



Northern Illinois University

Re-envisioning Assessment of Student Learning Through an Equity Perspective

Carrie Zack, Ritu Subramony, & Carolinda Douglass

HLC Conference 4/9/2021

Learning Outcomes for this Session



- Gain an understanding of how one institution began to incorporate best practices that support equity into the assessment of student learning.
- Review examples of ongoing efforts at NIU to transform our current approach to assessment reviews to promote, encourage, and support reflections on equity in assessment of student learning and the impact of these on closing identified equity gaps.

Context



Northern Illinois University is categorized as a public doctoral/research university – recognized for high research activity and community engagement and is located in DeKalb, IL 60 miles west of Chicago.



Student Body (Fall 2020)



Total Student Enrollment: 16,769

- Undergraduate: 12,277
- Graduate: 4,185
- College of Law: 307

Average Student Age

- Undergraduate: 22
- Graduate: 33

Male/Female Categories

- Undergraduate: 47.2% male; 52.8% female
- Graduate: 41.7% male; 58% female

Ethnic/Racial Categories—Undergraduate

- White: 48.2%
- Black: 19.2%
- Hispanic/Latino: 21.1%
- Asian: 5.9%
- Two or more races: 3.9%
- Non-res. Alien: 1.4%
- Native American: 0.1%
- Native Hawaiian: 0.1%
- Unknown: 0.2%

International Students

- 735 students from 118 different countries

NIU Mission, Vision, and Values



- NIU's most recent mission and vision statement approved in 2019 includes **equity and inclusion** as a core value exemplified by the following assertions:
 - *We seek and are strengthened by the diverse perspectives and experiences of our university community members.*
 - *We use an inclusive decision-making process.*
 - *We appreciate and respect every member of our community.*

The full Vision, Mission and Values statement can be found at the following location: <https://www.niu.edu/mission/index.shtml>

NIU's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan 2019-2023



Goal 3: Support equitable access, opportunity and success for students from diverse backgrounds where diversity is defined broadly.

Strategy: Clearly identify gaps in academic achievement and create tailored and comprehensive plans to reduce these gaps

The full Strategic Enrollment Management Plan can be found at the following location:

https://www.niu.edu/enrollment-plan/_pdf/strategic-enrollment-plan.pdf

Committee for Academic Equity and Inclusive Excellence



The Committee for Academic Equity and Inclusive Excellence has completed the plan and developed the following equity statement:

- *Northern Illinois University strives to improve outcomes for all students by identifying and removing barriers that disproportionately hinder the academic achievement and student experience of historically and currently underserved populations.*

More information about this committee can be found at the following location:

<https://www.niu.edu/university-council/committees/caeie.shtml>

NIU and UAP Take Action



- Vision, mission, and values statements are only as good as the actions they inspire
- Two NIU initiatives promote this value
 - Quality Initiative approved by HLC in December 2020
 - Work of the University Assessment Panel's (UAP) Equity and Assessment Subcommittee

Quality Initiative (approved by HLC Dec 2020)



- Identify relevant courses with low success rates or high equity gaps.
- Develop plans for each course based on best-practice and implement these along with faculty development and support.
- Assess initial implementation and implement revised course strategies as needed along with faculty development and support activities.
- Assess second-round implementation.

University Assessment Panel



- Faculty shared governance committee on assessment practice since 1998-1999
- Representatives from
 - 7 Colleges
 - University Libraries
 - Academic support units
 - Students
 - Assoc/Assist Deans responsible for curriculum
 - University Office of Educator Licensure (non-voting)
 - Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation (non-voting)
- Chaired by the Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness

UAP Equity and Assessment Subcommittee



- Product of conversations about the role of UAP in recognizing, supporting, and promoting equity in assessment and assessment for equity
- 5 UAP members representing
 - Faculty from 3 colleges
 - Academic support unit staff
 - Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation staff

Fall 2020



- **Sept 2020:** Groundwork to initiate conversation with UAP
- **Nov 2020:** Conversation at UAP begins with an introduction to equity and its relevance
 - What equity means
 - Sharing personal experiences with equity in teaching, learning, and assessment

Spring 2021



- **Jan 2021:** UAP discussion of equity frameworks
 - Source: [Montenegro & Jankowski \(2020\)](#)
- **Feb 2021**
 - Guest Speakers
 - Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Senior Vice Provost responsible for undergraduate programs and academic support units
 - Equity and Assessment Subcommittee is established

Approving the Charge for Equity and Assessment Subcommittee



- Lively discussions about equity postponed presentation of draft charge until February
- Charge went through revisions
- Final charge approved in March

Original Plan for Equity and Assessment Subcommittee



1. Consult the literature
2. Select a framework to guide the effort
3. Revised UAP feedback rubrics by end of April

Existing UAP rubrics

Degree programs: https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/_files/academic-program-assessment-plan-status-report-rubric.pdf

Academic support units: https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/_files/support-unit-assessment-plan-status-report-rubric.pdf

Equity and Assessment Subcommittee Charge

(2/5/2021 draft)



Enhance UAP processes, including revising and developing UAP tools, to assist the UAP in recognizing and encouraging efforts by programs/units to employ assessment practices to better promote equity in teaching, learning, and other university functions.

Equity and Assessment Subcommittee Charge (2/19/2021 draft)



To facilitate Northern Illinois University's mission and dedication to diversity, equity, and social justice, the Equity and Assessment Subcommittee has been formed to help guide, revise, and/or develop practices and tools for the University Assessment Panel to further facilitate assessments that promote equity, identify equity gaps, and work to close those gaps. The primary goals of this subcommittee will be to:

- Promote assessment processes that highlights equity in student learning, outcomes, and assessments;
- Encourage development of SLOs and assessment methods with equity and inclusion goals;
- Help programs/units identify equity gaps in their assessment methods;
- Support university programs in the use of assessment practices to identify equity challenges and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions/solutions

Current Status of Equity and Assessment Subcommittee



- Discussing context and broader implications of their charge
 - Motivating change/getting past resistance
 - Keeping the workload manageable
 - Providing support
- The discussion has broadened beyond its original focus on the feedback tool

Early Results



- Equity and Assessment as a standing item on UAP's bi-monthly agenda
- UAP feedback to programs
 - Discussing and encouraging current efforts to address equity
 - Suggesting opportunities to promote equity in teaching and learning
 - Responses to feedback highlighted some areas of resistance
- AAE has begun efforts to incorporate equity into learning resources
 - Wisdom Wednesday panel discussions
 - Learning modules on website
 - Links to external resources on website

Key Take-aways



To ensure the framework for addressing equity and assessment is responsive to the local cultural context

- Allocate sufficient time to explore the local context, including voices that represent a variety of institutional constituencies
- Consider what motivates people to address equity in assessment (e.g. personal experiences while teaching, potential for improved teaching and learning for all students)
- Consider causes of resistance or hesitancy about the work (e.g. concerns about potential to increase workload, concerns about working with sensitive data/student privacy, not seeing the need for such work)

Progress Updates



For updates on the work of the Equity and Assessment Subcommittee, visit the UAP's web page:

<https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/assessment/uap.shtml>

Contact Information

Carrie Zack czack@niu.edu

Ritu Subramony rsubramony1@niu.edu

Carolinda Douglass cdoug@niu.edu