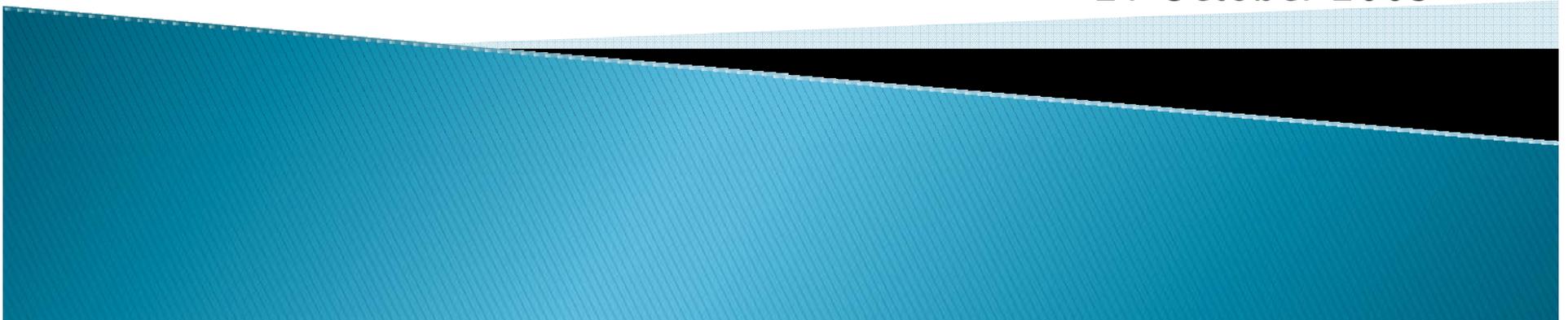


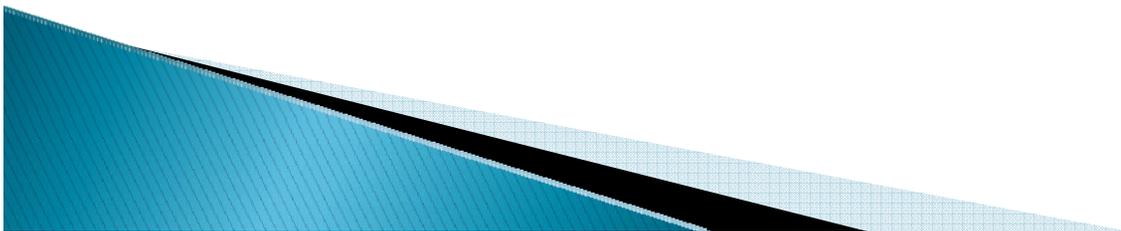
Reimagining Assessment as a Tool to Improve Learning

Robert Mundhenk
Iowa Coordinating Council
For Post High School Education
21 October 2009



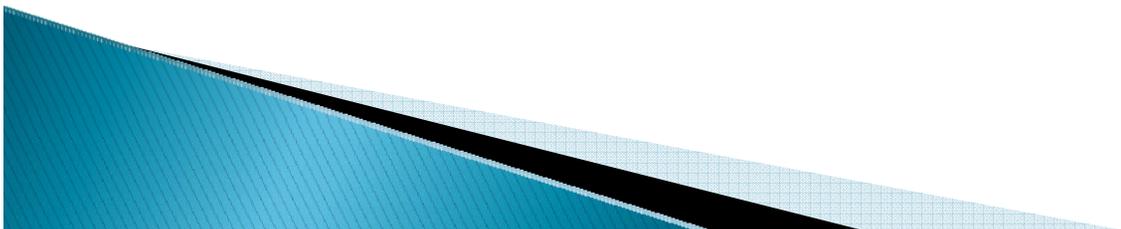
The Old Accountability, ?–2004

- ▶ Reporting:
 - Graduation rates
 - Participation rates
 - Enrollment and budget information
 - Annual reports
 - Program reviews
- ▶ Rarely any response, except from auditors



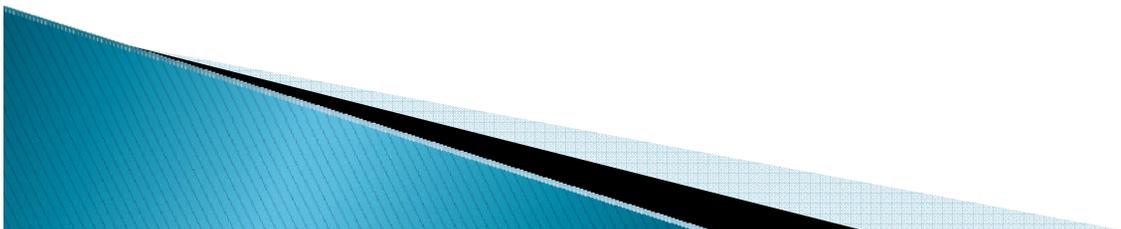
The Old Accreditation, ?–2003

- ▶ Focus on inputs
- ▶ Centrality of evidence
- ▶ Self–study as a historical and (perhaps) planning document
- ▶ Emphasis on these as indicators of quality:
 - Fiscal health
 - Adequacy of resources
 - Enrollment and graduation trends
 - “Satisfaction”



The Old Assessment, 1985 – ?

