Hanson, A.R. (2015). ***The Economic Value of College Majors***. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce.

## Why did we create the EIA Designations?



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Many campuses are successfully designing and implementing campus-wide assessment systems that provide evidence of the learning of all students. These systems are horizontally and vertically integrated to encompass learning both in and outside of the classroom, and are validated by participation and evaluation of external stakeholders, including alumni, employers, and schools their students subsequently attend for additional study. By incorporating all areas of campus, not just the academic experiences that occur in the classroom, institutions are able to confidently assert the competency of their students in areas of **leadership and teamwork, essential outcomes for employers in today's diverse workplaces.** Building intentionally integrated layered systems that rest on the foundational work of faculty in the classroom, campuses are able to provide deep and rich evidence of students' knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Hart Research Associates. (2015). *Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U).

Deming, D.J. (2015). *The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University and NBER.

Campus-level assessment is often thought of as an accountability or accreditation concern that is somewhat removed from the work of faculty teaching in specific programs or classes. Faculty may be disinvested from the administration of a campus-wide assessment instrument, at best seeing it as a benign requirement to appease external cries for accountability. The EIA program, however, understands that **campus-level assessment builds from a foundation of faculty assessment of student learning, as an integrated component designed to serve as a “tip of the iceberg” indicator for the depth and breadth of student learning happening on our campuses** (Figure 1).

Kuh, G. D., Jankowski, N., Ikenberry, S. O., & Kinzie, J. (2014). [\*Knowing What Students Know and Can Do: The Current State of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment in US Colleges and Universities\*](#). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

## Why did we create the EIA Designations?



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There's not one "right way" – many paths lead to quality assessment of student learning

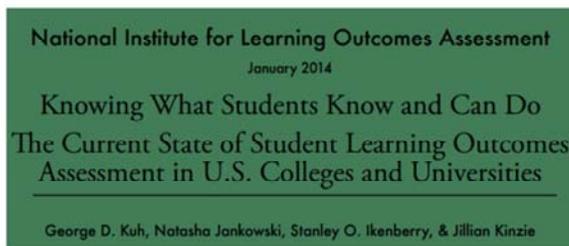
But we need to be able to find the right way for each campus – a GPS of sorts that will help us identify which route will lead to success with our students, faculty, and larger campus environment; EIA Designation serves as signposts to help guide campuses looking to take the next steps down the road

Also serves as a sort of "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" for external stakeholders who are demanding evidence that students are learning

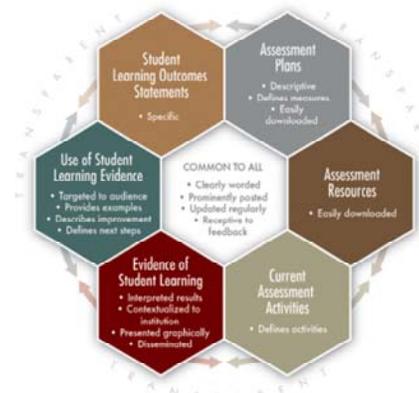
Creates space and a reason to stop and celebrate the work we've done and are doing

## How does the NILOA Transparency Framework fit in?

Institutions more frequently report assessment results internally than to external audiences.



National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment  
Making Learning Outcomes Usable & Transparent



However, doing good integrated assessment is only half the job. We need to be better at communicating what we're doing, how we're supporting it on our campuses, and what it all means to our stakeholders – both on-campus and off.

NILOA Report (January 2014): Knowing What Students Know and Can Do: The Current State of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment in US Colleges and Universities  
<http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/2013%20Abridged%20Survey%20Report%20Final.pdf>

In keeping with the original vision of the VSA to help institutions better tell their stories, therefore, the EIA Designations use a rubric developed from the NILOA Transparency Framework to evaluate campus applications, creating intention focus on communication of assessment processes and results.

Even those campuses that are engaged in intentionally aligned assessment of student learning struggle to tell their stories to the variety of stakeholders they are accountable to. While most campuses now make a practice of publicly stating what their learning outcomes are, they generally share assessment findings internally, and frequently only to faculty or assessment committees. Rarely are assessment plans or

rationales shared even with students or alumni, much less with external stakeholders such as employers, institutions who accept students for continued study, state legislators, or the public. **Put another way, campuses talk about assessment to themselves when they talk about it at all.**

**The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) created the Transparency Framework “to help institutions evaluate the extent to which they are making evidence of student accomplishment readily accessible and potentially useful and meaningful to various audiences.”** Based on a national review of campus assessment websites, the Transparency Framework consists of six components centered around a set of underlying principles common to all components (Figure 2). Guidance on the NILOA website includes key questions institutions can ask to help ensure they are making evidence of their assessment and student learning readily accessible and useful to both internal and external audiences.

