



Toolkit



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Campus Assessment Network to Discuss Troubling Findings

The last Campus Assessment Network (CAN) meeting for the academic year will take place on April 5 from 3:00-4:30 p.m. in Adams B13. This meeting will be a joint book discussion between the members of the Network and the newly formed Student Advisory Committee on Learning Outcomes (SACLO).

“Academically Adrift:

Limited Learning on College Campuses,” by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, analyzes data from the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). Their findings show that, during their college careers, very few undergraduate students demonstrate improvements in learning in three core areas: critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and written communication.

Op-ed columnist Bob Herbert recently wrote that “Students are hitting the books less and partying more. Easier courses and easier majors have

become more and more popular. Perhaps more now than ever, the point of the college experience is to have a good time and walk away with a valuable credential after putting in the least effort possible.

“What many of those students are not walking away with is something that has long been recognized as invaluable — higher order thinking and reasoning skills. They can get their degrees without putting in more of an effort because in far too many instances the colleges and universities are not demanding more of them” (“[College the Easy Way](#),” *The New York Times*, 3/4/2011).

The book is a quick read and is available on [Amazon.com](#) for around \$16 plus shipping. If you can, please join us for our discussion. We are looking forward to a lively exchange between faculty, staff, and students about this important issue.



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A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting April 8 - 12, 2011 Hyatt Regency Chicago

Sylvia Manning, president of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), is urging the membership to attend this year's meeting. In a [letter](#) posted on the HLC website, she writes:

“This year we will offer for discussion two Commission projects of major import: the development of the Open Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, first introduced in April 2009 but still very much in formation, and the upcoming revision of the Criteria for Accreditation, which is just getting started.

“In the coming year there will be many opportunities for comment, especially on the Criteria revision, but at the Annual Conference you can participate in the conversation directly, learn more, and offer us your advice. It's important to us and to everything accreditation stands for that when we re-think our criteria or our process, you, the membership, be actively involved. Please consider engaging with us on these projects when we gather in Chicago April 8 - 12.”

Participants may [register](#) online, by fax, or by mail.

Annual Assessment Updates May Now be Completed Online

After two years of pilot testing, the [Office of Assessment Services](#) (OAS) is pleased to announce that Annual Assessment Updates may now be submitted online through Blackboard.

Hopefully, this new initiative will expand the accessibility and transparency of OAS. For more information on the new online submission procedure, please visit the OAS [website](#) and click [Annual Update Online Submission Training](#) for step-by-step directions, as in the sample shown at right.

Those needing additional information may send an email to assess@niu.edu or telephone 753-8659.

Action Name	Action Status	Action Deadline	Workflow Name	Workflow Progress
* Submit Annual Assessment Update	In Progress	5/2/11 4:30 PM	2010-2011 Annual Assessment Update Submission	In Progress: Milestone 1 of 3 Update

Items Per Page: 25 [Go](#)

⌚ Indicates deadline is overdue
★ Indicates a required action

Click on the **Update** button

DID YOU KNOW?**Class of 2009 Alumni Give NIU Favorable Reviews**

Results are in for the Baccalaureate Alumni Survey for the class of 2009.

Respondents felt positive about their education at NIU:

- 98 percent found that, in their major, professors were accessible outside of class
- 98 percent felt that their major professors' expectations for the quality of student work were high
- 95 percent thought the amount of time it took to complete their degree was reasonable
- 92 percent expressed a positive attitude toward their degree major

Alumni were also pleased with how NIU prepared them for life after graduation:

- 94 percent described their overall university experiences and courses as helpful in developing their ability to think critically: to withhold judgment, raise questions, and examine contrary views
- 96 percent indicated that their overall university facilities and equipment were adequate to support the degree program
- 89 percent said that their degree prepared them for their present job

Overall, survey respondents had good things to say about the university:

- 93 percent stated they would recommend NIU to their friends and family and...
- 95 percent indicated a positive attitude toward NIU.

