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Knowing What Students Know and Can Do: The Current State of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment in U.S. Colleges and Universities

George D. Kuh, Natasha Jankowski, Stanley O. Ikenberry, & Jillian Kinzie



Full Report: Updated

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This document is a full version of the NILOA 2013 national survey of provosts. The abridged version of this report is available here: <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/knowingwhatstudentsknowandcando.html>

NILOA Mission

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

Acknowledgments

NILOA sincerely thanks Timothy Cain, Nora Gannon-Slater, Sarah Martin and Robert Dumas for their excellent contributions to this study and report. We also very much appreciate the provosts and their designates who set aside time from their very busy schedules to complete the questionnaire. We are in your debt.

The NILOA Team

Executive Summary

Assessment of student learning keeps climbing upward on the national higher education agenda. The many reasons for this include persistent prods from external bodies such as accrediting and governmental entities and, increasingly, the recognition by institutions of the need for more and better evidence of student accomplishment.

What do we know about what U.S. colleges and universities are doing to gather and use evidence on what their undergraduate students are learning? Provosts (or their designates) from 1,202 regionally accredited, undergraduate-degree-granting, two- and four-year, public, private, and for-profit institutions in the U.S. helped answer this question by responding (with a 43% response rate) to a national survey conducted by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) in the spring and summer of 2013. The questionnaire asked about institutions' current assessment activities and how the institutions were using evidence of student learning outcomes.

Major Findings

- **Stated learning outcomes for students are now the norm in American higher education.** In 2013, about 84% of all colleges and universities had adopted stated learning outcomes for all their undergraduates, an increase of 10% from 2009.
- **The prime driver of assessment remains the same: expectations of regional and program or specialized accrediting agencies.** At the same time, internal drivers including program review and process improvement have become increasingly important.
- **There is significantly more assessment activity now than a few years ago.** The average number of assessment tools or approaches used by colleges and universities in 2013 was five, two more than the average number (three) in 2009.
- **The range of tools and measures to assess student learning has expanded significantly.** National surveys remain popular (85% of all schools use them), but there has been a large increase in the use of rubrics, portfolios, and other classroom-based assessments as well.
- **Meeting accreditation expectations heads the list of how institutions use assessment evidence, but internal use by campuses is growing and is considered *far more important* than external use.** Responding provosts considered classroom-based assessments to be of greatest institutional value, as they capture student performance in the contexts where teaching and learning occur—course and program-embedded experiences. Ironically, while governing board expectations that the institution collect student learning outcomes data are greater today, sharing this information with the board was not reported to be as common as institutions' other uses.
- **Institutions more frequently report assessment results internally than to external audiences.** Assessment results are reported most frequently on campus in faculty meetings or retreats. In 2013, only about a third (35%) of campuses made assessment results publically available on their websites or in publications.
- **Provosts perceive substantial support on their campuses for assessment.** Nearly three quarters reported either “very much” or “quite a bit” of support for assessment activity, although institutional reward systems do not always recognize such work.

Executive Summary cont.

- **In general, institutional selectivity is negatively related to assessment activity.** For almost every category of assessment activity, the more selective an institution's admissions standards, the less likely it is to employ various assessment approaches, or use the results.
- **Faculty are the key to moving assessment work forward.** Provosts rated faculty ownership and involvement as top priorities to advance the assessment agenda.

Implications

The survey results point to five areas that require immediate attention by institutional leaders, faculty and staff members, assessment professionals, and governing boards:

1. More faculty involvement is essential.

If there is one matter on which almost everyone agrees—administrators, rank-and-file faculty members, and assessment scholars—it is that faculty involvement in assessment and improvement is essential both to improve teaching and learning and to enhance institutional effectiveness.

2. Sustaining the recent progress in institutional assessment work must be a priority.

Leadership turnover and limited resources threaten continued support for assessment, making it critical that faculty and staff embed assessment into their core activities.

3. Colleges and universities must use assessment results more effectively.

Although more assessment evidence is now available, its use is not nearly as pervasive as it must be to guide institutional actions toward improving student outcomes. Key to such an effort is integrating assessment work into the institution's governance and organizational structures.

4. Governing boards must make student learning a continuing high priority.

To be confident that the institution's internal academic quality controls are operating effectively, boards should request regular reports of student learning outcomes and examples of the productive use of these data.

5. Colleges and universities must cultivate an institutional culture that values gathering and using student learning outcomes data as integral to fostering student success and increasing institutional effectiveness—as contrasted to demonstrating compliance.

The goal is to get everyone—faculty, administrators, staff and the governing board—to see that assessing outcomes and using evidence for ongoing improvement is not just or primarily an obligatory response to demands from outside the institution but a challenge within the institution to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness.

Executive Summary cont.

Conclusion

The factors inducing more institutional effort devoted to student learning outcomes assessment have remained relatively stable over the last four years. At the same time, understanding what students know and can do is no longer driven exclusively—or even primarily—by external forces, especially if accreditation is viewed as a hybrid of self-imposed as well as external oversight. Today, joining the inducement of accreditation are a campus's own drivers—motivations within the institution to improve student learning, to evaluate the effectiveness of current practice, and to heed presidential and governing board interests. This leads us to conclude that U.S. higher education has turned a corner in the assessment of student learning. *Carrying out this important work is no longer primarily an act of compliance but—more appropriately and promisingly—is driven by a balance of compliance and institutional desire to improve.*

Indeed, colleges and universities themselves have every reason to take ownership of assessment of student learning and to use that evidence wisely and productively. If this improvement-oriented impulse, reflected in the results of this survey, becomes more deeply rooted in campus cultures, what may follow is more purposeful use of evidence of student learning outcomes in decision making—which, in turn, could do much to enhance academic quality and institutional effectiveness in American higher education.

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Context

Assessment of student learning keeps climbing upward on the national higher education agenda. The multiple reasons for this include early and persistent prods from external bodies such as accrediting and governmental entities and, more recently, institutions recognizing they need more and better evidence of student accomplishment. In 2006, the Spellings Commission embodied the external voice in proclaiming

We are disturbed by evidence that the quality of student learning at U.S. colleges and universities is inadequate and, in some cases, declining... Colleges and universities must become more transparent about cost, price, and student success outcomes, and must willingly share this information with students and families (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, p. 3-4).

Not surprisingly, the tone of the Commission's final report was somber. Were students learning what they needed to know? Were college graduates prepared to survive and thrive after college? And what were the implications of the answers to these questions for the nation's economy and the future of the democracy? It came as no shock when the Commission recommended that "*postsecondary education institutions should measure and report meaningful student learning outcomes*" (p. 28).

Now—eight years later and under a different administration—Congress once again is poised to consider reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The challenges have not abated. If anything, some concerns have intensified, including angst over rising college costs and uncertain academic quality and the need for greater and more equitable access. Employers, policy makers, and governmental officials agree that the nation needs greater numbers of students from more diverse backgrounds to succeed and achieve at higher levels—all of this while at the same time containing and reducing college costs. Meanwhile, regional and specialized program accreditation organizations, the traditional arbiters of quality assurance, are caught in the middle and are under fire from critics, magnifying the external pressure campuses feel.

Yet despite this heightened external pressure, as this report will show, the impetus for gauging what students know and can do is no longer just an external mandate but increasingly is driven by people responsible for the final product—faculty, staff, and institutional leaders. Various trends and factors point to what is behind this shift.

College students are more mobile and now can obtain credentials and degrees from a growing number of providers. More than half of all college graduates have attended more than one institution. Nearly half of all students take at least one course on-line. Both public and independent colleges and universities report enrollment shortfalls and other forms of financial stress. If students do

The impetus for gauging what students know and can do is no longer just an external mandate but increasingly is driven by people responsible for the final product—faculty, staff, and institutional leaders.

not succeed, campus enrollments sag—compounding the strain on already over-stretched institutional budgets. For campuses across the broad sweep of American higher education, the message in these signs is clear: knowing what students know and enhancing student success while containing costs is crucial to the institution's health and sustainability. Because of these challenges and the many others that campuses deal with daily, it is now essential that institutions inform their decision making with data they systematically collect on their students' learning.

This report provides some evidence that this is happening, albeit at a slow, tedious pace.

One change over the last decade is that we now know more about what institutions are doing to document and improve student learning outcomes. Ten years ago, the kinds of information presented in this report were not available. Substantial headway has been made in the numbers and kinds of approaches campuses are using to assess student learning, with a welcome discernible shift toward the use of multiple measures and classroom-based approaches.

Current State of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

What do we know about what colleges and universities in the U.S. are doing to gather and use evidence on what their undergraduate students are learning? Provosts (or their designates) at 1,202 regionally accredited, undergraduate-degree-granting, two- and four-year, public, private, and for-profit institutions in the U.S. helped answer this question by responding (with a 43% response rate) to a national survey conducted by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) in the spring and summer of 2013. The NILOA questionnaire asked about institutions' current assessment activities and how the institutions are using evidence of student learning outcomes.

The responses reflect a range of assessment activities. Some institutions were well advanced in their assessment efforts, while others were just getting involved in this important work. Taken together, what provosts told us underscores the need for meaningful measures that

- are not overly expensive or time consuming to implement,
- provide actionable information for guiding decision-making and curricular change, and
- leverage and share what people from different corners of the institution are discovering about student attainment in order to improve teaching and student learning.

In this sense, the survey results suggest that the kinds of student learning assessment approaches that matter most to provosts and the campuses they serve are not primarily responses to the interests of government or accreditors but, rather, are those efforts that yield meaningful, nuanced information that can both document student accomplishment and inform decision-making at all levels.

NILOA conducted a similar survey in 2009 (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009). Of the schools responding in 2013, 725 also completed the 2009 survey, allowing us to estimate the nature of the changes that have occurred. Appropriate

Learning outcomes assessment is key to addressing both affordability and access issues.

(provost at a master's institution)

statistical methods were used to determine whether differences in assessment activities existed between institutions by institution type, institutional control, or accreditation region as well as across time, between the 2009 and 2013 survey administrations.¹ The following narrative highlights statistically significant results as well as common patterns or similarities in these results.

In addition, we invited provosts to comment about their hopes, worries, positive outcomes, and needs to move their institution's assessment work forward. More than 83% (1,003) did so, which in itself says something about where student learning outcomes assessment falls on the institutional agenda. An overview of the themes in these comments follows the narrative on results from the formal questionnaire items.

Stated Learning Outcomes Are Now the Norm

Clearly articulated learning outcomes are important in determining whether students know and can do what an institution promises and what employers and policy makers expect. The vast majority of colleges and universities have set forth with varying degrees of specificity learning outcomes that apply to all their undergraduates, regardless of majors.

- Some 84% of institutions reported they had common learning outcomes for all their students, up from 74% four years ago.
- Moreover, four in ten institutions reported that the learning outcomes of all their various academic programs *were aligned with* the institution's stated learning outcomes for all students (Figure 1). This level of alignment suggests more careful attention to integrating assessment activities on campus.

Clearly articulated learning outcomes are important in determining whether students know and can do what an institution promises and what employers and policy makers expect.

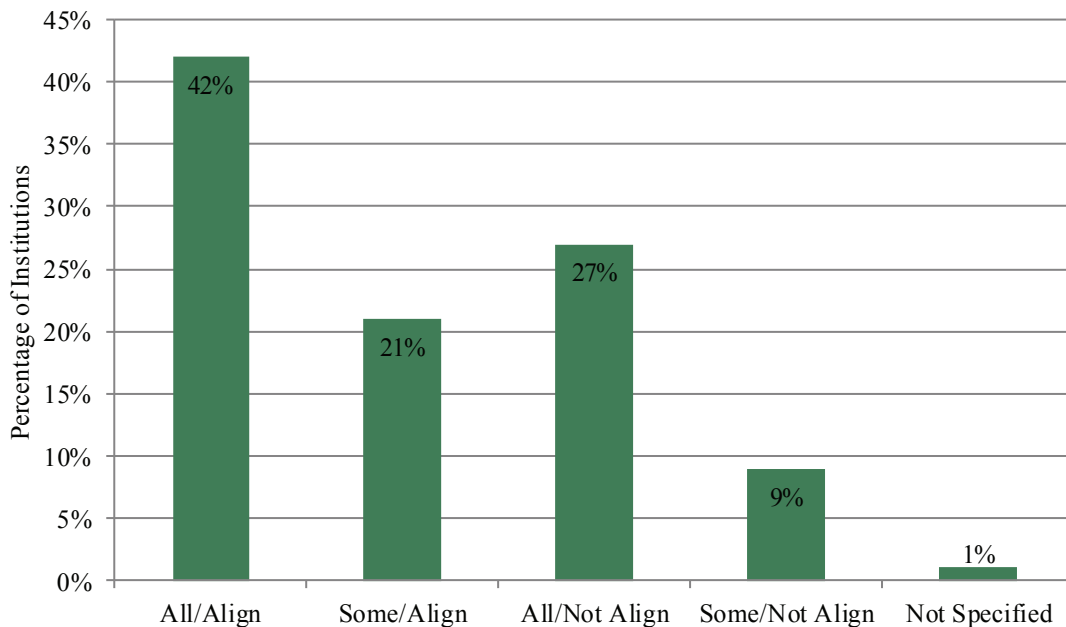


Figure 1. Percentage of institutions with stated program learning outcomes and their alignment to institution-level outcomes.

¹ Appendix A contains additional information about the survey administration and analysis. The survey questions may be seen here: <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/knowingwhatstudentsknowandcando.html>

The degree of articulation between program and institutional learning outcomes varies among different types of institutions. For example, fewer doctoral-granting institutions (27%) reported having departmental learning outcomes aligned with institutional learning outcomes compared with about half (49%) of all other institutions, perhaps reflecting the challenges of increased scale and complexity that characterize these campuses.² Still, more attention is being given overall to articulating and aligning learning goals within and across a campus.

Assessment Drivers

A variety of forces prompt institutions to gather information about student learning (Figure 2). Regional and specialized/program accreditation remain the prime drivers of assessment work, but internal drivers are also very important, including institutional commitment to improve and desire by faculty and staff to gain a clearer understanding of student learning outcomes. As another internal driver, presidents and governing boards are asking for evidence of student learning in relation to the overall effectiveness and value of current practice.

Apart from accreditation, a creature of the academy to ensure that colleges and universities focus on quality and improvement, much of the impetus for understanding what students know and can do emanates from internal impulses from faculty, presidents, and governing boards. Pressure does continue from external forces—governments, statewide coordinating boards, national calls for more accountability, and state or federal mandates—but these forces now appear less influential in prompting this work than internal drivers. We take this to be good news.

