

ENGAGING AND MEANINGFUL
PROGRAM ASSESSMENT FOR
STUDENT LEARNING IN
COMMUNITY COLLEGES



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Executive Summary

Here are five premises about student and program assessment in community colleges that strengthen the likelihood that assessment will enrich teaching and learning rather than be a burdensome requirement. Each premise focuses on one facet of assessment: its purpose, the rationale, assumptions about the role of assessment in renewing teaching and learning, how to use assessment to address meaningful questions, and the context for valuable program assessment.

- Premise 1—Purposes for Assessment: *Assessment maintains the integrity of the student-teacher relationship when it focuses on the continued renewal of teaching and learning practices and treats accountability as a by-product rather than vice versa.*
- Premise 2—Fundamental Reasons for Educational Change: *The driving forces for program assessment are the increasing diversity among students, the explosion of knowledge, and the need for management strategies that handle great complexity.*
- Premise 3—Philosophical Positions Shaping Assessment for Renewal of Teaching and Learning: *Assessment best supports desired student learning outcomes when all education stakeholders are internally motivated and use assessment as a means to appreciate—increase and value—their learning.*
- Premise 4—Positioning Assessment Within a Research and Evaluative Inquiry Framework: *Student and program assessment are most useful when research and inquiry frameworks guide the selection of what to assess, how to interpret assessment evidence within a context, and how to move toward what is valued.*
- Premise 5—Rethinking Assessment through Communities of Learning and Integrated Practice: *Communities of Learning and Integrated Practice (CLIPs) create a safe, trusting environment for programmatic assessment and evaluative inquiry. This environment supports holistic, evidence-based self-reflection that results in valuable teaching and learning.*

For the sake of organization, the five premises are presented separately in this paper. Each, however, is intricately related to the others. The premises collectively provide an orientation to

assessment that is expected to result in sustained and productive use of assessment within the college. The premises ask the reader to consider core beliefs around the role of assessment—whether it be for the purpose of accountability or for renewal of instructional programs.¹ The premises place traditional approaches to program and student assessment in a historical content, and also look at alternative ways of thinking about student learning assessment within a broader research and inquiry framework. These emerging approaches maintain a focus on the renewal of teaching and learning in the service of student learning—where assessment is value-driven, participatory, and uses a holistic approach to understand the influences on student learning outcomes.

Finally, this paper includes “action” steps for readers who collectively wish to use Communities of Learning and Integrated Practice (CLIPs) as a structure to articulate and operationalize their own premises to guide their assessment-related activities.

Although this paper is written based on community college experiences, it has application to higher education in general.

¹ Student outcomes assessment as an instructional tool in the classroom is not addressed in this paper.