Those who earned graduate degrees in 2009 also had good things to say about their alma mater. One year after the group's graduation:

- 94 percent reported that faculty at NIU were thorough in their treatment of course material
- 95 percent felt as though faculty were academically supportive and helpful to them
- 96 percent reported that they completed their degree in a reasonable amount of time

- 93 percent indicated that their degree program was a worthwhile investment of their time

Alumni were also pleased with how NIU prepared them for life after graduation:

- 87 percent of respondents indicated that they were currently employed, of which:
 - 95 percent reported being satisfied with their current job
 - 95 percent felt as though their graduate degree prepared them for their job

Overall, survey respondents had good things to say about the university:

- 94 percent indicated that the quality of their interactions with faculty at NIU was good
- 96 percent reported a positive attitude toward NIU and...
- 93 percent said that they would recommend NIU to their friends and family.



ASSESSMENT FAQ

How to Design and Assess Group Work

In **Tools for Teaching**, Barbara Gross Davis discusses categories related to group work which include: general strategies, designing group work, organizing learning groups, and evaluating group work. Some of her insights are reviewed here.

GENERAL STRATEGIES

When setting up your classes for the semester decide on what you want the groups to work on; which topics, projects etc. Give students as much information as you can to prepare them for working in groups: make clear the objectives, suggest group strategies, offer skills to master working in groups, and explain the grading criteria.

DESIGNING GROUP WORK

As you design the team, be sure to: create tasks where each member is responsible and integral to the success of the group; make the group tasks relevant to the course material; consider creating tasks that increase with difficulty as the semester progresses; think about using a method of competition among groups; deliberate about offering group test taking. Bob Petrusis also **urges instructors to consider**: the amount of control the students have in determining their grade; whether the assigned grades are based on established criteria related to individual or group performance; and whether the weight of the grade is based on the product or the process of the work.

ORGANIZING LEARNING GROUPS

In coordinating groups consider the following: whether you or the students themselves set up the groups, how large you would like the groups to be, if you want to keep groups together, how you can move them forward, and how often to check in with the groups.

EVALUATING GROUP WORK

In deciding how to evaluate the groups consider whether you will evaluate students individually or collectively, whether you obtain group members' evaluations of each group member and consider how students are held accountable to their other group members. Sherry Sullivan shares her

thoughts on the **assessment of group work** as well. She suggests requiring students, at regular intervals to write assessments of their progress within and about their group assignments. She asserts that this conveys to the students that the instructor recognizes the time and energy they invest in group work. This assessment includes: a summary of the reading material covered; a personal response to that material; and a self-assessment in which students reflect on their experiences in the groups in which they are a part. In grading the self-assessments, she looked for specific evidence the students provided of their commitment to focus on: the material and, on self as learner.

Assessment Video: Jill Zambito

Jill Zambito has been the Director for Off-Campus & Non-Traditional Student Services at Northern Illinois University (NIU) since July 2007. In this video, she discusses the use of



 *Faster Transmission*

external assessments in her unit, the alignment of the assessment results with the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS Standards), and the usefulness of both in her work with the diverse and unique student populations that she and her staff support. Jill is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Education in the Adult and Higher Education program at NIU.