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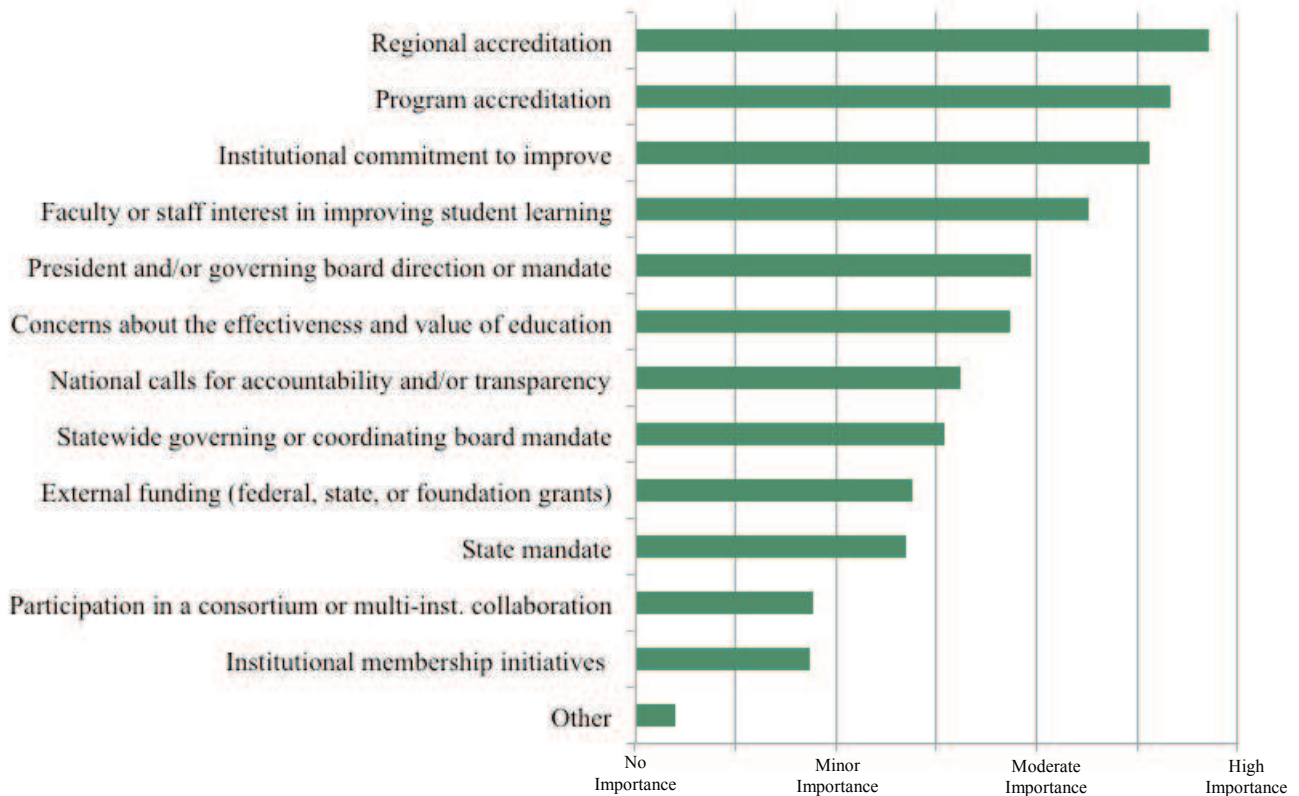


Figure 2. Importance of factors or forces that prompt student learning outcomes assessment.

² Please see appendix B for data tables by institutional type.

The source of impetus for assessing student learning tends to vary among public and independent colleges and universities (Figure 3). Not surprisingly, compared with their independent counterparts, more public and for-profit institutions report pressure to assess student learning from a statewide coordinating or governing board, state mandates, or other external pressures. Noteworthy is that “institutional commitment to improve” is a somewhat more important incentive for assessment work in for-profit higher education institutions compared with the not-for-profit public/private sectors.

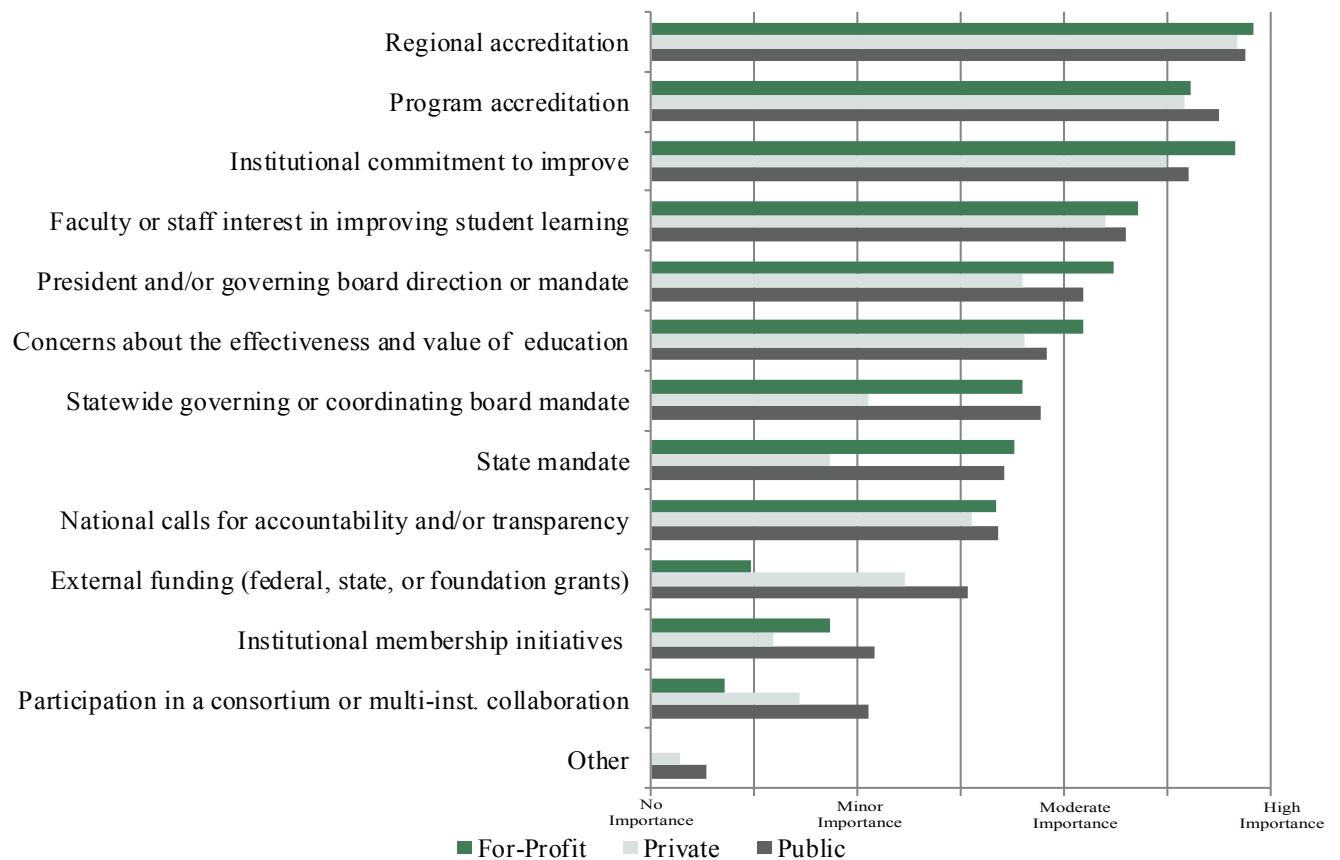


Figure 3. Importance of factors or forces that prompt student learning outcomes assessment by institutional control.

These patterns are consistent with those seen in 2009 (Figure 4), although the influence of governing boards has increased, perhaps reflecting increased awareness of governing boards in attending to matters of educational quality (Association of Governing Boards, 2010; Ewell, 2006; 2012). Meanwhile, the influence of institutional membership initiatives has decreased somewhat across public, private, and for-profit institutions.

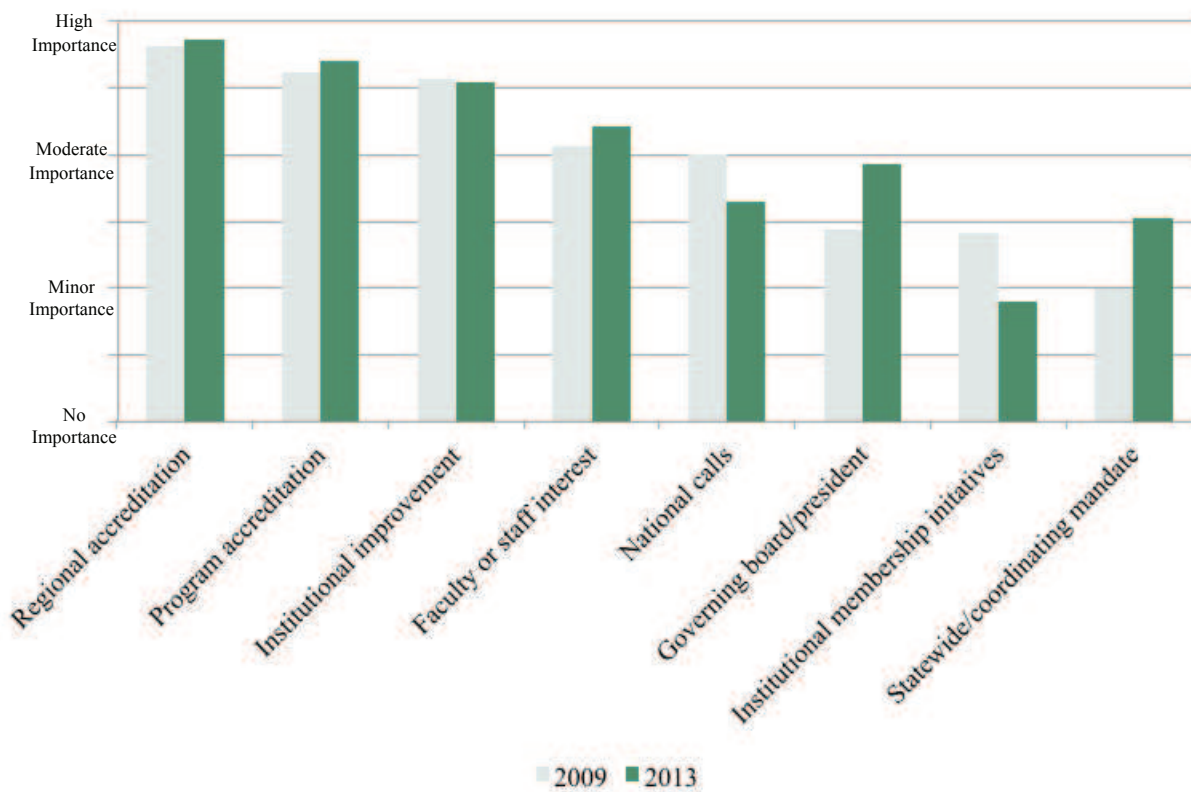


Figure 4. Comparison of importance of factors or forces that prompt student learning outcomes assessment, 2009 and 2013.

Despite some variation in results across institution types, improving student learning and institutional effectiveness seem to be the most important, consequential drivers of assessment practice (Figure 5).

- More associate’s degree-granting institutions than other types of institutions indicated assessment was influenced by presidential and board intervention and by state mandates and external funding opportunities.
- Doctoral institutions tended to give greater weight to institutional membership initiatives driving assessment, such as the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).

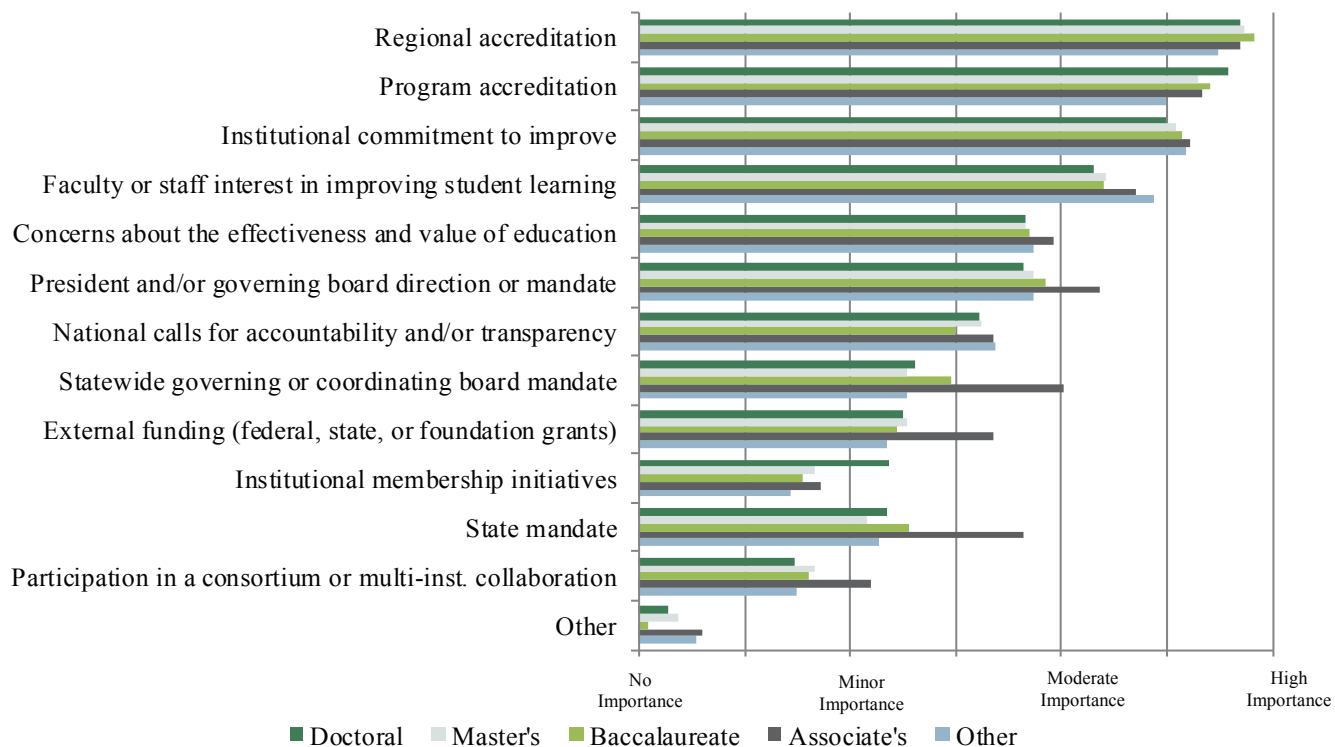


Figure 5. Importance of factors or forces that prompt student learning outcomes assessment, by institution type.

Use of Multiple Measures to Assess Learning

Experts generally agree that no single assessment tool or approach can adequately represent collegiate level student learning. Fortunately, there are many more assessment tools and approaches available today than a decade ago (Borden & Kernel, 2013), and American colleges and universities are using them more frequently (Figure 6).

- Among the more commonly used assessment tools are national student surveys (85%), rubrics (69%), and classroom-based assessments that are aggregated or “rolled up” in some manner to represent student learning outcomes at the institution level (66%).
- Classroom-based assessment, national student surveys, and rubrics (in this order) are the top three “most valuable or important” approaches for assessing undergraduate student learning outcomes.

That classroom-based assessment and rubrics are considered among the most valuable for institution level assessment underscores the shift toward using measures that capture student performance in the contexts where teaching and learning occur—course and program-embedded experiences. These data are then “rolled-up” to the institution level and aggregated to represent undergraduate student learning outcomes. Just a few years ago, institutions were searching for examples of the analytical and data presentation steps that would enable them to array course- and program-level outcomes in this manner.

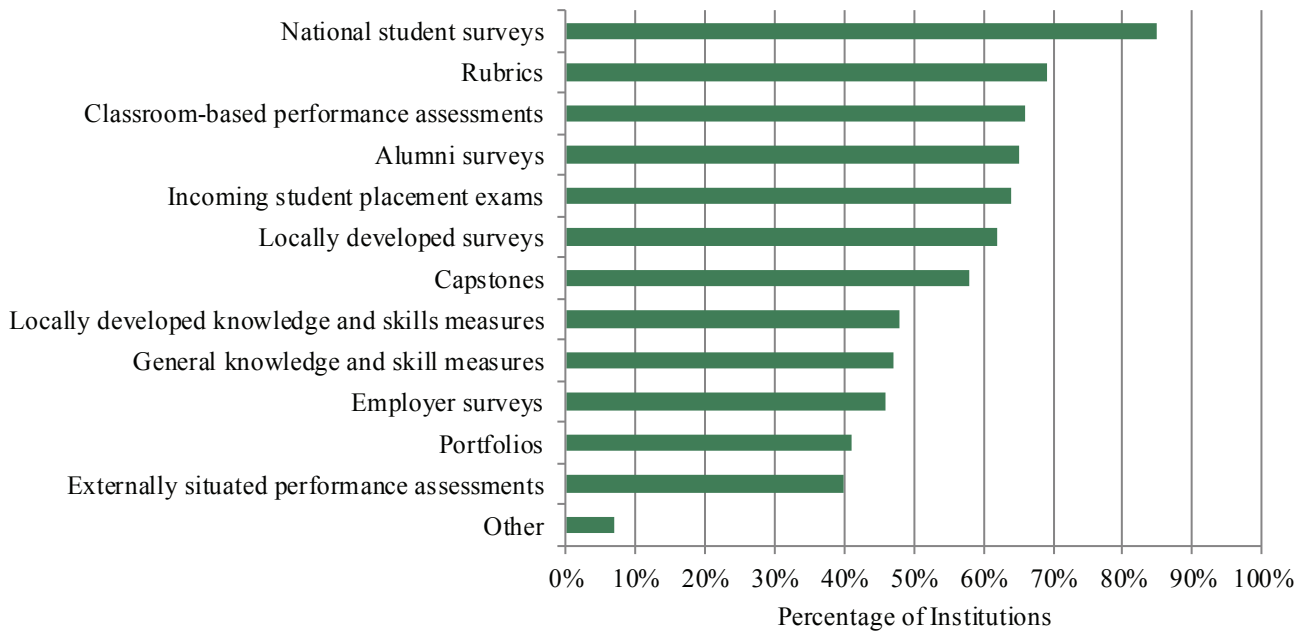


Figure 6. Percentage of institutions employing different assessment approaches at the institution level to represent undergraduate student learning.