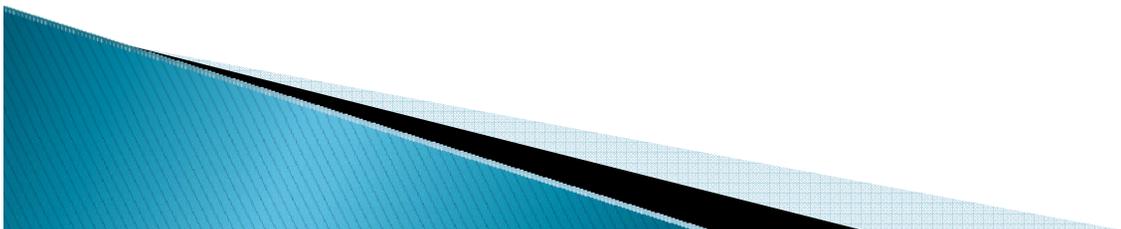
- ▶ Collect available data about learning, not necessarily connected to outcomes
- ▶ Take surveys
- ▶ File data and surveys
- ▶ Wait for a site visit



The National Scene:

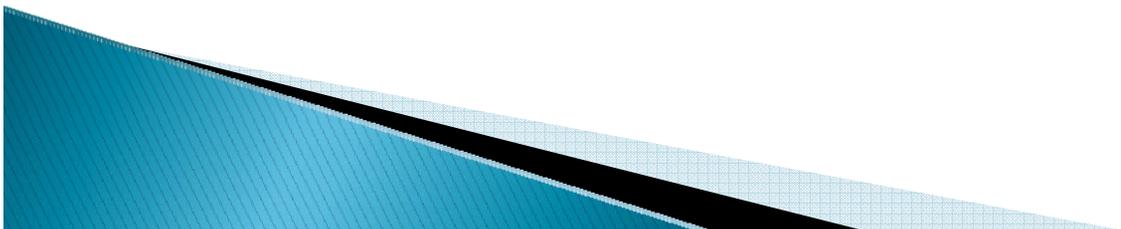
- ▶ “The real culprit is the education establishment’s continuing reluctance to give the public a clear and accurate glimpse at how colleges spend their money. What’s missing, by and large, is ‘sunshine.’”

—John A. Boehner, House Minority Leader and former Chair, House Committee on Education and the Workforce



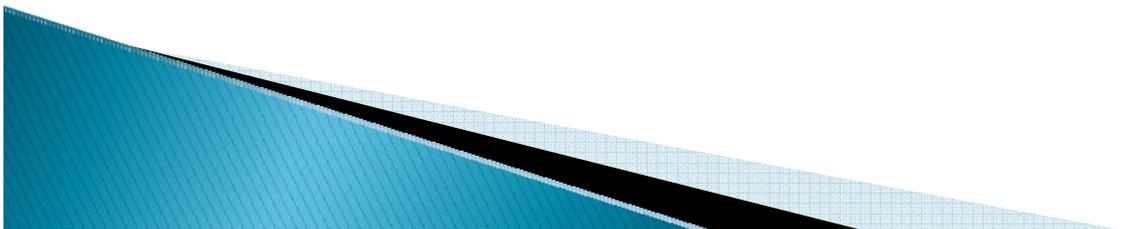
The National Scene:

- ▶ [Colleges constantly tell us] “Everything is fine, we are doing a great job, send us more money, and leave us alone.”
 - Rep. Buck McKeon, House Committee on Education and the Workforce



The New Accountability

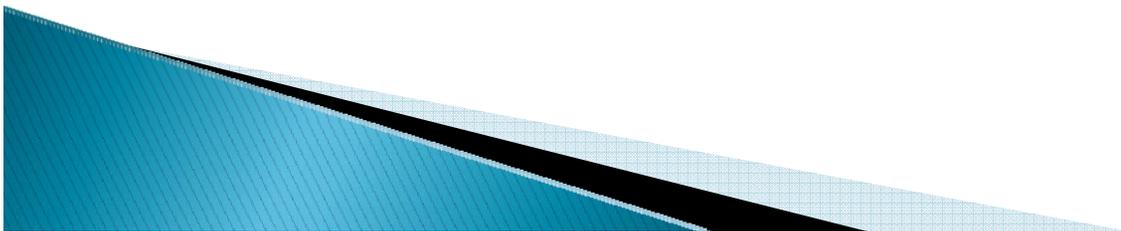
- ▶ SPELLINGS COMMISSION (8/3/06):
 - “. . . The quality of student learning at U.S. colleges and universities is inadequate and, in some cases, declining.”
(7)
 - “Accreditation reviews are typically kept private, and those that are made public still focus more on process reviews than bottom-line results for learning or costs.”
(13)



The New Accountability

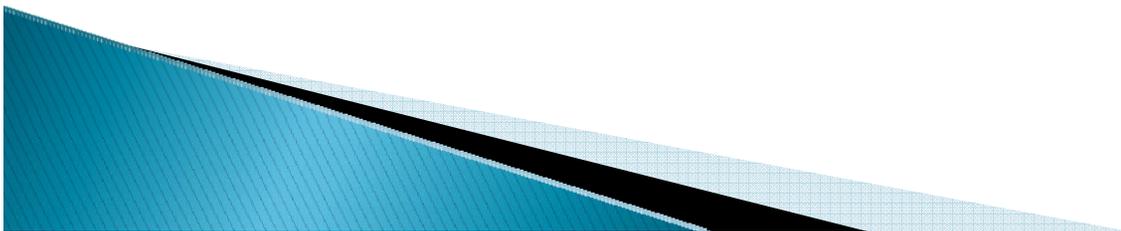
- ▶ “But can I assume that my graduate is going to be literate, know how to write, be exposed to math, be taught by senior faculty?”