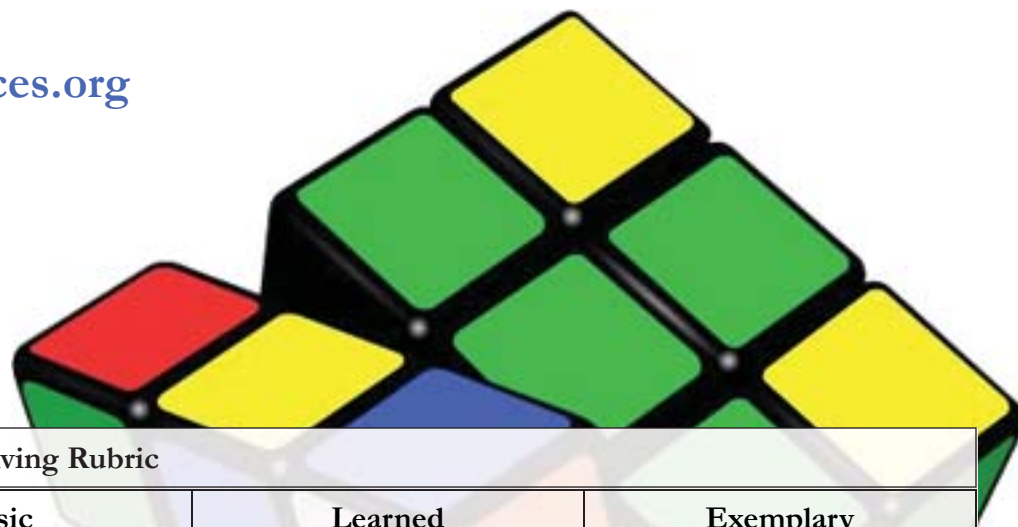
 *Better Quality*

TOOL OF THE MONTH



Problem-Solving Rubric from OpenEdPractices.org

OpenEdPractices.org, self-described as “A community of practice for teaching and learning with open/community-source tools,” offers numerous rubrics and other resources for education professionals. Unless otherwise noted in copyright notes, all material published in the [OpenEd Practices repository](http://OpenEdPractices.org) is licensed by its posting author under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/). This rubric comes from Canada’s [National Adult Literacy Database](http://NationalAdultLiteracyDatabase.org).



Problem-Solving Rubric

	Apprentice	Basic	Learned	Exemplary
Understanding the Problem	Needs a complete explanation of the problem before getting started.	Needs some clarification from others to understand the problem.	Understands (can explain) the problem and proceeds to the next step.	Understands the problem and relates it to other situations in the working world.
Planning to Solve the Problem	Designs only one strategy. Requires assistance to evaluate strategy.	Brainstorms a few strategies and requires assistance to select an appropriate strategy.	Brainstorms several strategies. Decides on an appropriate solution.	Brainstorms many strategies. Makes priorities for our strategies.
Carrying out the Plan	Attempts to solve problem with an inadequate strategy.	Solves problem without making modifications.	Solves problem using design. Makes appropriate modifications to conclude.	Challenges self to try new methods to solve problem.
Evaluating the Results	Requires assistance to evaluate solution.	Limited evaluation of solution without assistance. Compares solution to the problem.	Compares actual and expected results.	Suggests other modifications or applications for other work situations. Designs own evaluation criteria.
Communicates Result	Explains what happened in simple terms.	Explains what happened using terminology related to the problem.	Explains the reason one method is better using specialized language and symbols including specific measurements and quantities.	Generalizes solution. Describes how solution can be used in other situations.

ASSESSMENT WORKSHOPS

Broadening Participation in the Assessment of Student Communication Skills

Joan Hawthorne, Associate Provost for [Assessment and Achievement](#), University of North Dakota, presented a two assessment workshops on

Friday, March 25. This workshop was designed for those interested in helping students achieve the learning outcomes related to communication which have been affirmed in the baccalaureate review. Joan addressed faculty participation in both the teaching and assessment of writing, building shared ownership of the goal of communication, and investing students in the development of communication competencies. She pointed out that, in order to achieve this participation, faculty and staff might build upon



“intrinsic motivations for involvement in assessment of writing.”

Examples of such motivations for students are shown in the slide from her presentation at right.

Joan also shared ideas for involving cross-disciplinary faculty in teaching and assessment of writing, engaging students in assessment (and in their own learning), and strengthening the campus-wide commitment to teaching, learning, and assessment of written communication.

A key element of both workshops was going beyond immediate practical steps to underlying principles. For example, many faculty are familiar with the general concept of rubrics, but would probably find the suggestions shown here to be helpful.

The Office of Assessment Services is interested in feedback from those who attended this workshop or any OAS event. Email assess@niu.edu or call 753-8659.