- Institutions are using almost every type of approach to assessing student learning more frequently in 2013 than they did in 2009.

While more is not always better, this trend is another marker of the shift toward institutional improvement as an assessment driver. While all types of measures are being used more often (Figure 7), the most striking changes are the increased use of rubrics, portfolios, external performance assessment (such as internship and service learning), and employer surveys.

Favored assessment approaches vary by institutional control.³

- Compared with the not-for-profit sector, fewer for-profit institutions employed national student surveys. However, more for-profit schools used rubrics and classroom-based performance assessments, such as simulations, comprehensive exams, and critiques. In fact, all of the for-profit institutions that responded to the survey reported using rubrics.
- Public universities less frequently used portfolios, capstone projects/ courses, and information from alumni compared with their private and for-profit counterparts.

³Appendix B contains tabulated results of assessment approaches by institutional control.

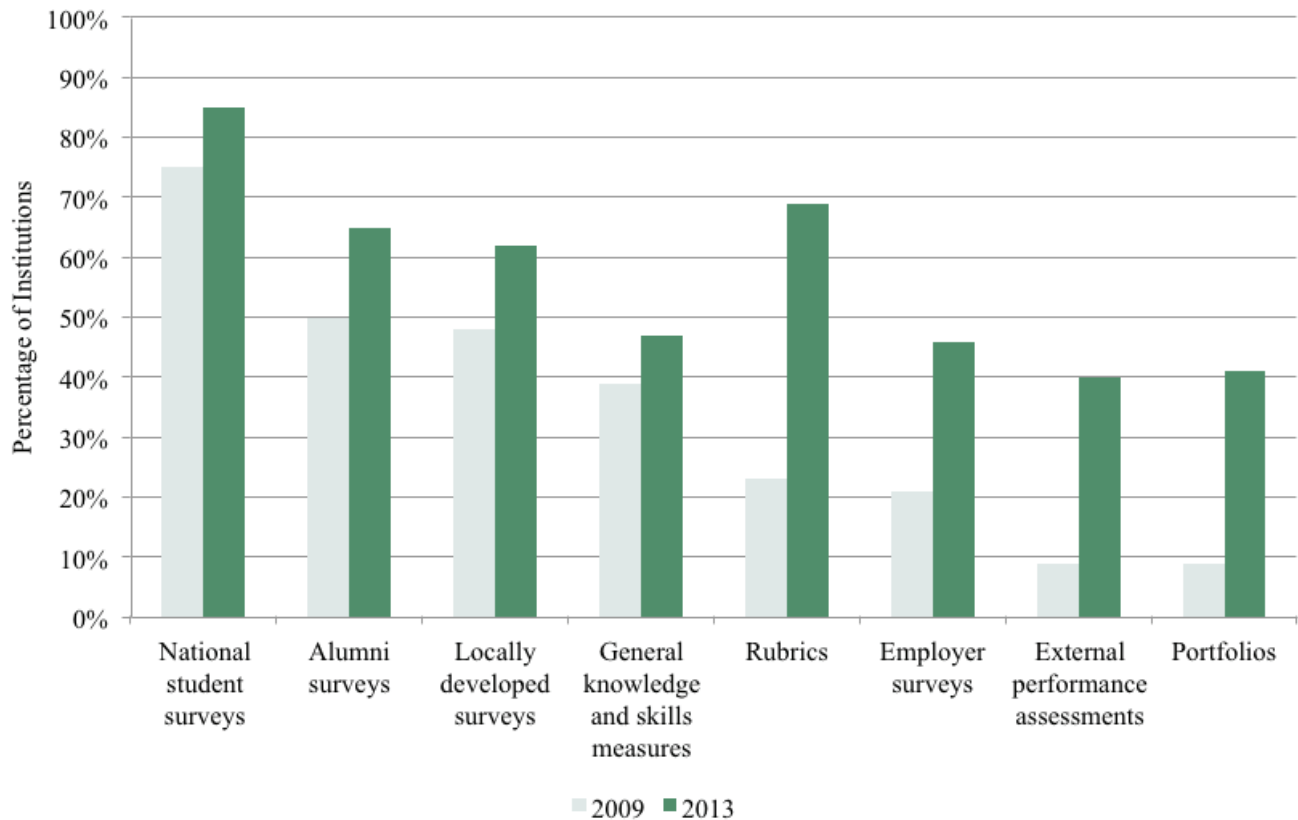


Figure 7. Comparison of use of selected assessment approaches, 2009 and 2013.

Assessment approaches also vary by institution type (Figure 8).

- More associate’s degree-granting institutions used incoming student placement exams and information from employers, but they were *least likely* to use alumni surveys and capstone projects.
- Doctoral institutions were *more likely* to use national student surveys perhaps because they are easier to administer across large numbers of students; they were *least likely* to use externally situated performance assessments, portfolios, locally developed measures, rubrics, and classroom-based assessments.
- Special mission colleges—for example tribal colleges—favored assessment approaches such as classroom-based assessments, portfolios, alumni surveys, locally developed surveys, and externally situated assessments such as internships or other community-based projects.

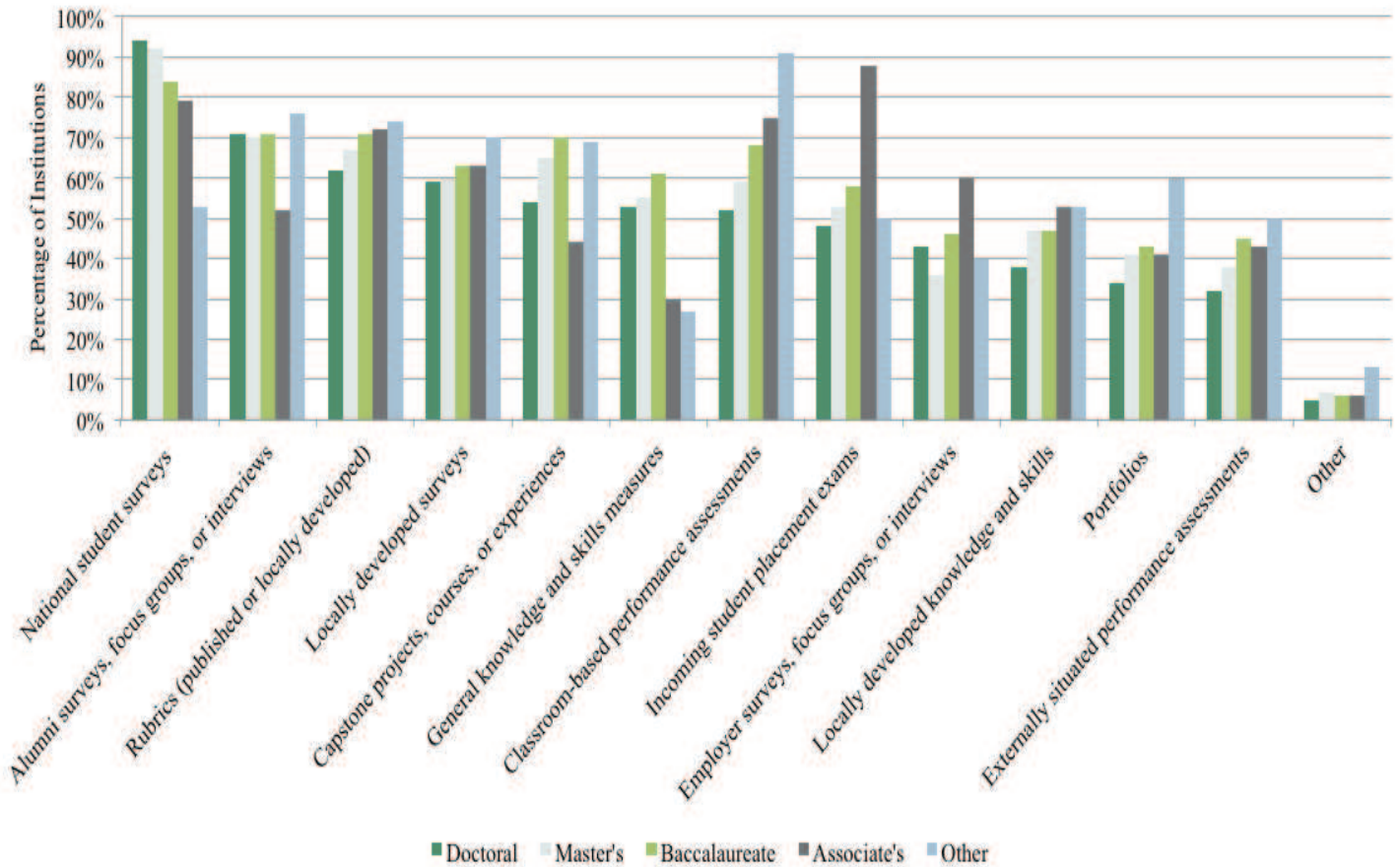


Figure 8. Percentage of assessment approaches used by institutional type.

Use of Assessment Results Is Growing

Gathering information about student accomplishment can be an empty exercise if the data are not used in meaningful and productive ways. One of the most encouraging findings from this study is that reports of *institutional use of assessment evidence* are up in every single category (Figure 9).

- Complying with regional and program accreditation expectations is the most frequent use, as was the case in 2009.
- At the same time, nine of ten institutions today use student learning outcomes data in program reviews, either institution-wide (62%) or for some programs (29%).
- Institutions also report frequently using assessment evidence for other improvement-related tasks, such as curriculum modification, strategic planning, policy development, benchmarking, and faculty development—all encouraging signs (Figure 10).

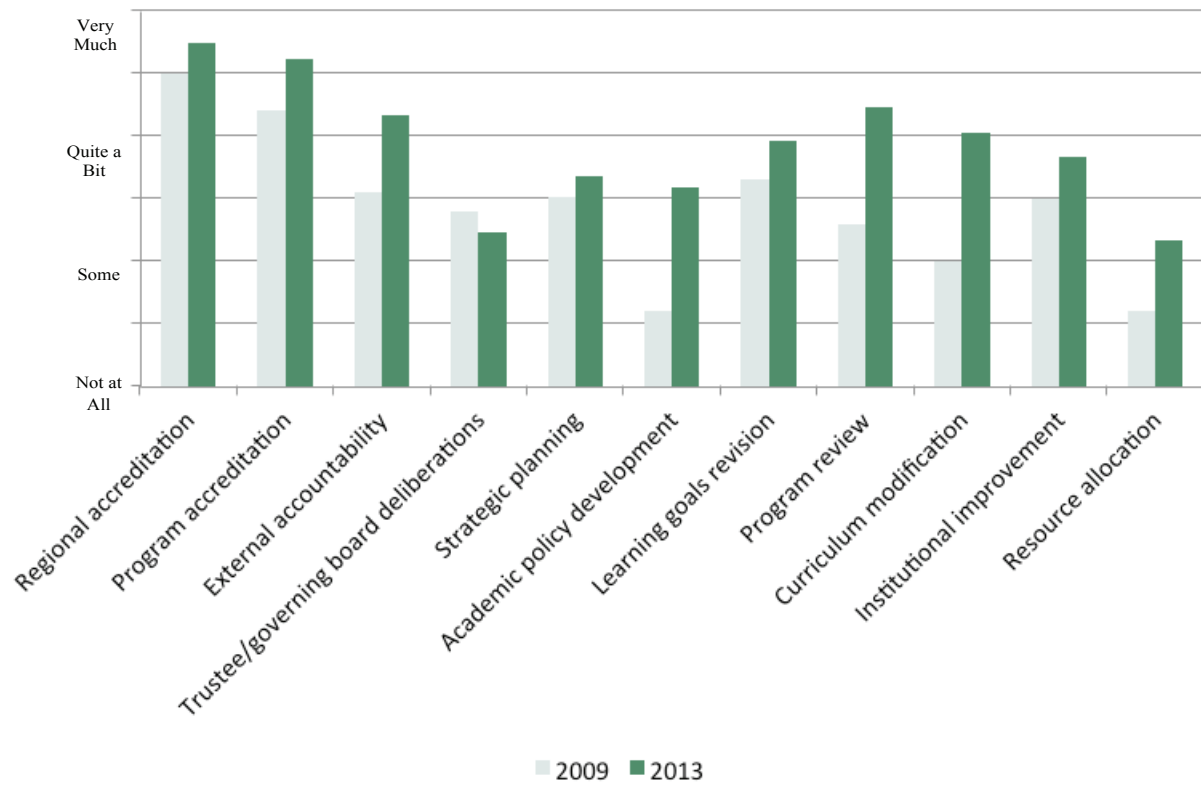


Figure 9. Comparison of uses of assessment results, 2009 and 2013.

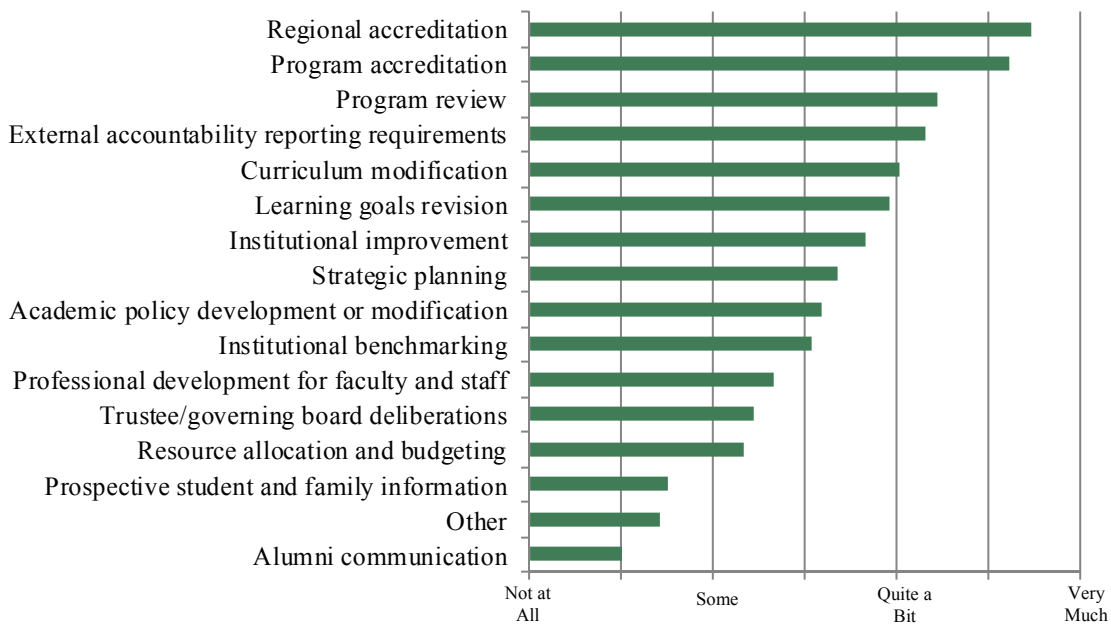


Figure 10. Extent of use of assessment results for various purposes.

Figure 11 confirms that assessment results are more often used to guide changes in policy and practice at the course or department/program level than at the college or institution levels. As some have observed (Banta & Blaich, 2011; Suskie, 2009), broad, institution-wide measures—be they tests, survey results or other approaches to assessment—may be less actionable than evidence of student learning closer to the course, department/program, and college.