—Anne D. Neal, National Advisory Council on Institutional Quality and Integrity, 12/20/07



The New Accountability

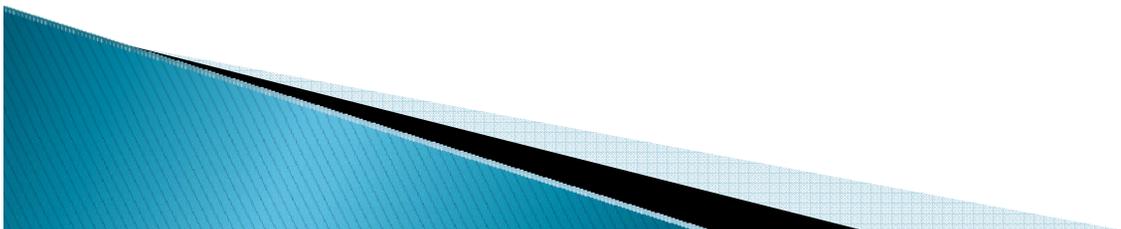
- ▶ “Institutions are asked, ‘Are you measuring student learning?’ And they check yes or no. That must change. Whether students are learning is not a yes-or-no question. It’s How? How much? And to what effect?”
--Margaret Spellings Sept 06



The New Accountability

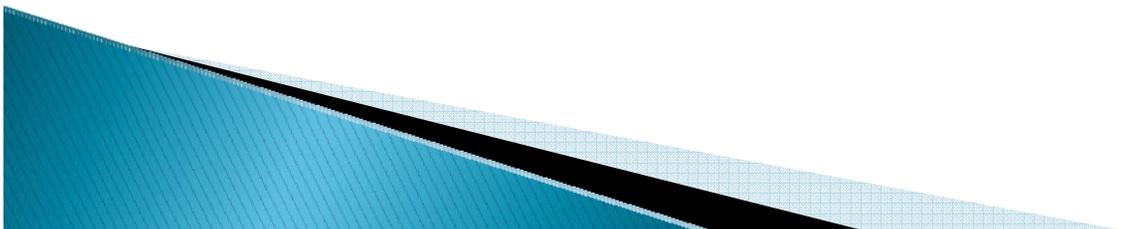
▶ Educational Testing Service:

- “What is needed is a systematic, data-driven, comprehensive approach to understanding the quality of two-year and four-year postsecondary education, with direct, valid, and reliable measures of student learning.”
 - Workplace readiness and general skills
 - Domain-specific knowledge and skills
 - Soft skills
 - Student engagement with learning



Spellings Commission Recommendations (8/9/06)

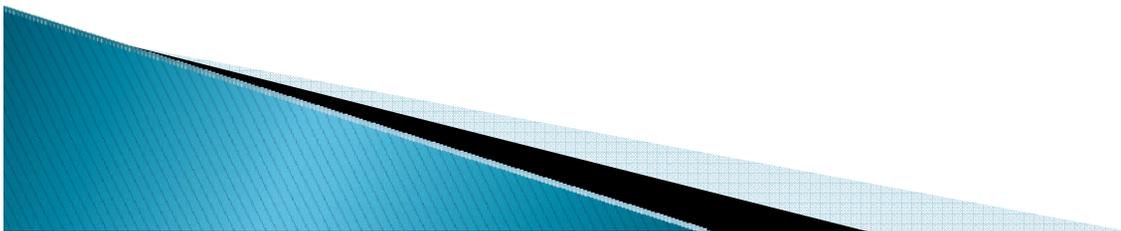
- ▣ “Robust culture of accountability” with a “consumer-friendly database that provides access to institutional performance and aggregate student outcomes” (21)
- ▣ “Accreditation agencies should make performance outcomes, including completion rates and student learning, the core of their assessment . . . to . . . allow comparisons among institutions regarding learning outcomes and other performance measures” (23)
- ▣ “Develop interoperable outcomes-focused accountability systems designed to be useful to students, policymakers, and the public. . . .”(22)



The Higher Education Act Reauthorization (PL110-315)

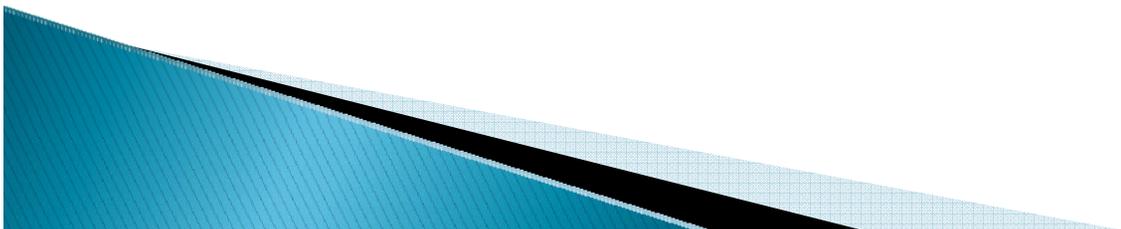
- ▶ Section 136:

“ . . . To maximize and improve the information institutions receive from data systems, in order to assist institutions in improving educational practice and post-secondary outcomes.”



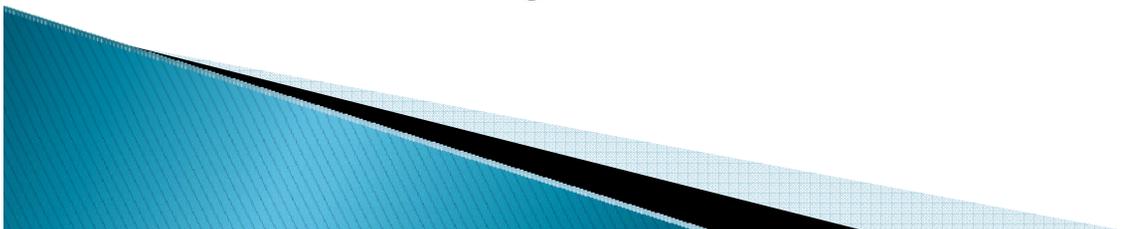
Accountability Becomes Transparency

- ▶ Continuing emphasis on student success, defined as “outcomes”:
 - Graduation
 - Completion
 - Remediation
 - Competencies



Higher Education's Response (NASULGC and NAICU): “Voluntary” Accountability Data on the Web

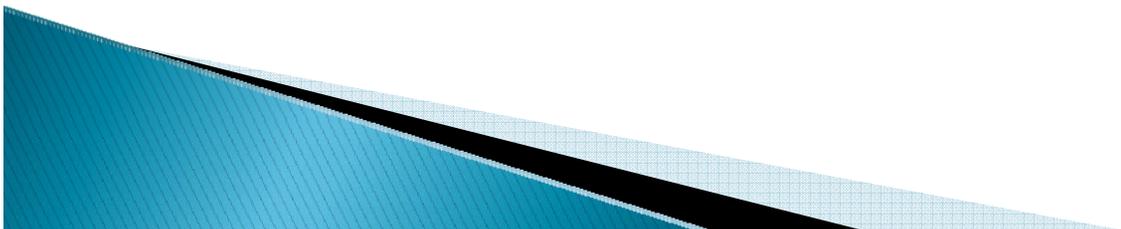
- ▶ Standard IPEDS data
 - Enrollment, persistence, graduation, etc.
- ▶ Student “experiences and perceptions”
 - satisfaction and engagement data
- ▶ Student learning outcomes:
 - Critical thinking
 - Analytic reasoning
 - Written communication
 - “. . . Using one of three tests”



On the Other Hand.....