Students

- As learners
- As contributors
- As criteria-generators
- As scorers
- As participants in analysis
- As participants in loop-closing
- To accrue a portfolio
- To get feedback
- To learn “perspective”
- To take learning seriously
- To help with accountability
- To get a great education

Principles of rubric use

- Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Involve the people who'll use it.
- Involve the people who'll get their work scored.
- Don't wait for the perfect wording.
- And then start tweaking....

Above: Intrinsic motivations for student involvement in assessment of writing, upon which faculty and staff can build shared participation in the assessment process.

Left: Principles of rubric use to make the process easier, faster, and more effective.

*Slides by Joan Hawthorne
Reprinted with permission*

Students Form New Advisory Council

“Have A Voice; Own Your Education.” This is the motto of the newly-created Student Advisory Council on Learning Outcomes (SACLO). SACLO president [Nora Lindvall](#) and vice-president [Eric Niemi](#) indicate, “We are looking for proactive problem solvers to work with NIU’s Office of Assessment Services (OAS) to shape the teaching and learning experience at NIU.” Nora is an undergraduate majoring in English and political science; Eric is pursuing his Ed.D. in counseling and adult and higher education. Both serve as student representatives on the University Assessment Panel.

The Council cites several benefits to learners:

- Learning about the role of assessing student outcomes and how it fits into the educational process
- Having a voice/say in university processes
- Participating in a dialogue and establishing ownership of the learning process at NIU
- Providing feedback that improves classroom learning experiences
- Acting as problem-solvers and expressing opinions in a safe environment where people’s opinions are heard and respected
- Participating in an inclusive and open forum that is learner-centered
- Resume/CV builder

In addition, SACLO points out benefits to the University and to OAS:

- Authentic learner-based feedback on teaching and learning at NIU

- An opportunity to improve how learning outcomes are communicated and measured at NIU
 - An opportunity for faculty and staff to engage in dialogue and action with learners to improve teaching and learning at NIU
- Participation in the Council requires service for one academic year and attendance at meetings as appropriate. SACLO meets in B13 Adams Hall. The April 5 meeting is open to students, faculty and staff. Other dates are being planned, and interested parties should contact [Nora](#) or [Eric](#) for further information.

Eric said, “SACLO has been fortunate to have many students, faculty, administrators, and staff members work with us to meet our goals. It’s very much been a collaborative effort to improve the teaching and learning process here at NIU by promoting a strong culture of

assessment, and I think the institution will be better because of it.”

Nora added, “Getting students actively involved in a dialogue about learning outcomes with faculty and staff is a great example of ‘engaged learning.’ In a nutshell, student learning outcomes are statements that explain what students will know or be able to do at the completion of a course/project/activity, etc. Typical outcomes include skills, values, attitudes, or knowledge. If you are a proactive problem solver who wants to help shape the teaching and learning experience here at NIU in an open and inclusive forum—look no further. The Student Advisory Council on Learning Outcomes (SACLO) needs you!”