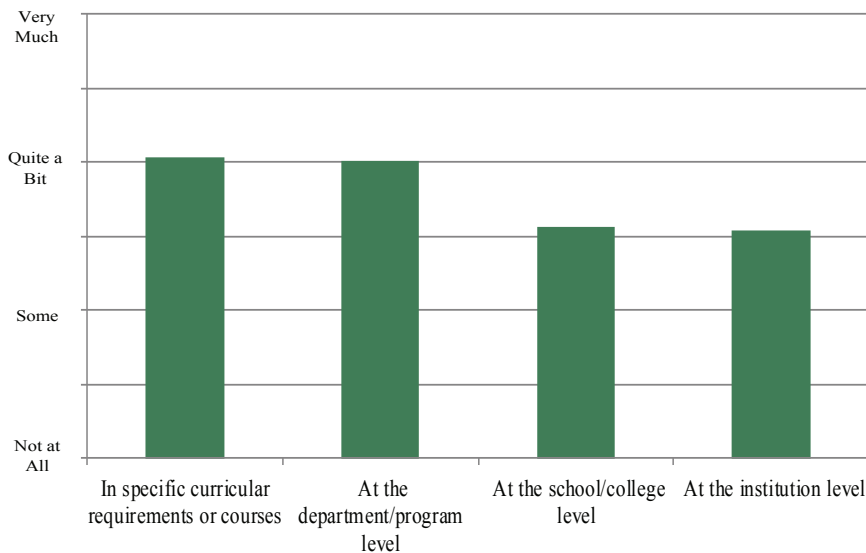


Figure 11. Extent to which changes are made based on assessment results by level within the institution.

For-profit and public institutions were *more likely* to indicate external accountability reporting requirements than private institutions as uses of assessment.⁴ In addition, for-profit institutions were *more likely* than not-for-profit institutions to use assessment results in trustee or governing board deliberations, strategic planning, institutional benchmarking, and curriculum modification. This pattern of student outcomes use is not surprising, given the market sensitivity of these institutions and shareholders' expectations for data-driven decision making that insures a reasonable return on their investment.

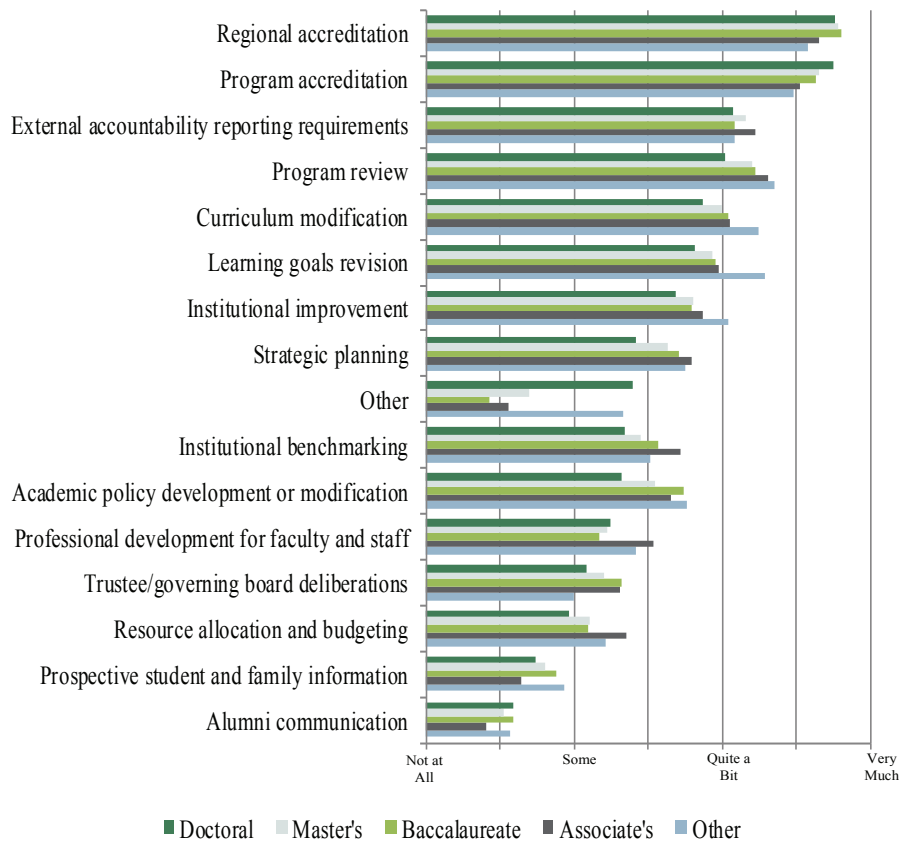
While most institutions reported frequent use of results for accreditation, different types of institutions tend to use assessment results for different purposes (Figure 12).

- Associate's degree-granting institutions were *more likely* than other institution types to use assessment results in strategic planning, resource allocation, professional development, and institutional benchmarking—all of which are directly tied to decision making and monitoring institutional performance.
- Other institutions such as special mission colleges were *more likely* to use results internally for institutional improvement, curriculum modification, and learning goals revision.
- Doctoral degree-granting institutions were *least likely* to use assessment results for academic policy development or modification.

Once faculty are collecting useful information, that information is being used to make changes to try to improve student learning... Sharing examples of faculty using results within disciplines, programs, and courses would drive the institutional work of assessment forward.

(provost at a community college)

⁴Data about institutional control and uses of assessment results are presented in Appendix B.



Assessment results are more often used to change policies, programs, and practices closer to the action—at the course level rather than at the institution level.

Figure 12. Use of assessment results by institutional type.

The information presented thus far—especially the data displayed in Figures 2, 9, and 10—warrants further consideration. Although provosts were asked to report the extent of use of various assessment results (Figure 10), they also reported that assessment results are more often used to change policies, programs, and practices closer to the action—at the course level rather than at the institution level (Figure 11). This makes sense if the primary purpose of assessment is to improve student attainment. Assessment effort needs to be expended where teaching and learning occur—in classrooms, laboratories, studios, and so forth—and where evidence can be applied in actionable ways. At the same time, the results of this grassroots work can and should inform institutional strategic planning and trustee discussions and decision making.

Ironically, while governing boards are important drivers of assessment work (Figure 2), the frequency with which assessment results are shared with trustees and regents appears to have decreased slightly since 2009—the only such use to decrease (Figure 9).

In short, it appears that over the past few years, institutions are using learning outcomes findings to a greater extent, and more so internally in terms of the largest area of growth—for institutional improvement purposes. To the extent this trend continues, it bodes well for the future (Figure 9).

Communicating Assessment Results on Campus and Beyond

One of the criticisms of postsecondary education is that too little information about the student experience and other aspects of institutional performance is available to faculty and staff or to the general public. The results of this study suggest that this concern is being addressed, as about 90% of all colleges and universities are providing at least some information about student learning outcomes assessment on their websites or in publications (Figure 13). However, only about 35% are assessment results, and just 8% offer information about whether the assessment data had any impact on policy or practice.

- The means for communicating assessment results *within the institution* that were ranked most effective were presentations of assessment findings at faculty meetings or retreats (73%) and through the work of assessment committees (65%).

The communication approaches institutions deemed effective were quite similar across the various accreditation regions, with a few exceptions.⁵

- WASC, HLC, and Middle States schools were *more likely* to indicate assessment committees as effective means to report assessment results internally.
- SACS institutions were *more likely* to favor the dean's council and email updates.

Over the past few years, institutions are using learning outcomes findings to a greater extent, and more so internally in terms of largest area of growth, for institutional improvement purposes.

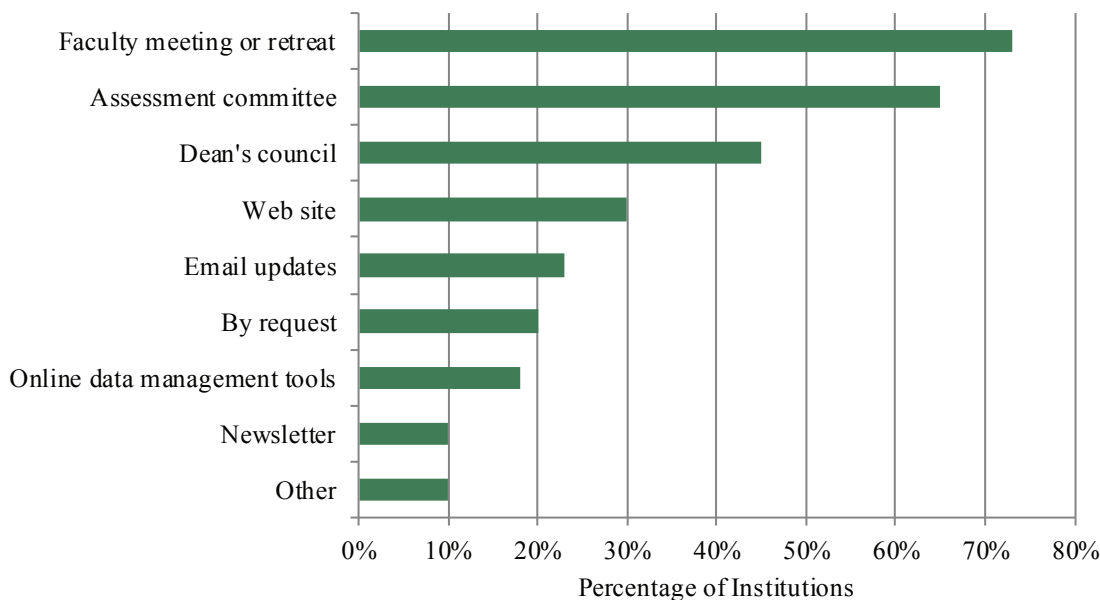
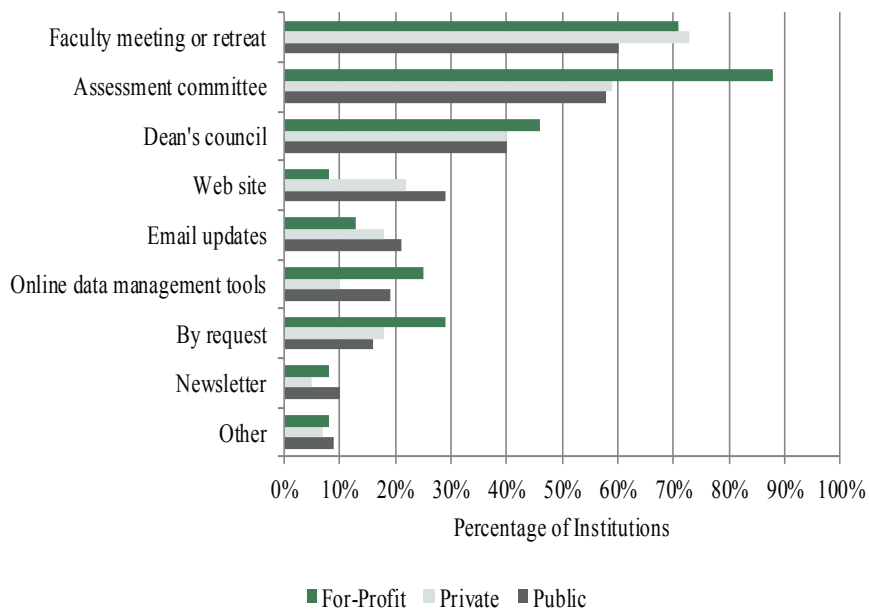


Figure 13. Percentage of institutions reporting approach as the most effective means for sharing assessment results within the institution.

Different types of institutions favored different internal communication methods that, on the surface, seem to be a function of institution size and organizational complexity (Figures 14 and 15).

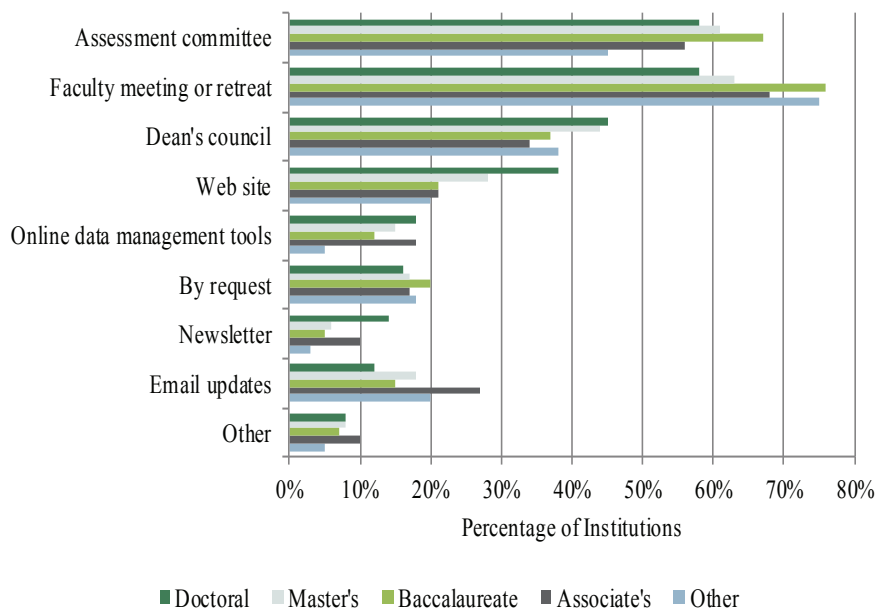
⁵ Appendix B provides tabulated responses for the internal communication approaches by accreditation region.



The assessment information most commonly shared with external audiences is the institution's student learning outcomes statements.

Figure 14. Percentage of institutions reporting approach as the most effective means for sharing assessment results within the institution, by institutional control.

- More public institutions than private and for-profit schools said website and email updates were effective while for-profit institutions favored assessment committees.
- Baccalaureate institutions more so than other schools reported assessment committee and faculty meetings as effective means of internal communication.
- Associate's degree-granting institutions tended to prefer email updates, which may be a more efficacious way for those types of schools to communicate with part-time faculty and others who may not have campus offices or mail drops.
- Doctoral institutions favored websites and dean's council reports, perhaps reflecting the scale and complexity of these academic institutions, or a focus on administrative communication flows of assessment information.



We have been working on student learning outcomes at the course level for years, but we still struggle with ways to share our successes within our institution.

(provost at a baccalaureate institution)

Figure 15. Ranking of most effective means for sharing assessment results within the institution, by institution type.

How are assessment activities and evidence of student learning outcomes communicated *beyond the campus*? The results of this study suggest patterns in these communications among institutions overall (Figure 16).

- The assessment information most commonly shared with external audiences is the institution's student learning outcomes statements.
- While assessment results are available on some campuses, information lags about *how the data are being used*.

Generally unsurprising results about publicly sharing assessment information were found by institutional control.⁶

- For-profit institutions were *less likely* to publicly report their current assessment activities and resources.
- Public institutions—which are expected or even legally required to be transparent in most matters—were *more likely* to report assessment information, except for how they are using the results and the impact of results on institutional policies and practices.

⁶ Appendix B presents data about public reporting by institution control.

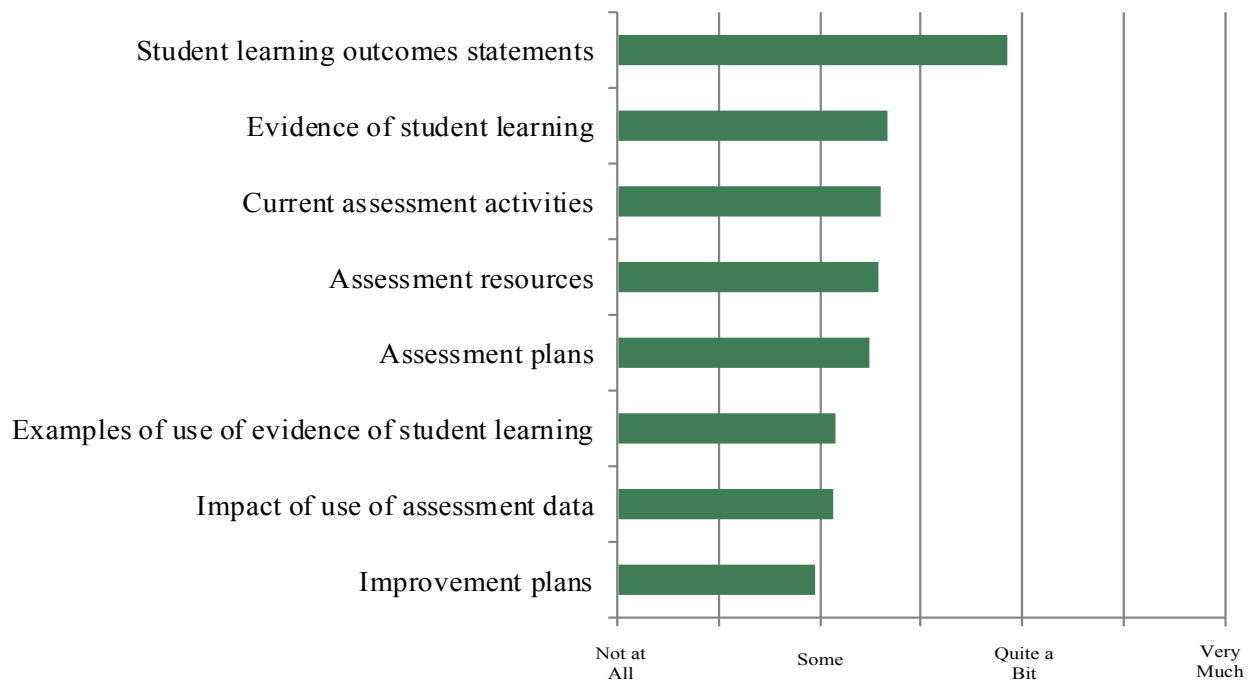


Figure 16. Extent to which institution makes types of assessment information publicly available.