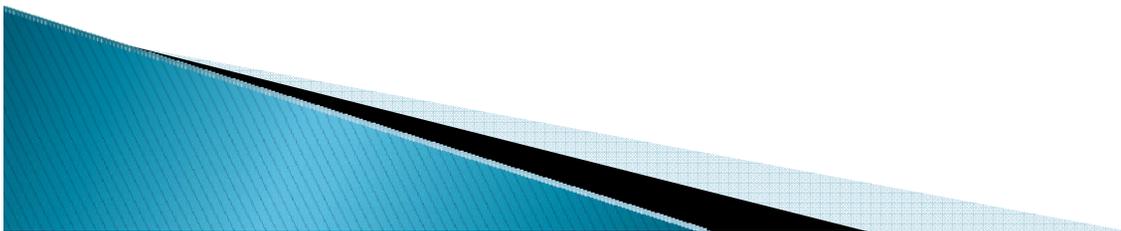
- ▶ “Outcomes–assessment practices in higher education are grotesque, unintentional parodies of both social science and ‘accountability.’ No matter how much they purport to be about ‘standards’ or student ‘needs,’ they are in fact scams run by bloodless bureaucrats who . . . do not understand the holistic nature of a good college education.”

—Laurie Fendrich, “A Pedagogical Straitjacket,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 8, 2007, B6.



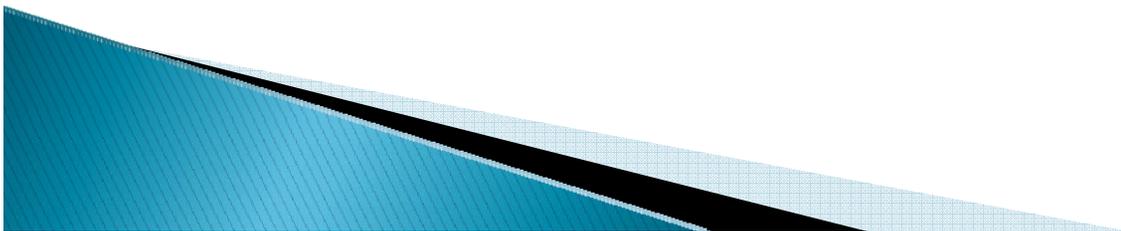
Fendrich's Objections

- ▶ Assessment is reductive
- ▶ Assessment is life-threateningly formulaic
- ▶ Assessment substitutes jargon for thoughtful consideration of the learning process
- ▶ Assessment atomizes an organic, holistic process
- ▶ “We were supposed to lay out art on a dissecting table as if it were a dead cat.”



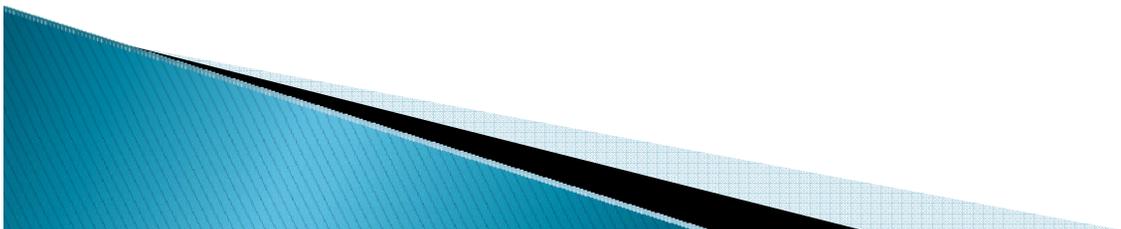
Some Things to Consider:

- ▶ Do Spellings, Boehner, McKeon, and the drafters of PL 110–315 have a point?
- ▶ Does Fendrich?
- ▶ Are they talking about the same thing?

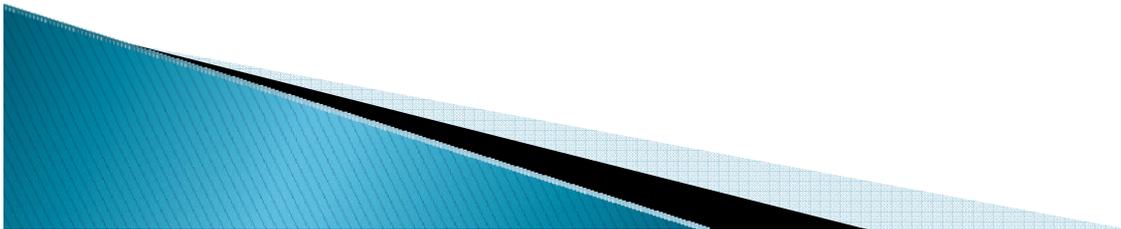


One More Caveat

- ▶ Robert Zemsky, *Making Reform Work* (2009)
“Those who argue that greater transparency, that is, more evidence as to the academy’s problems and failings, will either compel faculty to change or force public entities or accrediting agencies to change always underestimate the inertia in the system...”
(120–21)

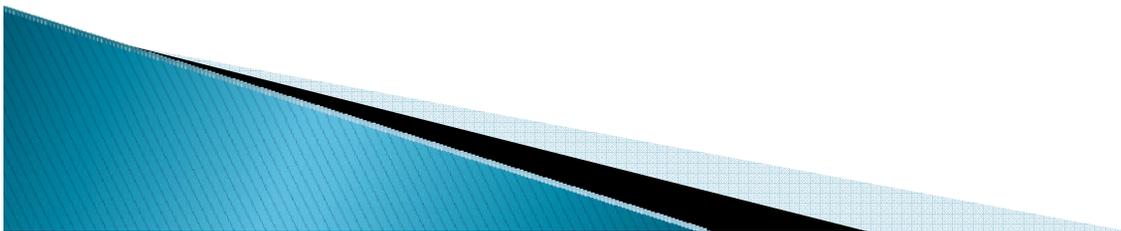


How Do We Assure Credible Quality and Satisfy Stakeholders?