Kuh, G. D., Jankowski, N., Ikenberry, S. O., & Kinzie, J. (2014). [\*Knowing What Students Know and Can Do: The Current State of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment in US Colleges and Universities.\*](#) Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. (2011). Transparency Framework. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). Retrieved from: <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/TransparencyFramework.htm>

## Application Components

- Letter from Senior Campus Leadership
- Annotated list of individuals and groups engaged in assessment activities across campus
- Application narrative
  - Self study reflection process
  - Draws heavily on components of the NILOA Transparency Framework
  - Reflection and Growth/Improvement Plan
- Evaluation by national assessment experts – rubric available on website



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**A letter from senior campus leadership** (e.g., President/Chancellor) stating why the campus decided to pursue the Excellence in Assessment Designation. The letter is the introduction to your campus application and should be no more than two pages. The letter should provide an overview of your institution's submission for the EIA designation, including any highlights you wish to emphasize in your application. The letter is not scored as part of the application.

**A completed campus contacts form** (see form provided as part of this packet).

**An annotated lists of individuals and groups engaged in assessment activities across campus**, such as assessment councils or committees at the campus, college, or department level, with brief descriptions of the charge of each group as it relates to assessment. These individuals and groups are not required to participate in the creation of the application, but rather are intended to help reviewers better understand the structure of assessment processes on the applicant campus. This list can also serve as a reference document within the narrative so that applicants do not have to explain the function of each group in the content of their applications.

### **Application narrative**

Limited space for narrative – you have to create a concise

narrative!

Applications should address the eight domains described below in more depth in the Narrative Components section:

Groups & Individuals Engaged in Assessment Activities

The [NILOA Transparency Framework Components](#) as viewed from the perspective of campus-level/campus-wide assessment of student learning outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes Statements

Campus-level Assessment Plan

Campus-level Assessment Resources

Current Campus-level Assessment Activities

Evidence of Campus-level Student Learning

Use of Campus-level Student Learning

Reflection and Growth/Improvement Plan

It is not a requirement that each domain be given equal space; campuses should decide the best use and formatting of their application information.

You may include links to additional information online

# Inaugural Designees Announced August 2016



**EXCELLENCE IN ASSESSMENT**  
2016 Designees



CAMERON UNIVERSITY



CAPELLA UNIVERSITY



CCBC



MSJ  
1920  
MOUNT ST. JOSEPH UNIVERSITY



جامعة زايد  
ZAYED UNIVERSITY



MILLS COLLEGE



ROSE-HULMAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY



IUPUI  
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis



KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY



WISCONSIN UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



2017 application period now open!

## Lessons from Inaugural Campus Applications

- Narrative construction – talk about \*why\* you do what you do
- Campus \*application\* team vs. Individuals and groups regularly engaged in assessment activities
  - Designed to intentionally address “when it’s everyone’s job, it’s no one’s job” syndrome
  - Self-study should engage broad constituents but application written by a few
- Engagement with non-academic staff and external stakeholders
- Use the rubric for self-evaluation, determine institutional readiness



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In reflecting on the first year of the EIA designation, reviewers and sponsors noted several points where applicants appeared to struggle in compiling their application narrative.. Some of these areas were due to lack of clarity in the application guidelines, which we’ve attempted to rectify in these guidelines. Some areas, similarly, were due to misalignment between the evidence we asked institutions to provide and the evidence our reviewers said would be most useful to evaluate a campus. We’ve likewise made adjustments to these guidelines to address those areas, as well as clarifying the scoring rubric to clarify the essential elements of each component. The following additional guidance is offered to applicants for the 2017 Designations in hopes of helping them craft successful narratives based on evaluations of the 2016 inaugural applications. Reviewers noted that many institutions seemed to struggle with presenting a cohesive and concise narrative regarding their campus-level assessment process. The difficulty came from making an active shift away from simply listing processes and/or activities to focusing on explaining why the processes in place on their campus mattered for their specific setting or students. Providing appropriate background context for assessment practices is important for the reviewers and others to understand why the institution engages with and approaches

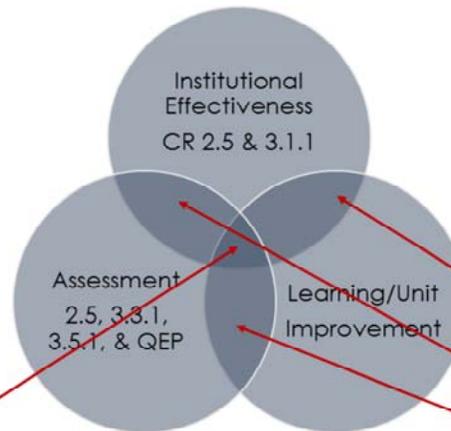
assessment in the manner it does. Many campuses defaulted to providing lists of various disconnected activities without connecting or aligning the activities into a cohesive narrative and describing or explaining the relationships between the various parts. Applicants are strongly encouraged to approach the narrative as a representation of the collective whole of assessment activities, one that is placed within a specific institutional context, and to provide that context explicitly within their narrative when necessary. It is not enough to say that an institution is engaged in a particular assessment practice without articulating why **that** practice is important within **that** context.