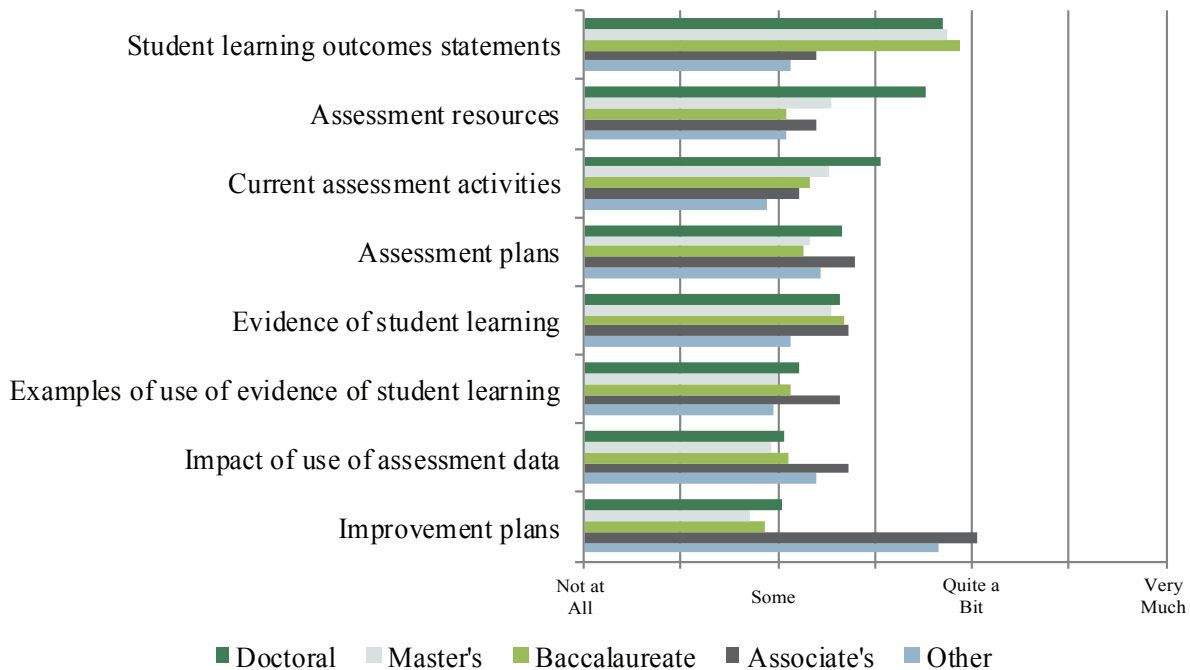


Figure 17. Extent to which institution makes types of assessment information publicly available, by institution type.

Only a few differences were found in terms of publicly sharing assessment information by institution type (Figure 17).

- Associate’s degree-granting institutions and other special mission institutions were more likely to report improvement plans and information on what was being done with assessment results.
- Doctoral institutions were more likely to report the resources devoted to assessment and current assessment activity.

While most institutions are communicating something about their assessment work, institutions should be encouraged to become much more transparent in this important area of institutional performance.

Organizational and Structural Support for Assessment

Provosts responding to the survey indicated overall that they perceive substantial organization and structural support on their campuses for assessment (Figure 18). Most provosts (71%) reported that student learning outcomes assessment had substantial (“very much” and “quite a bit”) support from their institution’s organization and governance structures.

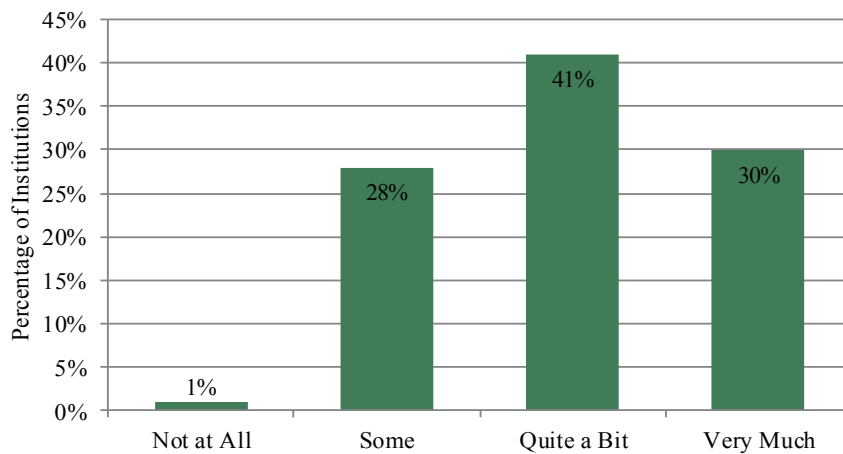


Figure 18. Extent of organizational and structural support for assessment.

While organizational and structural support for assessment was substantial across all institutions in general, it was strongest at for-profit institutions and associate’s institutions.

Overall, as Figure 19 indicates, the most important and prevalent assessment supports were

- institutional policy/statements about assessing undergraduate learning,
- faculty engagement and involvement in assessment,
- existence of an assessment committee, institutional research and/or assessment office capacity for assessment work, and
- availability of professional staff dedicated to assessment.

While most institutions are communicating something about their assessment work, institutions should be encouraged to become much more transparent in this important area of institutional performance.

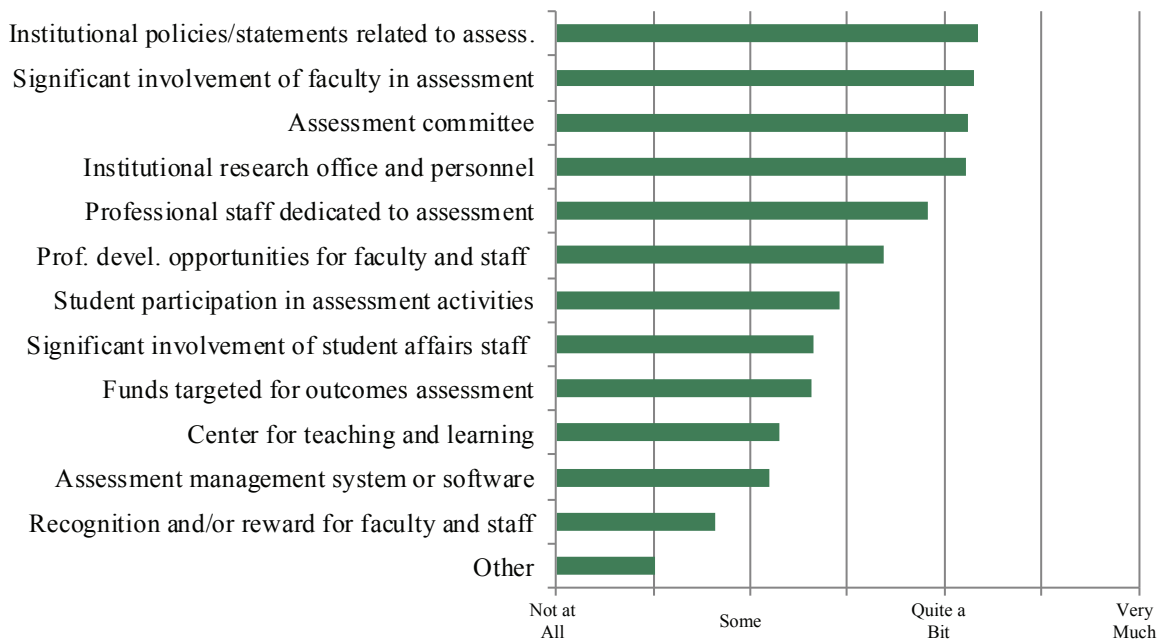


Figure 19. Extent to which institutional structures and conditions support assessment.

While assessment committees and institutional policies related to assessment were important across all institution types, some differences existed by institutional control and type. Results by institutional control include the following:⁷

- Public institutions indicated faculty and staff professional development as supportive elements.
- Private institutions indicated teaching and learning centers as less supportive of assessment.
- Public and for-profit institutions found assessment management systems and recognition or rewards for faculty and staff involvement in assessment more supportive of assessment.

Figure 20 displays patterns in the results regarding structures and conditions in support of assessment by institution type.

- Associate’s degree-granting institutions more than other institution types indicated professional development opportunities for faculty and staff and significant faculty involvement as supportive of assessment.
- Doctoral institutions were *more likely* to stress that teaching and learning centers, professional staff dedicated to assessment, and significant involvement of student affairs staff in assessment were supportive features of assessment work.

⁷ Appendix B contains data for supportive organizational elements by institutional control.

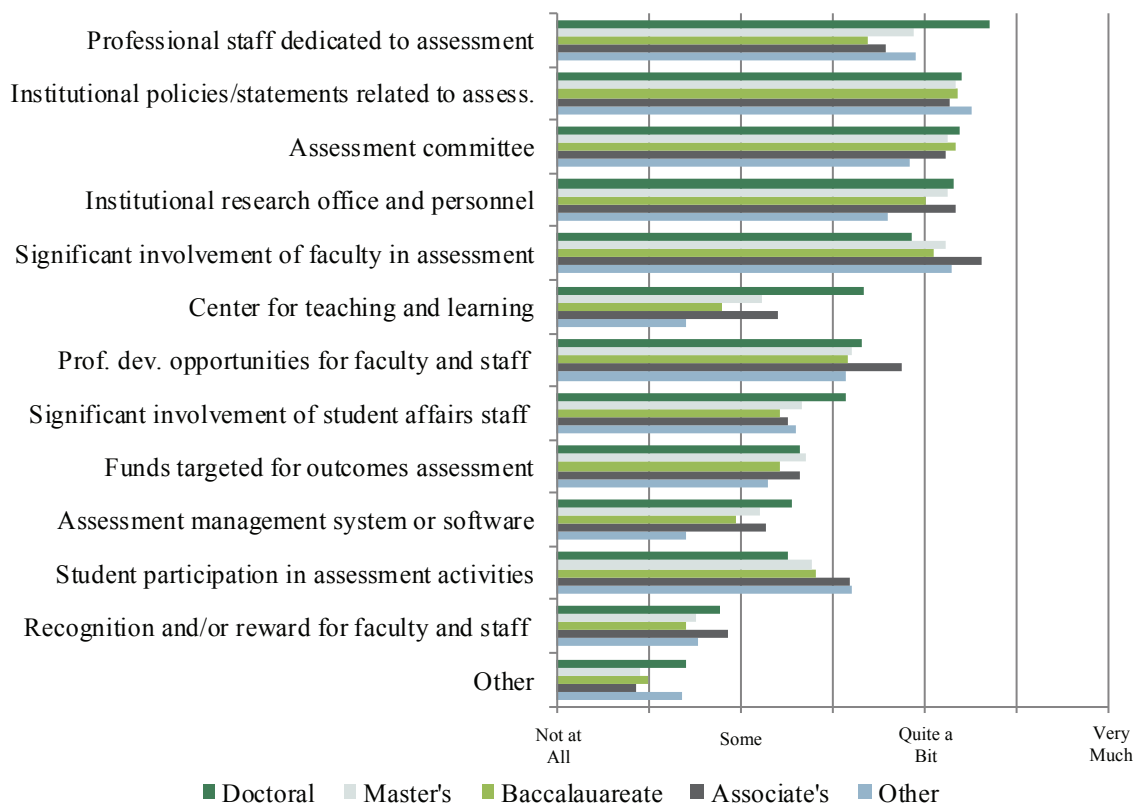


Figure 20. Extent to which institutional structures and conditions support assessment, by institution type.

Across institutions overall, student affairs staff involvement in assessment was not rated as high in terms of support for assessment activities. This could reflect a lack of integrated assessment activity on campus and may suggest a useful topic for greater partnership.

Minor differences existed across the accreditation regions with regard to the kinds of structures and conditions respondents considered supportive of assessment (Figure 21).

- WASC and SACS schools were *more likely* to indicate that institutional policies and statements about assessing undergraduate learning were supportive.
- HLC schools were *more likely* to report that assessment committees were supportive.
- SACS schools were *more likely* to note the importance of an institutional research office and that necessary personnel were supportive.
- WASC schools were *more likely* to say funds targeted for outcomes assessment were supportive.

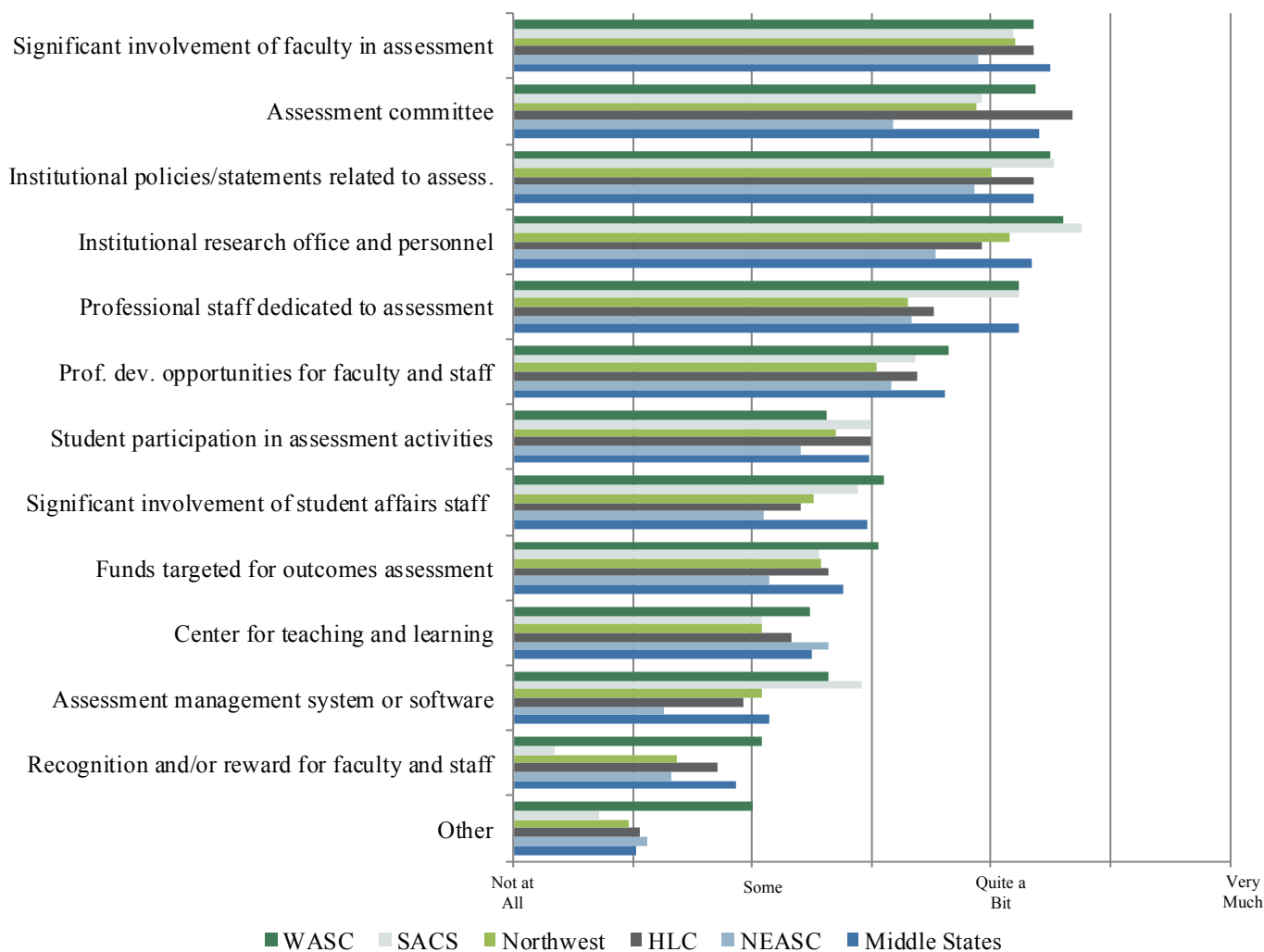


Figure 21. Extent to which institutional structures and conditions support assessment, by accreditation region.