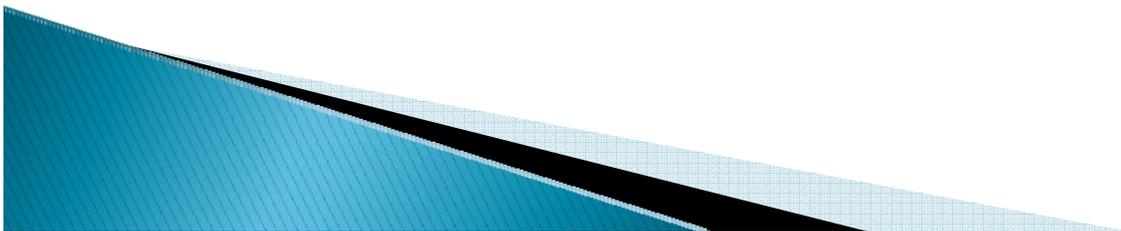
HLC Position on Voluntary Systems

- ▶ The Commission regards institutions' participation in these systems of accountability not as substitutes for the more extensive use of data for analysis, planning and improvement, but as serious efforts to meet public calls for transparency.



HLC Position on Voluntary Systems

- ▶ The Commission applauds these efforts and encourages its affiliated colleges and universities to participate in one of them or to collaborate in the creation of similar programs to accommodate different types of institutions. The Commission will not require participation but will recognize it as evidence where its *Criteria for Accreditation* concern communication with the public and institutional integrity.



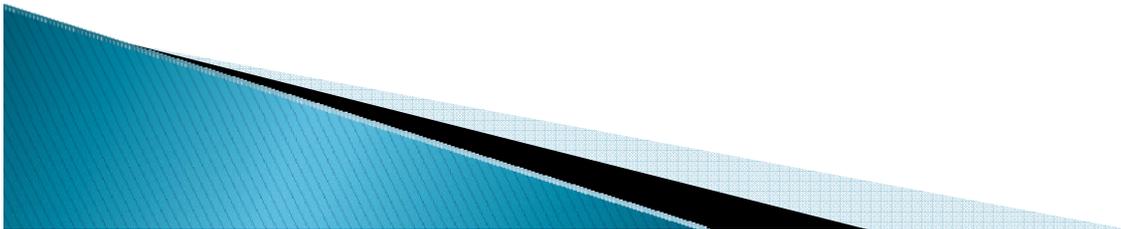
Accreditation Agencies May Be Charting a Different Path

- ▶ Transparency is important
- ▶ Accountability is essential
- ▶ Resistance to federal pressure is futile
- ▶ But more data collecting and reporting will not necessarily produce greater quality
- ▶ Effective, well-designed assessment can be the way to both serve accountability requirements and the need for continuous improvement



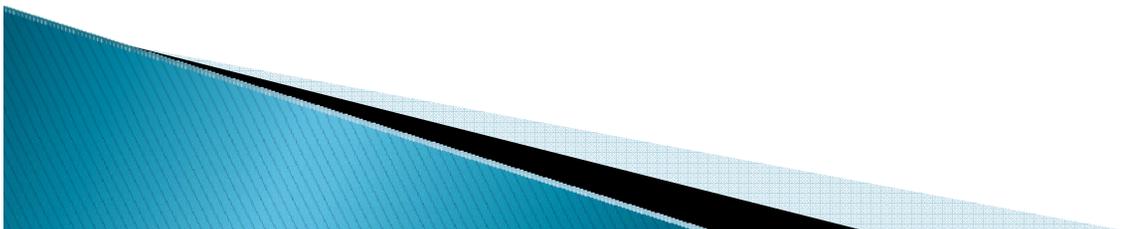
The New Accreditation: Higher Learning Commission

- ▣ Refocus on student learning within Five Criteria:
 - ▣ Mission and Integrity
 - ▣ Engagement and Service
 - ▣ Acquisition, Discovery, Application of Knowledge
 - ▣ Student Learning and Effective Teaching
 - ▣ Preparation for Future
- ▣ The 2004 Criteria see learning as infused throughout all Criteria, so responsibility for supporting, enhancing, and improving learning is institutional.



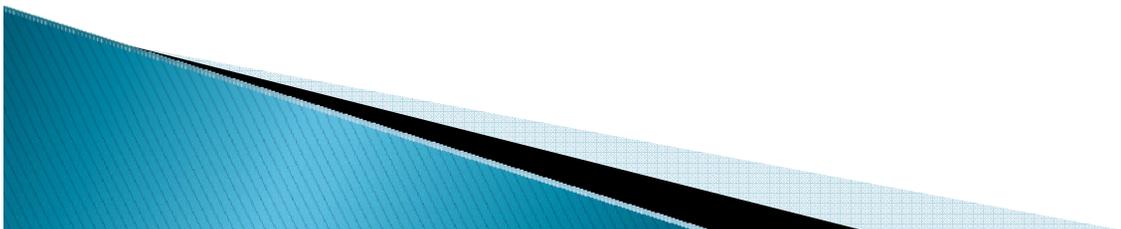
What Regional Accrediting Agencies Expect: The C-RAC Report (2003)