Assessment Expo 2011 a Huge Success

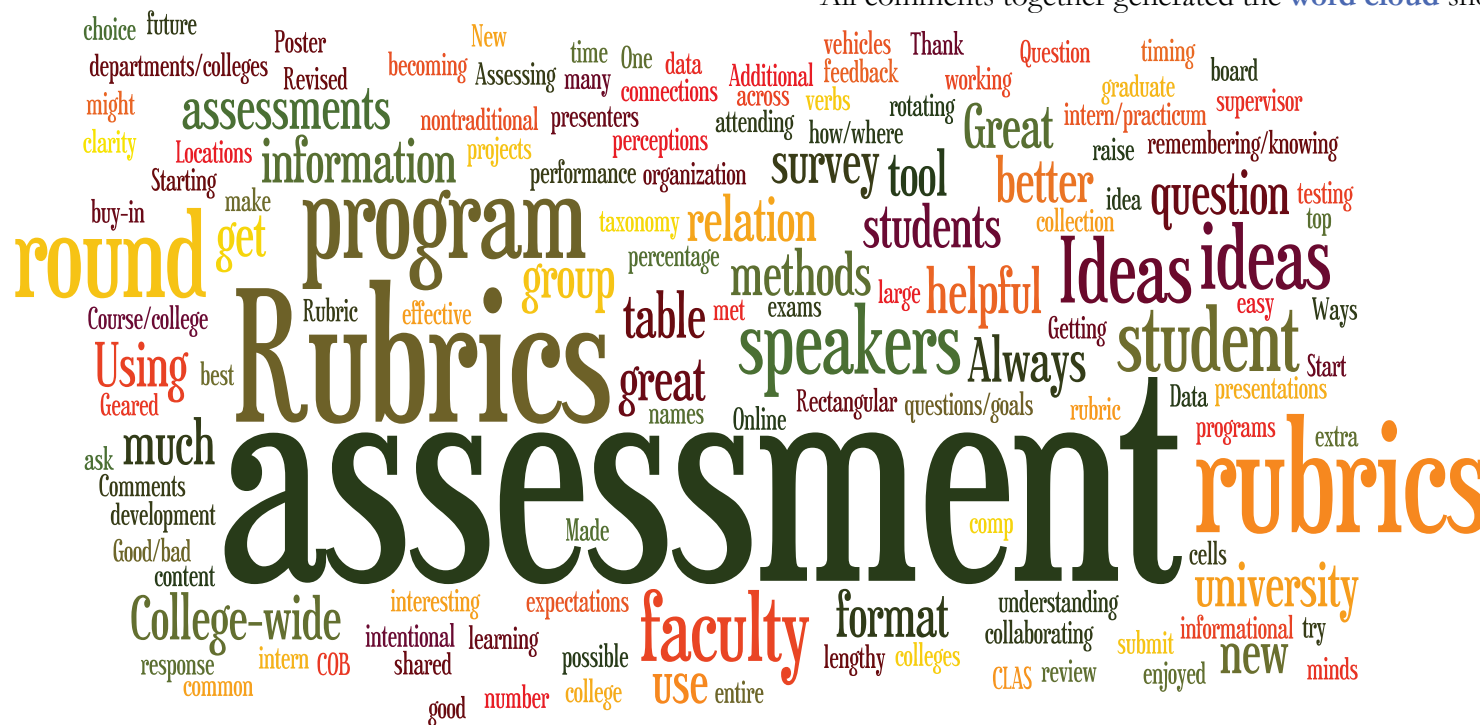
Those who attended the 2011 Assessment Expo were invited to assess the event in a two-part survey. The quantitative section offered respondents a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Of those completing the survey:

- 97 percent agreed that the scope of topics covered in the program was appropriate.
- 97 percent felt the length of the program was sufficient for the topics covered.
- 96 percent said their objectives for attending this program were met.
- 91 percent described the concepts/techniques covered as applicable in their teaching or student-related activities.
- 97 percent said their participation in the Expo has potential benefit to NIU students.
- 97 percent agreed that the overall promotion, organization, and delivery of the program were adequate.
- 97 percent found the timing of the Assessment Expo during the semester was appropriate.

The second part of the survey invited participants to cite the two most useful ideas they gleaned from the Expo. Comments included:

- Assessment timing
- Data collection methods
- Course/college assessment methods
- That assessment *is* do-able
- Ideas for rubrics/Practical ideas about rubric design
- Assessing employers' perceptions of intern/practicum student performance
- How to raise percentage response rate to survey
- Framing assessment questions/goals
- Getting buy-in
- Always remembering/knowing what you want to accomplish for students
- The importance of assessment across the university
- Made good connections with new staff I've never met
- New ideas from other departments/colleges
- Using technology for data storage

All comments together generated the **word cloud** shown here.



Toolkit is brought to you by the Office of Assessment Services: Donna Askins, Editor-in-Chief; Carolinda Douglass, Director of Assessment Services; and the Office of Assessment Services staff.