- Middle States, SACS, and WASC schools were *more likely* than HLC, NEASC, and Northwest institutions to view professional assessment staff and significant involvement of student affairs staff as assessment supports.
- WASC schools were *more likely* than SACS schools to indicate recognition or rewards for faculty and staff involvement in assessment as supportive.

While organizational structures and institutional governance may be more or less congenial to assessing student learning, provosts identified specific ways assessment work could be advanced at their institution (Figure 22). Priorities have shifted in some ways from 2013; while faculty engagement remains key, less important than in 2009 are better assessment measures. In 2013, provosts said the following were most important

- more professional development for faculty (64%),
- more faculty using the results (63%), and
- additional financial or staff resources (56%).

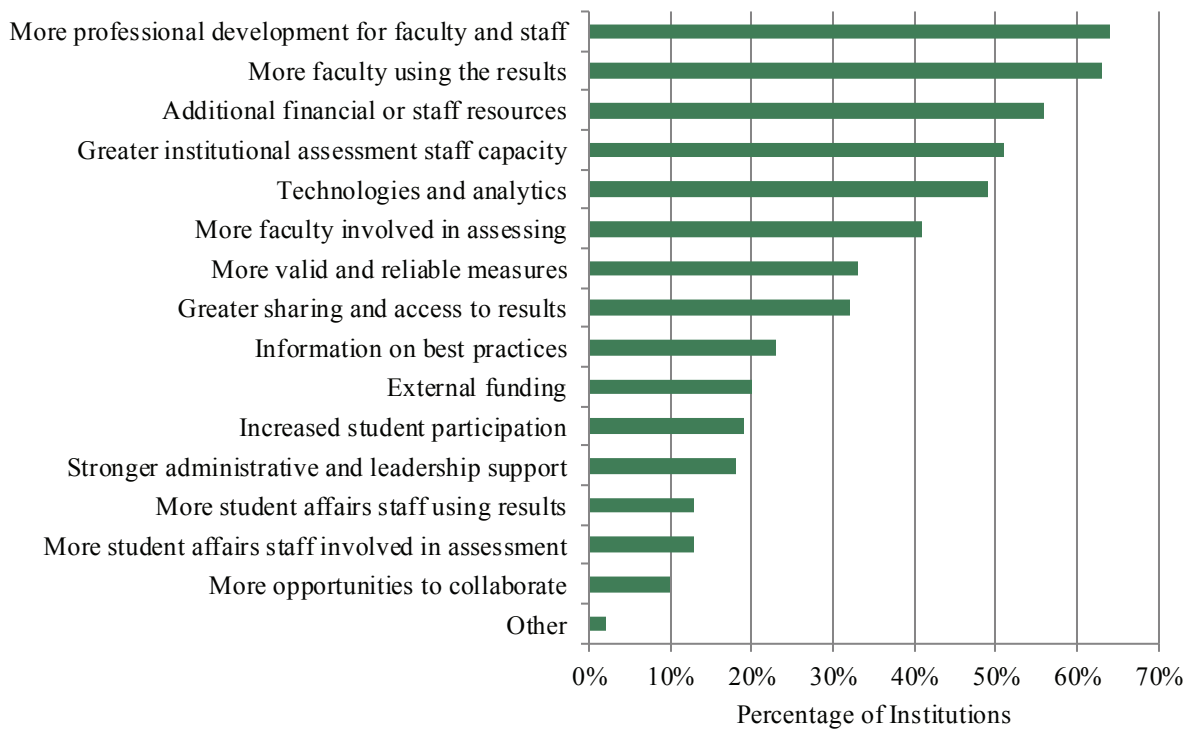


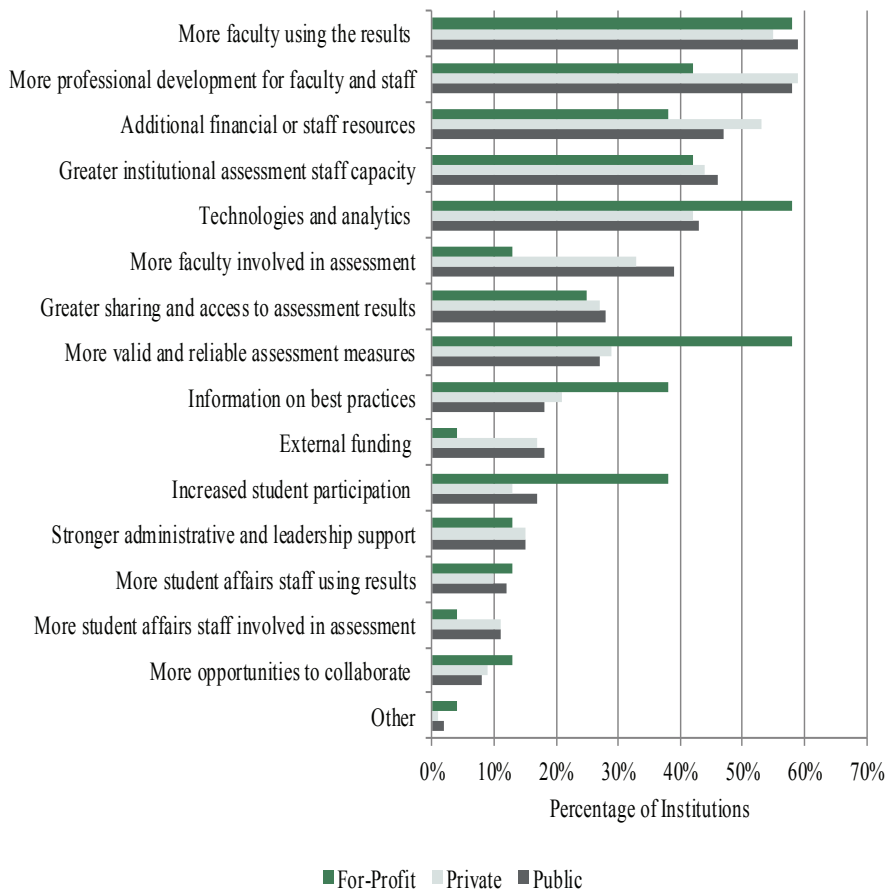
Figure 22. Percentage of institutions indicating priority needs for advancing assessment work.

Whether assessment tools have improved during the four years between the two survey administrations is not clear. What is clear, as reported earlier, is that authentic learning measures such as rubrics and other classroom-based assessments are being used more often to represent institution-level learning. It is also plain that provosts recognize that if student learning outcomes assessment is to contribute to institutional improvement, the results must be embraced and used by more faculty members—which has direct implications for faculty development, as the provosts’ priorities indicate.

Figure 23 displays results on perceived institutional needs for advancing assessment work by institutional control.

By a significant margin, for-profit institutions said they needed

- more valid and reliable measures of student learning,
- greater student participation in assessment,
- more information about best practices, and
- access to technologies that would aggregate assessment data.



Many faculty struggle with determining how to conduct a proper assessment and then how to use the results, and many of the disciplinary meetings are very broad and not specific in this regard.
(provost at a master's institution)

Figure 23. Percentage of institutions indicating priority needs for advancing assessment work, by institutional control.

Respondents from public institutions reported needing

- more faculty involved in assessment,
- increased use of the results, and
- more professional development for faculty and staff.

Private institutions, many of which are relatively small and have few if any professional staff dedicated to student learning outcomes assessment, reported their greatest need was for additional financial and staff resources.

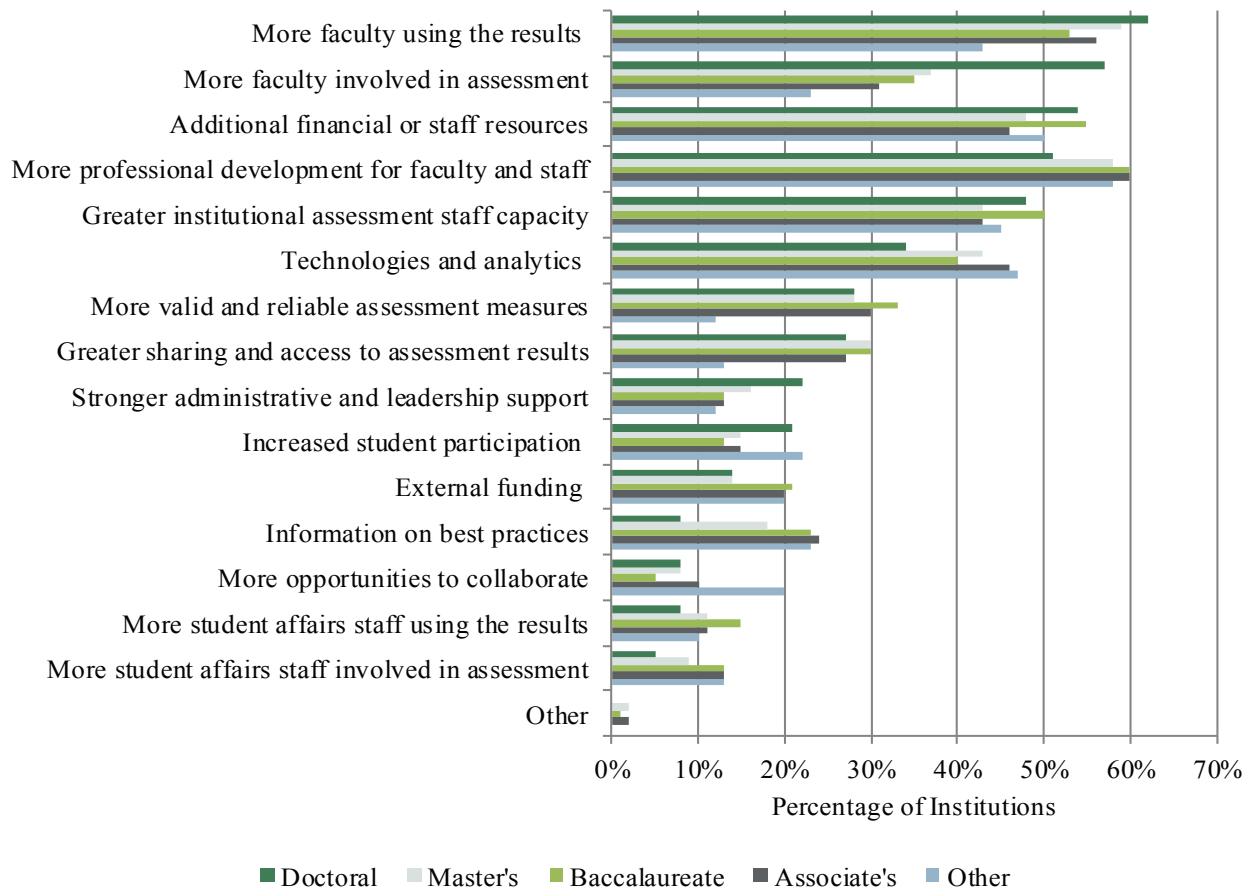


Figure 24. Percentage of institutions indicating priority needs for advancing assessment work, by institution type.

Figure 24 displays results on perceived needs for advancing assessment work by institution type. The biggest challenges to advancing assessment work reported by doctoral institutions were

- the need for more faculty use of the results of assessment,
- more faculty involved in assessment, and
- stronger administrative and leadership support.

Baccalaureate institutions said they needed

- more student affairs staff using the results of assessment,
- more valid and reliable assessment measures, and
- greater institutional assessment staff capacity.

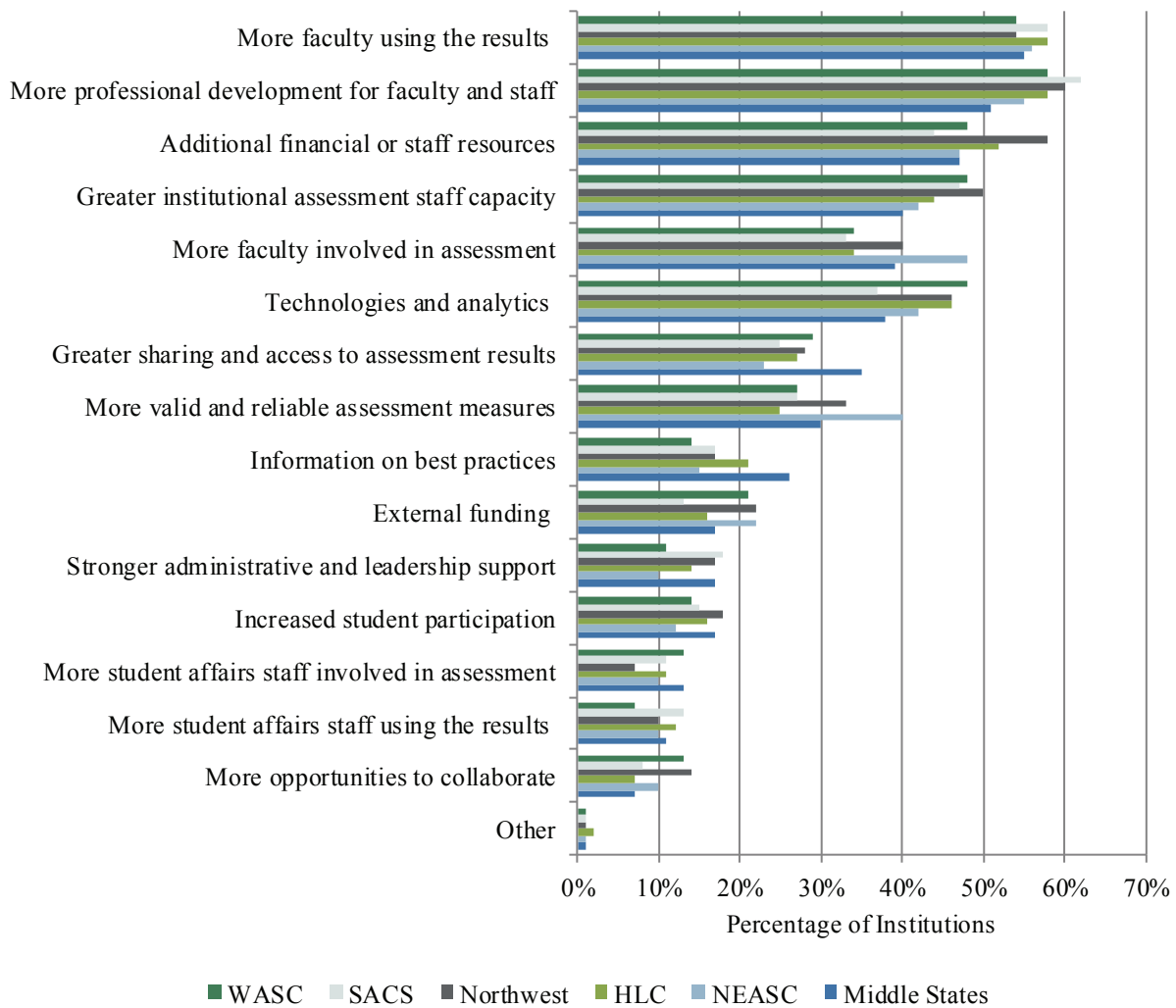


Figure 25. Percentage of institutions indicating priority needs for advancing assessment work, by accreditation region.