- ▶ “The institution defines quality by how well it fulfills its declared learning mission.”
- ▶ The institution documents student learning by:
 - Setting clear learning goals
 - Collecting evidence of attainment
 - Applying collective judgment as to the meaning and utility of evidence
 - Using evidence to effect improvement
- ▶ It uses multiple sources and kinds of evidence
- ▶ It shares results with stakeholders



What Specialized Accrediting Agencies Expect: ABET:

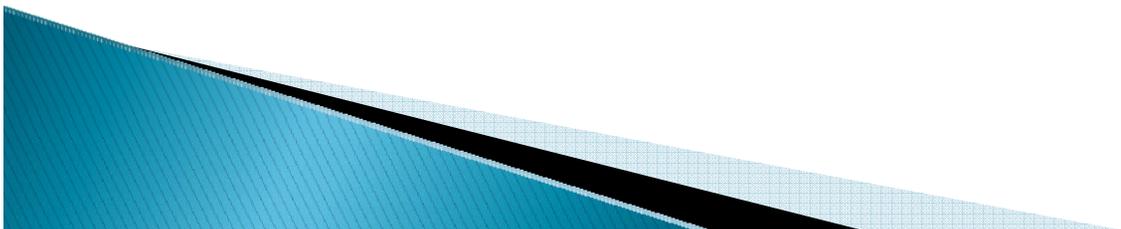
- ▶ Each program must formulate program outcomes that foster attainment of the program objectives articulated in satisfaction of Criterion 2 of these criteria. There must be processes to produce these outcomes and an assessment process, with documented results, that demonstrates that these program outcomes are being measured and indicates the degree to which the outcomes are achieved. There must be evidence that the results of this assessment process are applied to the further development of the program. (March 2007)



What Specialized Accrediting Agencies Expect: National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education

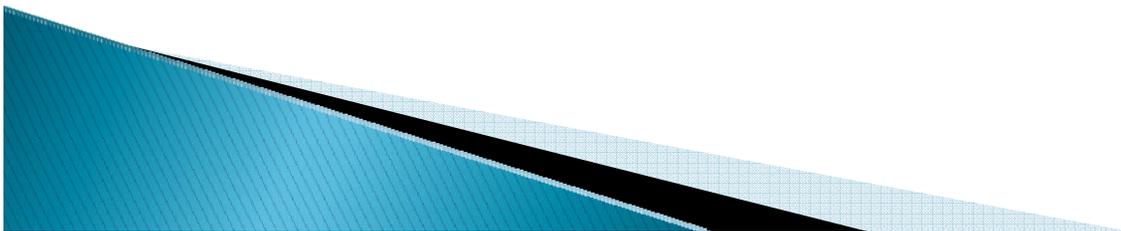
- ▶ The unit has an assessment system that collects and analyzes data on applicant qualifications, candidate and graduate performance, and unit operations to evaluate and improve the performance of candidates, the unit, and its programs.

Effective Fall 2008



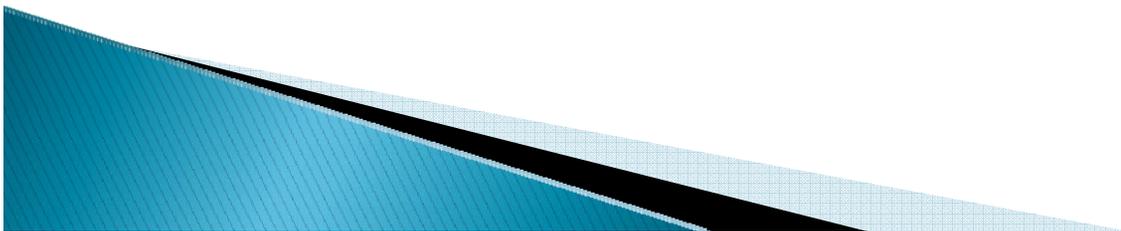
What Specialized Accrediting Agencies Expect: NCATE

- ▶ The unit has fully developed evaluations and continuously searches for stronger relationships in the evaluations, revising both the underlying data systems and analytic techniques as necessary. The unit not only makes changes based on the data, but also systematically studies the effects of any changes to assure that programs are strengthened without adverse consequences.



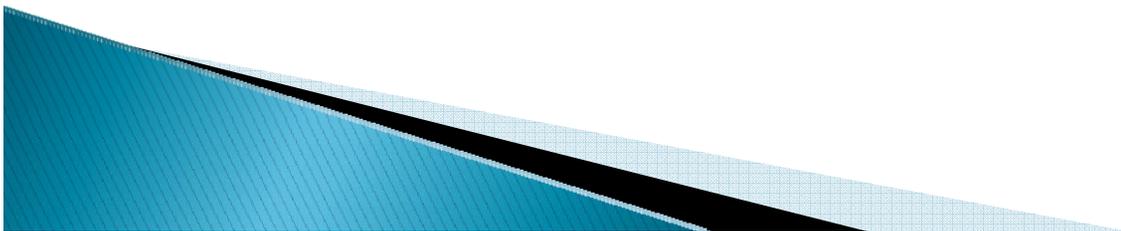
Higher Learning Commission Criterion 3 (2005)

- ▶ The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates that it is fulfilling its educational mission.
 - 3a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible



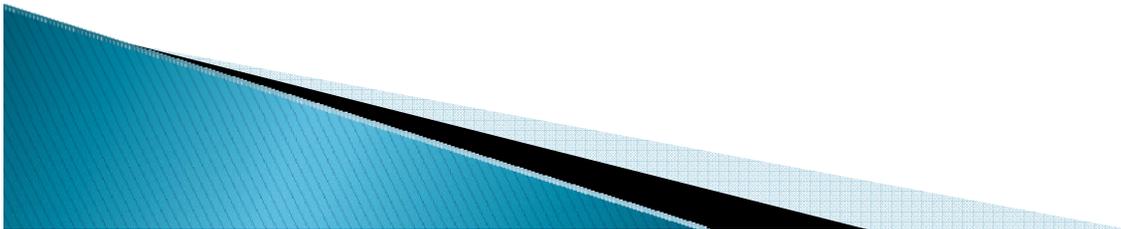
Higher Learning Commission Statement on Assessment of Student Learning (2003)

Assessment's "effectiveness in improving student learning relies on its **integration** into the organization's processes for program review, departmental and organizational planning, and unit and organizational budgeting."