The 2016 guidelines included an expectation for a large and diverse campus application team to engage in the self-study process that we feel is best to aid campuses in preparing their EIA designation application narrative. Unfortunately, we placed too much emphasis on representation within an application team without addressing our true intent: that a broad and diverse group of campus committees and individuals are actively and substantively engaged in on-going assessment activities. The application guidelines have been altered for 2017 to make it clear that while an ideal campus assessment plan will be inclusive of a broad and diverse set of constituents, it is not a requirement that all of those parties engage directly in creating the campus application narrative. However, we would encourage the team charged with crafting the campus application narrative to be inclusive of various audiences in some substantive way. This expectation is an intentional effort to address a barrier to integrated approaches to assessment—that only one office or a few individuals are in charge of and responsible for supporting the entire campus enterprise. The majority of 2016 EIA applicants revealed in their narrative that they struggled to engage various groups in their campus-level assessment processes a consistent and connected manner. For instance, either student affairs were not involved in assessment at a campus-level or they had a separate approach not connected with the academic side of the house that was made clear in the application process. Further, few campuses reported actively engaging adjunct or part-time faculty, students, alumni, receiving institutions, and employers in their assessment work. These areas were subsequently identified in the Reflection and Growth/Improvement Plans, with many applicants stating intentions to make better connections with these groups moving forward. Using the application process as a means to think collectively as a campus about strategies to better address areas of disconnect proved to be a strong use of the EIA application self-study process.

Finally, we heard from many other campuses that reported they used the EIA evaluation rubric and application materials as a means to examine institutional readiness to apply for a Designation or to review current campus-level assessment processes. This is an important and meaningful use of the EIA designation materials and one that can help identify priorities or current needs within an assessment process. Indeed, one of the primary goals of the EIA Designations is to help foster meaningful communication and discussion on campuses regarding the creation of scaffolded and horizontally integrated assessment practices in order to create more cohesive learning environments for all our students.

## Excellence in Assessment & SACSCOC Managing Quality & Compliance

- EIA**
- 1) the diversity of groups and individuals engaged in assessment activities;
  - 2) student learning outcomes statements;
  - 3) assessment plans;
  - 4) assessment resources;
  - 5) current assessment activities;
  - 6) evidence of student learning;
  - 7) use of student learning outcomes results; and
  - 8) growth and improvement plans.



- SACSCOC**
- CR 2.5: Strategic Planning, integration/alignment of assessment & planning at the institutional-level
  - CR 2.7.3: General Education
  - CR 3.5.1: Assessment (not improvement) of General Education
  - CS 3.3.1.1: Program-Level Learning & Assessment
    - 3.3.1.2 thru 3.3.1.5
  - QEP



EIA = Quality in Assessment

SACSCOC = IE & Compliance, but not necessarily high levels of quality 11

EIA is focused on quality in assessment practices, it hits the IE sweet spot. SACSCOC aims for quality, but compliance can be achieved without attaining it to a high degree.

Compliance does **not** require:

- Discussing assessment results
- Including outside constituencies
- Actual gains in learning
- Reflecting on practices
- Transparency/sharing of results
- Faculty and staff development in assessment

Compliance with 3.3.1.1 requires articulation of SLOs at the program-level, assessment of the extent to which they are achieved, documentation that improvements were made in relation to the results.

Compliance with 3.5.1 requires that general education outcomes are assessed, but improvement in relation to the results is not necessary for compliance.

The QEP requires SLOs and assessment, but not improvement in relation to the data.

Designing processes for **quality** using the EIA framework will set conditions

necessary for not only **compliance**, but also lead to the creation of systems and outcomes that are **valued**.

## Our Panelists

Keston Fulcher  
Executive Director,  
Center for Assessment & Research  
Studies  
James Madison University



Loraine Phillips  
Assistant Vice Provost,  
Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting  
The University of Texas at Arlington

Lee Rakes  
Director of Assessment & Evaluation  
Virginia Military Institute



Decline in need for faculty development against it still being a top concern perhaps = artifact of how we correlated these issues

### Panel Questions:

1. Why should institutions engage with the EIA process? What does EIA add that they can't do already?
2. Some campuses can look at the criteria and immediately see how they fit in those; what can institutions who maybe aren't feeling so confident get from the EIA materials? How can institutions benefit from this process and/or the EIA materials?
3. Talk a bit about narrative creation and institutional story-telling within accreditation. What should campuses here that are in various stages of working on their SACSCOC re-affirmation pay particular attention to in crafting their stories?