There were only a few differences regarding needs among accreditation regions (Figure 25).

- NEASC member institutions tended to stress the need for more valid and reliable assessment measures of student learning and the need for more faculty involved in assessment.
- Institutions in the Northwest stressed the need for greater institutional assessment staff capacity and additional financial or staff resources.
- SACS institutions emphasized the need for more professional development for faculty, stronger administrative and leadership support, and more student affairs involvement in assessments.

Institutional Selectivity

In general, institutional selectivity is negatively related to assessment activity. For almost every category of assessment activity, the more selective an institution's admissions standards, the less likely it is to employ various assessment approaches or use the results. For example, more selective institutions are less likely to

- have student learning outcomes statements that apply to all students,
- use assessment for external accountability reporting requirements,
- use assessment results for strategic planning,
- change curricular requirements or courses as a result of assessment, and
- consider regional or program accreditation as an important reason for doing assessment.

Why selectivity should be associated with less assessment activity is not clear, although a recent survey of research universities conducted by the Association of American Universities (AAU) suggested increased attention to assessment issues by these institutions.⁸

In Their Own Words: What Provosts Say About the State of Assessment on Their Campus

The NILOA survey invited provosts to write comments about the student learning outcomes assessment work on their campuses. A surprising number (1,003, to be exact) took the additional time to respond to these open-ended questions:

1. What are you *most hopeful* about in terms of assessing student learning at your institution?
2. What are you *worried* about in terms of assessing student learning at your institution?
3. What is the *most positive outcome* of your institution-level student learning assessment activities?
4. With what *issues or topics* regarding assessing student learning does your campus need assistance?

Subsequent reports from NILOA will summarize in more detail what provosts said about these topics. Provided here are selected highlights representing the handful of themes that emerged from an analysis of what they shared.

What provosts were most hopeful for and most worried about in terms of assessment at their institutions varied widely. Themes emerged from response analysis reflecting concerns that have been discussed in the assessment literature for decades:

- external mandates that stretch already limited resources and dominate institutional conversations (reinforcing a compliance as contrasted with an improvement agenda),
- undersourced assessment work and overloaded staff,
- the questionable adequacy of assessment tools to measure outcomes the institution deems important,

With so many competing demands on faculty time, assessment needs to be sustainable and manageable. For that to happen it needs to be useful.

(provost at a doctoral institution)

⁸ See Appendix B for tables of institution responses by institutional selectivity.

- the worry among some faculty that assessment results will be used in performance reviews, and
- insufficient use of assessment data to guide curricular reform and to enhance teaching and learning.

At the same time, *the majority of provosts were optimistic about potentially promising but in many instances unrealized goals.* Many respondents remained hopeful that their campus would find ways to use the results of student learning outcomes assessments both to meet the needs of accreditors and to guide campus strategic planning, resource allocation, curricular revision, and various initiatives to improve teaching and learning. Some respondents expressed optimism about new sources of funding, the creation of a new assessment committee, or increased staffing. Others wrote about concrete institutional accomplishments, such as embedding assessment practices into regular program review, joining the functions of an assessment office and center for teaching and learning to enhance assessment efforts, winning national awards for assessment work, increasing faculty ownership and buy-in, and gaining recognition from regional accreditors on the growth and sustainability of institution assessment efforts. But some of these same provosts expressed *worries* about sustaining the assessment work currently underway over the long term, in part because of anticipated faculty and administrative turnover—often a harbinger of shifting priorities.

Dozens of chief academic officers expressed confidence that *their institutions have turned a corner and are embracing assessment in new, positive ways.* They identified campus and program-level leadership and growing faculty engagement, hinting at a cultural shift at least acknowledging if not embracing the value of student learning outcomes assessment. Most signaled in one way or another that—for student learning outcomes assessment to take root and to help enhance teaching, learning, and institutional effectiveness—such a cultural shift was essential to mobilize a critical mass of faculty and staff from various campus units to establish the structures and processes to implement, support, and sustain the assessment program institution wide.

As suggested in this overview of comment highlights, provosts’ views about the state of assessment were decidedly mixed. Some of this variance, we suspect, is due to how long and the extent to which the institution had a systematic student learning outcomes assessment program in place. On some campuses, for example, achieving faculty and staff initial buy-in for the assessment agenda remains a primary concern.

Provosts’ comments do coalesce, however, around what is needed to advance the gathering and productive use of assessment results. Regarding these needs, the following priorities for campus action were those mentioned, many of which echo and amplify the survey results reported earlier:

- **Using assessment results more effectively.** Institutions need advice about how to gather actionable data and internally communicate the results and their implications so that the evidence can guide improvement and strategic planning.
- **Learning about established promising practices.** Institutions need examples of good assessment work at the program-level, such as examples of discipline-specific and general education outcomes assessment, as well as how to “roll-up” program-level assessment results to the institution-level to represent student learning.

Initiative overload is a very real problem. Shrinking state funding compounds this by reducing staff and increasing administrative requirements at the same time.

(provost at a public institution)

- **Finding resources for additional staff and technology.** Institutions need enough support staff and appropriate technology to see the return on investment of assessment in order to justify the time and resources needed to support assessment efforts.
- **Developing better outcomes assessment tools responsive to campus priorities and stated learning outcomes.** Institutions need assistance in designing and using rubrics (specifically norming practices) and other authentic measures of learning, and in representing this kind of evidence in scorecards and benchmarking exercises.
- **Involving more faculty.** Because faculty involvement remains critical, institutions need to find ways to recognize and reward faculty who do this work so as to increase buy-in and encourage more instructors and staff to take part in professional development activities and assessment efforts.
- **Integrating assessment work with the core teaching and learning functions.** Institutions need examples of how assessment of authentic student learning can be built into the everyday work of the faculty and student affairs staff as well as into program reviews and governance.
- **Communicating the merit and worth of assessment.** Institutions need to find and employ effective ways to articulate the value of student learning outcomes assessment in how the institution is using assessment activities and results to improve learning, teaching, and strategic planning, and in how decisions informed by assessment data result in improved student learning and more effective faculty teaching.

Implications

Compared with what institutions were doing in 2009, more institutions today are using multiple measures and a wider variety of tools to assess student learning outcomes. Four years ago, the typical college or university used an average of three different assessment approaches at the undergraduate level. Five was the average number in 2013. That schools are using more measures is not surprising. More institutions have established student learning outcomes at the institution-level and more programs have aligned their learning outcomes with those of the institution, all of which could prompt the use of more measures. Also, colleges and universities increasingly realize that by using multiple measures they can better capture the range and depth of undergraduate student learning and personal development (Astin, 2013). In addition, the increase also responds to concerns raised by accreditors regarding the need for direct and indirect measures. What is surprising is the increase in the *types of measures* institutions use at the institution-level. Rubrics, classroom-based assessments, and portfolios, for example, have all jumped substantially in use since 2009, and provosts generally agreed that these kinds of measures have the most institutional value.

The sharp increase in using rubrics almost certainly is partly a function of the large number of institutions adapting or adopting the AAC&U VALUE rubrics for local use (<http://www.aacu.org/value/casestudies/index.cfm>) and initiatives that promote rubric use and other classroom-based authentic learning assessment tools. For example, a recent SHEEO led nine-state collaborative to measure student learning strives to evaluate student work in a way that faculty, institutions, and states can use to assess student learning. This collaboration seeks to utilize faculty-developed rubrics that will be aggregated across similar institutions for potential benchmarking—thus, providing both institutional examples of rolling up of assessment results and cross-state examples (<http://www.sheeo.org/news/press-releases/sheeo-leads-nine-state-collaborative-measure-college-student-learning>).

Once faculty see the value of this work, they can understand how to modify the work they are already doing... Faculty perception needs to shift to include assessment as part of their responsibility, as opposed to an external imposition or add-on. The only way to do that is for assessment to provide information that leads to change within the curriculum.

(provost at a public institution)

Another classroom-level assessment development is the availability of enhanced technology that makes it possible to aggregate classroom-based assessment and rubric results to create an institution-level outcome (Ariovich & Richman, 2013). However, provosts did not rate data management systems or software as supportive of assessment work to the same degree as many other institutional features or conditions. Whether this is a function of the actual utility of these technologies or lack of sufficient familiarity with them to understand their value is not known.

The results point to five areas that require immediate attention by institutional leaders, faculty and staff members, and assessment professionals.

First and foremost, attention needs to be directed to involving more faculty in meaningful ways in collecting student learning outcomes data and using the results.

Recall that provosts' top two priorities for advancing assessment work on their campus were more professional development for faculty members and more faculty using the results. Indeed, if there is one matter on which almost everyone agrees—administrators, rank-and-file faculty members, and assessment scholars—it is that faculty involvement is essential both to improve teaching and learning and to enhance institutional effectiveness. While faculty routinely “assess” their students' learning through papers, tests, and other tasks, the nature of student work is not always closely aligned with stated course, program, or institutional outcomes. Teaching and learning centers can make an important contribution to the assessment agenda by offering workshops and consultations that help faculty design classroom-based assignments that both address the faculty member's interest in determining whether his or her students are learning what is intended as well as provide evidence about student learning that can be used to represent institutional effectiveness.

Another promising faculty development approach is to situate assessment as a curricular review function, either in the context of the disciplines or the general education program. A template such as the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) (Lumina Foundation, 2011) can be used to guide a curricular mapping process for either the general education program or individual major fields to determine which learning outcomes are being addressed sufficiently in terms of breadth and depth and which need more attention. The key to using such an exercise to full advantage is to emphasize the essential role of assignments in inducing students to demonstrate what they know and can do and to use this information to document whether students are, indeed, achieving the proficiency levels stipulated by the institution and their major field (Ewell, 2013). Doing so returns the responsibility for determining whether students are learning what the institution promises to the faculty—where it belongs.

Second, sustaining the recent progress in institutional assessment work must be a priority.

In their responses to the open-ended questions, provosts expressed a concern about leadership turnover and the shift in institutional priorities that often occurs when new administrators take office. To offset this effect, finding ways to embed assessment within the core work of faculty and staff is increasingly crucial. Such observations point to the need for institutional cultural change toward embracing and seeing assessment as a valued and valuable activity supported and, to an extent, guided by institutional leaders but also owned by every unit and department.

Finding ways to embed assessment within the core work of faculty and staff is increasingly crucial.

At the same time, one size does not fit all. What an institution needs to advance assessment work will surely vary in some ways that differ from the aggregated prioritized needs reported by provosts, depending on the campus context and the stage at which an institution is in implementing its assessment program.

Third—and most important to institutional improvement—is making assessment useful and productive.

Most institutions still need to find ways to use student learning outcomes results more effectively to improve teaching and learning. Although using assessment evidence appears to be increasing, it is not nearly as pervasive as it must be to guide institutional actions that will improve student outcomes. This is by far the most disappointing finding from the 2013 survey.

To enhance student accomplishment, an institutional assessment program must purposefully focus on questions and issues that are central to attaining the institution's educational mission and that will produce actionable evidence. Key to such an effort is integrating assessment work into the institution's governance and organizational structures. For example, assessment activities and results should be used to inform faculty and staff development programs sponsored by teaching and learning centers. It is also important that assessment work at every level—classroom, program, and institution—be recognized and rewarded, two institutional features that were not viewed by the majority of provosts as particularly supportive of student learning outcomes assessment.

Another area that needs attention on many campuses is the capture of evidence of student learning that occurs outside of the classroom, laboratory, and studio. Student affairs professionals, librarians, and others who have ongoing contact with students can add important perspectives to an assessment program, especially for interpreting and using the results and generating ideas for policies and practices that could enhance student performance. Equally important, the professional organizations of both student affairs and library professionals are very interested in their members collaborating with their faculty colleagues on this important work. In addition, students themselves should be regularly asked to help interpret assessment results and offer ideas to improve their learning.

Fourth, governing boards must make student learning a continuing high priority.

On some campuses, governing board members have been coached to shy away from questions of academic quality because the issues are too complex and beyond the board's expertise. Moreover, assessing student learning is what faculty members do, not the board. Granted, gathering and using evidence of student learning is a complex undertaking and faculty and academic leaders are rightfully the daily arbiters of academic quality. Too often, however, the results of assessments of student learning outcomes do not lead to action (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009). The board should expect that instances and examples of productive use of assessment be presented in an understandable, coherent way sufficient to enable the board to be confident that the internal academic quality controls of the institution are operating effectively. In addition, governing boards can encourage and support the president and other institutional leaders to make sure these issues are given proper priority on an already crowded institutional agenda (Klein-Collins, Ikenberry, & Kuh, 2014).

Finally, colleges and universities must cultivate an institutional culture that values gathering and using student learning outcomes data as integral to fostering student success and increasing institutional effectiveness—as contrasted with a compliance exercise.

It is also important that assessment work at every level—classroom, program, and institution—be recognized and rewarded.

The goal is to get everyone—faculty, administrators, and staff—to see that assessing outcomes and using evidence for ongoing improvement is not just or primarily an obligatory response to demands from outside the institution. Rather, assessment must be viewed and undertaken as a continuous improvement process yielding actionable information for faculty and staff as well as for institutional leaders. A key element of this culture-bending work is explaining and communicating better to specific audiences the assessment work underway and the value of this work. Provosts noted the value of sharing stories of effective use of assessment results internally that help showcase faculty involvement and generate as well as sustain interest in assessment. One provost at an associate’s degree-granting institution told us,

The value of assessment lies not in the program or an individual course that is assessed, but in understanding that the real benefit of outcomes mastery is adequate preparation for success at the next level. This means changing how we work—how classes are scheduled, how we advise, how we develop programs and revise courses—everything is different for us with learning in mind. That’s the value [of the assessment] conversation we need to share internally and externally.

Some institutions appear to be well along in bending their cultures toward these ends, but much is yet to be done.

Last Word

At most U.S. colleges and universities, more assessment activity is underway now than ever before. Institutions are applying a broader range of instruments and approaches to document student progress, and the use of this evidence appears to be increasing—albeit at a snail’s pace. The numbers and capacity of assessment professionals have grown dramatically. Some campuses are more advanced in this work than others, which is to be expected given the scale, complexity, and diversity of the enterprise. Much of what has been accomplished is relatively recent, and much of it has been in response to pressure from external entities.

At the same time, the responses from chief academic officers to the NILOA 2013 survey indicate that the push to understand what students know and can do is no longer driven exclusively—or even primarily—by external forces especially if accreditation is viewed as a hybrid of self-imposed and external oversight. Indeed, colleges and universities themselves have every reason to take ownership of assessment of student learning and to use that evidence wisely and productively. While accreditation remains the prime driver of assessment activity, joining it today are a campus’s own drivers to improve teaching and learning, to assess effectiveness of current practice, and to heed presidential and governing board interests. This leads us to conclude that U.S. higher education has turned a corner in the assessment of student learning. *Carrying out this important work is no longer primarily an act of compliance but—more appropriately and promisingly—is driven by a balance of compliance and institutional desire to improve.*

The developments represented in the NILOA survey results suggest that American higher education may be on the verge of an inflection point where what follows is a more purposeful use of evidence of student learning outcomes in decision making—which, in turn, has the potential to enhance academic quality and institutional effectiveness. To realize this promise sooner rather than later, colleges and universities must complete the transition from a culture of compliance to a culture of evidence-based decision-making in which key decisions and policies are informed and evaluated by the ultimate yardstick: a measurable positive impact on student learning and success.

Colleges and universities must evolve from a culture of compliance to a culture of evidence-based decision-making.

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This document is a full version of the NILOA 2013 national survey of provosts. The abridged version of this report is available here: <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/knowingwhatstudentsknowandcando.html>

Appendix A

Data Collection and Analysis

The 2013 NILOA national survey of chief academic officers was conducted by the Center for Survey Research at Indiana University between April and September, 2013. The sample included provosts or chief academic officers at the 2,781 regionally accredited, undergraduate degree-granting institutions listed in the *Higher Education Directory*, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc. A total of 1,202 institutions completed the survey for a response rate of 43%.