Some Broad Themes from the Accreditors:

- ▶ Emphasis on student *learning*
- ▶ Focus shifts from content and inputs to *outcomes*: what students know and value—and can *do* with what they know and value
- ▶ General emphasis on improvement over reporting
- ▶ Consideration of stakeholders
- ▶ Focus on *use* of data and *integration* into institutional processes



The “Continuous Improvement” Paradigm

- ▶ Shift from inputs to outcomes as indicators of quality
 - ▶ Shift from capacity to student learning as a central theme
 - ▶ Concern with learning and its improvement infuses all criteria
 - ▶ Focus on shared responsibility
 - ▶ Focus on accountability, but not on reporting for its own sake
 - ▶ Focus on *use* of assessment data
 - ▶ Centered on continuous improvement
- 

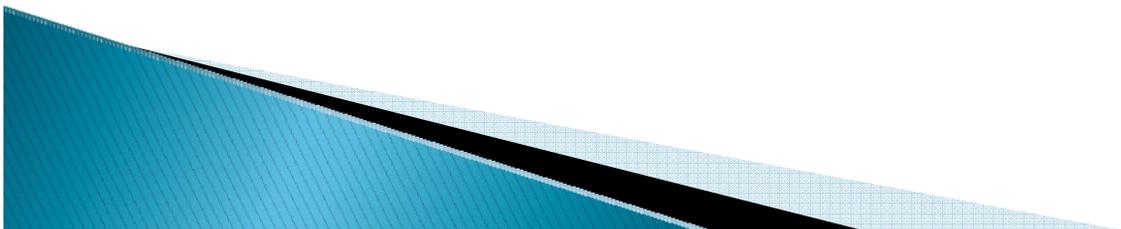
Two Uses for Assessment

▶ Accountability

- Externally focused
- Sometimes strong internal resistance
- Not necessarily consumer-friendly
- If based on standardized instruments, rarely offers indicators for improvement

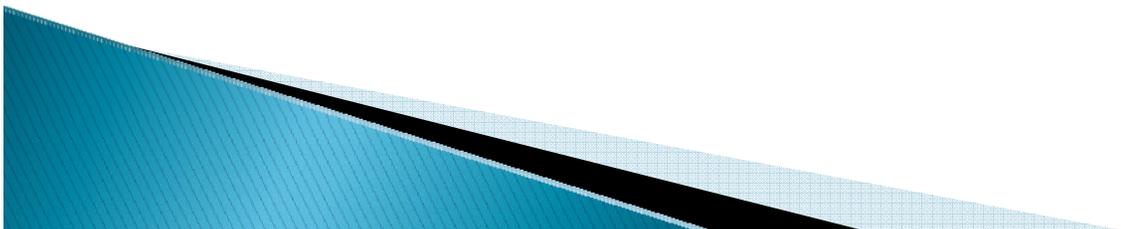
▶ Improvement

- Internally focused but externally reportable
- An extension or formalization of what faculty already do
- Can be the basis for continuous quality improvement



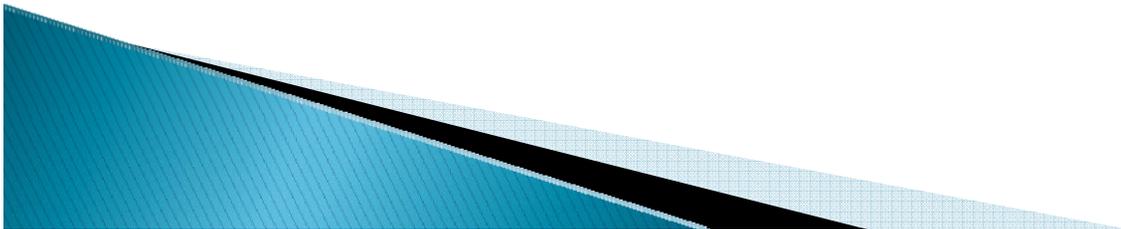
Six Fundamental Questions

- ▶ How are your stated student learning outcomes *appropriate* to your mission, programs, and degrees?
- ▶ What *evidence* do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?
- ▶ In what ways do you *analyze and use* evidence of student learning?



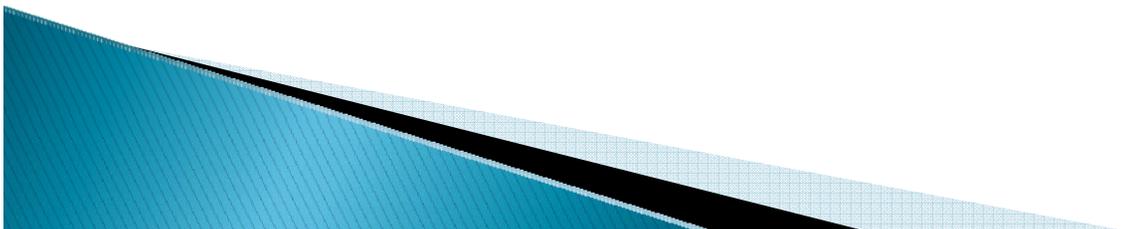
Six Fundamental Questions

- ▶ How do you ensure *shared responsibility* for student learning?
- ▶ How do you *evaluate and improve* the effectiveness of your efforts to *assess and improve* student learning?
- ▶ In what ways do you inform the public about what students learn—and how they learn it?