The survey was administered primarily online, with the initial invitation followed by three email reminders; a paper copy of the questionnaire was mailed to those who had not completed the survey after the third email reminder. Web-based completions were the most common by far, with 87% of respondents using this mode. Membership organizations such as the American Council on Education (ACE), the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), along with other affinity groups, helped to publicize the survey.

Many of the questions were used previously in the NILOA 2009 questionnaire. Other questions were revised or added, informed by changing practices in the field and input from NILOA's National Advisory Panel, a select group of assessment experts, and a small group of chief academic officers convened during the January 2013 Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) meeting. The final 2013 version included additional questions on awareness of and use of the Degree Qualifications Profile, organizational and governance structures that support gathering and using assessment information, and internal and external communication of assessment results to various audiences.⁹

The characteristics of participating colleges and universities in terms of institutional control (public, private, and for-profit), institution type (doctoral, master's, baccalaureate, associate's, and other), and accreditation region were generally similar to the national profile except for overrepresentation of master's institutions and underrepresentation of baccalaureate institutions. We speculate that the overrepresentation of master's institutions may be due in part to their participation in various initiatives sponsored or encouraged by state systems, state policy mandates, and organizational membership initiatives such as the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).

Table A1
Institution Type: 2013 Participating Institutions Compared with National Profile

Type	2013	Current National (C.N.)
Doctoral	11%	10%
Master's	40%	23%
Baccalaureate	13%	23%
Associate's	31%	38%
Other	5%	6%

Table A2
Institutional Control: 2013 Participating Institutions Compared with National Profile

Control	2013	C. N.
Public	55%	56%
Private	43%	40%
For-Profit	2%	4%

⁹ A copy of the 2013 survey may be viewed here: <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/knownwhatstudentsknowandcando.html>

Appendix A cont.

Table A3

Accreditation Region: 2013 Participating Institutions Compared with National Profile

Accreditation Region	2013	C. N.
Middle States	16%	17%
NEASC	8%	7%
HLC	38%	35%
Northwest	6%	5%
SACS	24%	27%
WASC	8%	9%

As with the 2009 survey, we asked respondents to identify their position within the institution if they were not the provost who was originally invited to complete it. Table A4 shows that among about three quarters of the responding institutions the provost or someone in the provost's office completed the questionnaire. Also, 61 respondents identified themselves as interim to their position, and an additional 30 identified that this was their first year in office.

Table A4

Survey 2013 Respondents by Position

Position	%	N
Provost/CAO (including 136 assistant/associate provost)	74%	N = 883
Director of assessment (or person responsible for assessment)	18%	N = 223
Dean (or assistant/associate dean)	8%	N = 96

Merged with the survey results from several sources were additional data, such as Carnegie classification, accreditation region, control, mission, size, IPEDS student demographics, and *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges* selectivity indicators. An initial review was conducted of frequency distributions, and where appropriate, means for all items for all participants. Frequency tables were also produced for Carnegie, accreditation, and institutional control and type. Questionnaire items 1, 2, 3, 5, 13, 14, 15, and 16 were analyzed using the cross tabs procedure in SPSS (21), which yielded chi-square tables that identified statistically significant differences. These results were further analyzed to determine whether selected responses differed across institutions with different characteristics: by *Carnegie classification, control, accreditation region, and selectivity*.

Items 6, 8, 10, 11, and 12 have interval scales and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to identify statistically significant differences between various groupings of institutions. A post-hoc test with a Bonferroni correction was applied to control for an inflated type-I error rate, since so many post-hoc tests were run. Statistically significant results were those at the .05 level or below.

Finally, responses to items 4 and 17-20 (the open-ended questions) were reviewed by two NILOA researchers. Broad codes were then developed in conversation about the general reading of the responses. Each reader, in relation to the assessment literature on needs and effective practices, developed a list of potential thematic groupings of the responses (including themes such as general education, faculty engagement, use of results, etc.) These themes were assigned codes, which were used in guiding a second reading and further coding, analysis, and iterative reclassification of responses—until a final set of themes and codes was generated for each open-ended response item.

Appendix B

Supplemental Data Tables

This appendix contains supplemental data tables for items mentioned but not graphically displayed in the body of the report.

Table B1

Alignment of department outcomes with institution learning outcomes by institution type.

	Doctoral	Master's	Baccalaureate	Associate's	Other
Yes, all and aligned	27%	39%	51%	48%	57%
Yes, some and aligned	16%	19%	22%	23%	13%
Yes, all/but may not align	48%	31%	18%	20%	22%
Yes, some/but may not align	8%	10%	10%	8%	6%
No	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%

Table B2

Institution-level assessments used to represent undergraduate student learning by institutional control.

	Public	Private	For-Profit
Incoming student placement exams (ACCUPLACER, COMPASS, locally developed exams)	76%	47%	70%
National student surveys (NSSE, CCSSE, UCUES, CIRP, etc.)	86%	86%	36%
Locally developed surveys	60%	63%	57%
General knowledge and skills measures (CLA, CAAP, ETS PP, etc.)	47%	46%	41%
Locally developed knowledge and skills measures	48%	48%	50%
Classroom-based performance assessments such as simulations, comprehensive exams, critiques, etc.	65%	66%	91%
Externally situated performance assessments such as internships or other community-based projects	39%	42%	46%
Portfolios (a purposeful collection of student work showcasing achievement of learning objectives)	37%	46%	48%
Capstone projects (including senior theses), courses, or experiences	47%	72%	78%
Rubrics (published or locally developed)	66%	72%	100%
Alumni surveys, focus groups, or interviews	58%	73%	83%
Employer surveys, focus groups, or interviews	50%	38%	78%
Other	7%	7%	9%

Written in responses for the “other” category included general education, faculty evaluations, certification or licensure exams, and major field tests.

Appendix B cont.

Table B3

Extent to which student learning assessment results are used for various purposes by institutional control.

	Public	Private	For-Profit
Regional accreditation	3.71	3.77	3.76
Program accreditation	3.61	3.62	3.74
External accountability reporting requirements	3.24	3.02	3.52
Program review	3.24	3.2	3.4
Curriculum modification	2.98	3.04	3.48
Learning goals revision	2.93	2.97	3.36
Institutional improvement	2.83	2.8	3.12
Strategic planning	2.71	2.6	3.2
Institutional benchmarking	2.57	2.47	3.04
Academic policy development or modification	2.54	2.65	3
Professional development for faculty and staff	2.41	2.2	2.75
Trustee/governing board deliberations	2.24	2.19	2.75
Resource allocation and budgeting	2.24	2.07	2.39
Other	1.69	1.8	1.5
Prospective student and family information	1.67	1.88	1.74
Alumni communication	1.47	1.55	1.68

Response options include: N/A (not shown), Not at all, Some, Quite a bit, Very much.

Written in responses for the “other” category included new program development or program-specific benchmarking.

Appendix B cont.

Table B4

Most effective means for sharing assessment results within the institution by accreditation region.

	Middle States	NEASC	HLC	Northwest	SACS	WASC
Assessment committee	67%	50%	65%	53%	47%	59%
Faculty meeting	63%	69%	66%	63%	66%	69%
Dean's council	38%	39%	34%	39%	51%	34%
Website	30%	17%	29%	32%	21%	21%
Email updates	17%	21%	20%	14%	25%	17%
Online data management	14%	4%	15%	19%	19%	17%
By request	13%	20%	16%	24%	21%	15%
Newsletter	11%	4%	10%	5%	4%	9%
Other	11%	9%	7%	7%	6%	10%

Written in responses for the “other” category included annual assessment reports, blogs, administrative retreat, and annual assessment day activities.

Table B5

Publicly available assessment information by institutional control.

	Public	Private	For-Profit
Student learning outcomes statements	3	2.83	2.88
Assessment resources	2.47	2.1	1.92
Assessment plans	2.42	2.02	2.04
Current assessment activities	2.42	2.17	1.92
Evidence of student learning	2.39	2.25	2.24
Examples of use of evidence of student learning	2.15	1.99	2.2
Impact of use of assessment data	2.14	1.95	2.24
Improvement plans	2.09	1.8	2

Response option range includes: Not at all, Some, Quite a bit, Very much.

Appendix B cont.

Table B6

Extent institutional organization and governance structure(s) support student learning outcomes assessment by accreditation region.

	Middle States	NEASC	HLC	Northwest	SACS	WASC
Organization governance structure and support	3.01	2.78	3.00	2.83	3.07	3.01

Response option range includes: Not at all, Some, Quite a bit, Very much.

Table B7

Extent institutional organization and governance structure(s) support student learning outcomes assessment by institutional control.

	Public	Private	For-Profit
Organization governance structure and support	3.03	2.93	3.48

Response option range includes: Not at all, Some, Quite a bit, Very much.

Table B8

Extent institutional structures, resources and features support assessment activities by institutional control.

	Public	Private	For-Profit
Institutional policies/statements related to assessing undergraduate learning	3.16	3.17	3.44
Assessment committee	3.14	3.11	3.32
Institutional research office and personnel	3.15	3.06	3.08
Professional staff dedicated to assessment	2.94	2.86	3.36
Professional development opportunities for faculty and staff on assessment	2.82	2.54	2.64
Center for teaching and learning	2.28	1.99	2.50
Significant involvement of faculty in assessment	3.16	3.11	3.52
Significant involvement of student affairs staff in assessment	2.33	2.32	2.24
Student participation in assessment activities	2.50	2.40	2.56
Funds targeted for outcomes assessment	2.36	2.26	2.36
Assessment management system or software	2.24	1.92	2.32
Recognition and/or reward for faculty and staff involvement in assessment activities	1.92	1.69	1.91
Other	1.54	1.46	1.38

Response option range includes: Not at all, Some, Quite a bit, Very much.

Written in responses for the “other” category included support of administration through programming and training, consultants, involvement of students in assessment efforts, faculty stipends, and accreditation workshops or training on assessment.

Appendix B cont.

Table B9

Uses of assessment results by institutional selectivity.

Use	Special or not identified	Less competitive and Non competitive	Competitive and competitive+	Very Competitive and Very Competitive+	Highly Competitive and Highly Competitive+	Most Competitive
Regional accreditation	3.68	3.71	3.83	3.79	3.77	3.68
Program accreditation	3.57	3.68	3.68	3.65	3.52	3.44
External accountability reporting requirements	3.22	3.17	3.24	2.94	2.96	2.93
Trustee/ governing board deliberations	2.29	2.25	2.21	2.13	2.14	2.17
Strategic planning	2.78	2.78	2.69	2.50	2.36	2.33
Institutional benchmarking	2.67	2.60	2.49	2.41	2.33	2.22
Academic policy development or modification	2.66	2.55	2.60	2.46	2.53	2.47
Learning goals revision	3.00	2.98	2.98	2.89	2.83	2.65
Program review	3.30	3.20	3.27	3.18	2.97	2.74
Curriculum modification	3.07	3.10	2.97	2.98	2.98	2.65
Institutional improvement	2.86	2.85	2.89	2.72	2.63	2.51
Resource allocation and budgeting	2.29	2.25	2.11	2.01	2.00	1.91
Professional development for faculty and staff	2.46	2.41	2.22	2.25	2.08	2.08
Alumni communication	1.44	1.53	1.51	1.57	1.56	1.68
Prospective student and family information	1.71	1.65	1.80	1.82	1.98	1.83
Other	1.65	1.33	1.33	2.00	3.00	4.00

Appendix B cont.

Table B10

Assessment approaches used by institutional selectivity.

	Special or not identified	Less competitive and non competitive	Competitive and competitive+	Very competitive and Very competitive +	Highly Competitive and highly competitive +	Most Competitive
Incoming student placement exams (ACCUPLACER, COMPASS, locally developed exams)	76%	73%	59%	50%	32%	18%
National student surveys (NSSE, CCSSE, UCUES, CIRP, etc.)	76%	84%	90%	97%	93%	76%
Locally developed surveys	65%	59%	57%	60%	60%	66%
General knowledge and skills measures (CLA, CAAP, ETS PP, etc.)	35%	51%	63%	50%	36%	30%
Locally developed knowledge and skills measures	54%	46%	45%	40%	41%	47%
Classroom-based performance assessments such as simulations, comprehensive exams, critiques, etc.	75%	61%	64%	59%	42%	60%
Externally situated performance assessments such as internships or other community-based projects	44%	40%	43%	32%	32%	27%
Portfolios (a purposeful collection of student work showcasing achievement of learning objectives)	44%	44%	40%	35%	38%	44%
Capstone projects (including senior theses), courses, or experiences	54%	55%	62%	62%	66%	67%
Rubrics (published or locally developed)	72%	70%	68%	63%	70%	63%
Alumni surveys, focus groups, or interviews	61%	67%	65%	66%	76%	70%
Employer surveys, focus groups, or interviews	54%	55%	42%	32%	28%	31%
Other	8%	11%	5%	2%	17%	6%

Appendix B cont.

Table B11

Extent to which changes were made using assessment results by level, by institutional selectivity.

	Special or not identified	Less competitive and Non competitive	Competitive and competitive+	Very Competitive and Very Competitive+	Highly Competitive and Highly Competitive+	Most Competitive
At the institution level	2.56	2.57	2.57	2.46	2.45	2.36
At the school/ college level	2.55	2.67	2.58	2.61	2.58	2.31
At the department/ program level	3.00	3.03	3.06	2.98	3.02	2.67
In specific curricular requirements or courses	3.02	3.11	3.10	2.98	3.03	2.58

Appendix B cont.

Table B12

Factors or forces prompting institutions to assess student learning by institutional selectivity.

	Special or not identified	Less competitive and Non competitive	Competitive and competitive+	Very Competitive and Very Competitive+	Highly Competitive and Highly Competitive+	Mostly Competitive
Faculty or staff interest in improving student learning	3.32	3.31	3.19	3.24	3.03	3.25
Institutional commitment to improve	3.59	3.57	3.54	3.56	3.51	3.44
President and/or governing board direction or mandate	3.15	3.02	2.89	2.74	2.75	2.73
Statewide governing or coordinating board mandate	2.88	2.57	2.45	2.11	2.16	1.42
State mandate	2.69	2.46	2.21	2.03	1.79	1.39
Regional accreditation	3.84	3.85	3.92	3.90	3.75	3.68
Program accreditation	3.66	3.77	3.72	3.72	3.46	3.09
Participation in a consortium or multi-institution collaboration	2.01	1.90	1.73	1.85	1.82	2.08
External funding (federal, state, or foundation grants)	2.56	2.42	2.22	2.14	2.39	2.44
National calls for accountability and/or transparency	2.67	2.68	2.61	2.58	2.50	2.24
Concerns about the effectiveness and value of postsecondary education	2.94	2.94	2.82	2.85	2.70	2.69
Institutional membership initiatives (e.g., VSA, U-CAN, Transparency by Design, AAUDE, VFA)	1.83	2.12	1.85	1.87	1.75	1.69
Other	1.28	1.04	1.15	1.23	1.43	1.00

Appendix B cont.

Table B13

Institutions that have learning outcomes statements that apply to all graduates by institutional selectivity.

	Special or not identified	Less competitive and non competitive	Competitive and competitive+	Very competitive and Very competitive +	Highly Competitive and highly competitive +	Most Competitive
Percent with learning outcome statements	85%	85%	84%	83%	87%	67%

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Jillian Kinzie

*Senior Scholar, NILOA; Associate Director,
Indiana University*

NILOA Mission

NILOA's primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

Comments and questions about this paper should be sent to njankow2@illinois.edu.

About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/>.
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.
- One of the co-principal NILOA investigators, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001.

NILOA Staff

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

Stanley Ikenberry, *Co-Principal Investigator*

George Kuh, *Co-Principal Investigator and Director*

Peter Ewell, *Senior Scholar*

Jillian Kinzie, *Senior Scholar*

Pat Hutchings, *Senior Scholar*

Timothy Reese Cain, *Senior Scholar*

Paul Lingenfelter, *Senior Scholar*

Natasha Jankowski, *Assistant Director and Research Analyst*

Robert Dumas, *Research Analyst*

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National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

For more information, please contact:

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
340 Education Building
Champaign, IL 61820

learningoutcomesassessment.org
njankow2@illinois.edu
Phone: 217.244.2155
Fax: 217.244.5632