Commitment, Not Compliance

- ▶ Effective assessment becomes a matter of commitment to the improvement of learning by improving the processes that produce it
- ▶ Effective assessment focuses on how data can be used to improve, not on how it can be reported
- ▶ Effective assessment focuses on inquiry rather than evidence
- ▶ In that sense, effective assessment is at the heart of what we do as academic institutions



Assessment Practice Should Be:

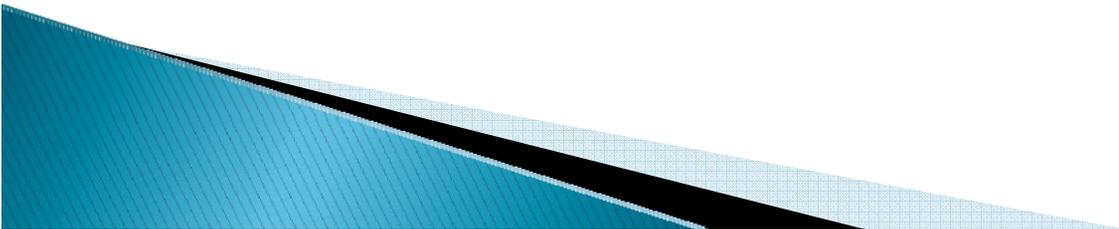
Meaningful

Useful

Workable

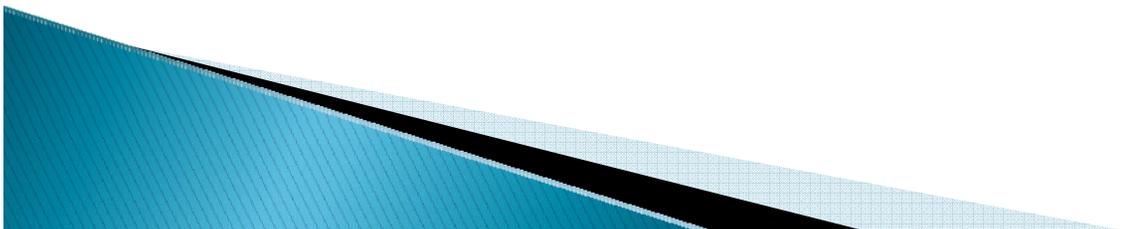
Reasonable

Credible



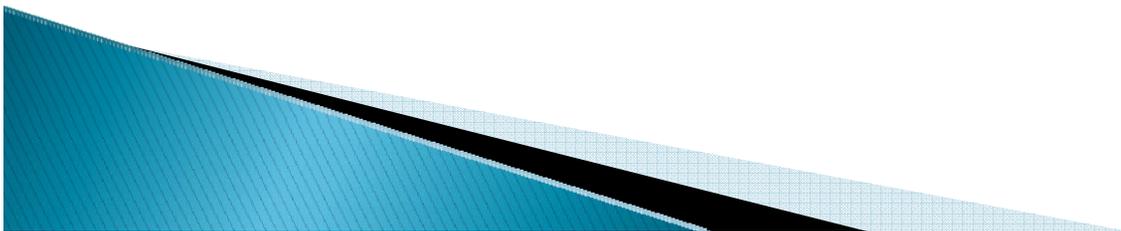
Assessment as an Ongoing Process

- ▶ Focus on continuous improvement in core areas
- ▶ Not a project initiated two years before a site visit
- ▶ No need to assess all things all the time, but essential to assess all core areas on a reasonable cycle (the Assessment Academy and the Pathways Project)
- ▶ A part of institutional culture and processes



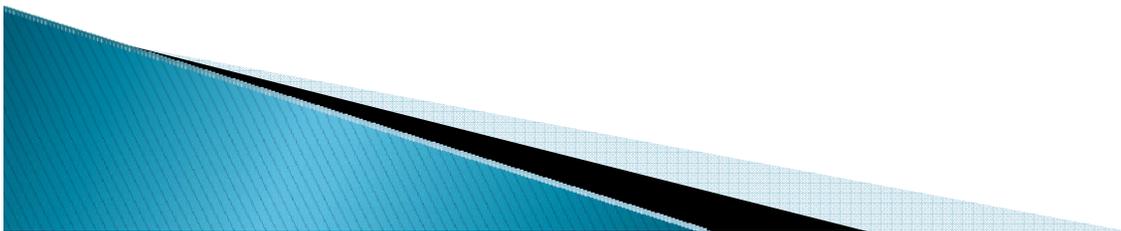
Assessment as an Ongoing Process

- ▶ Based in inquiry:
 - What do our students learn?
 - Is what they learn what we say they will learn?
 - How do we know they have learned?
 - What do we do with our knowledge?
 - How can we improve student learning?
- ▶ Evidence analysis and use, not collection, is the end of assessment



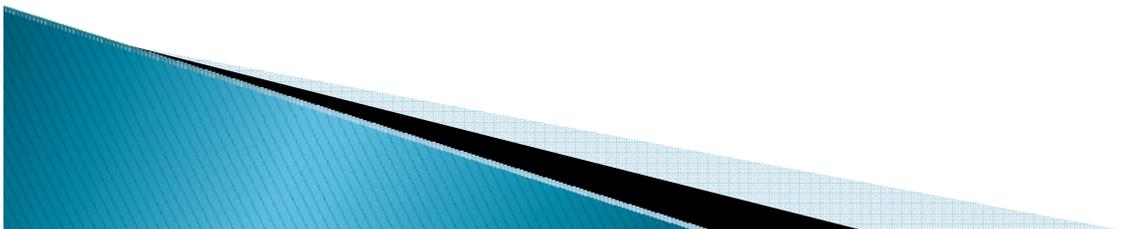
Implications for Practice

- ▶ Outcomes, plans, strategies, and approaches need to be focused on student learning *in the context of* institutional mission and values
- ▶ Clearly defined outcomes should be aligned at course/section, program, and institutional levels
- ▶ Clearly defined outcomes should be assessable



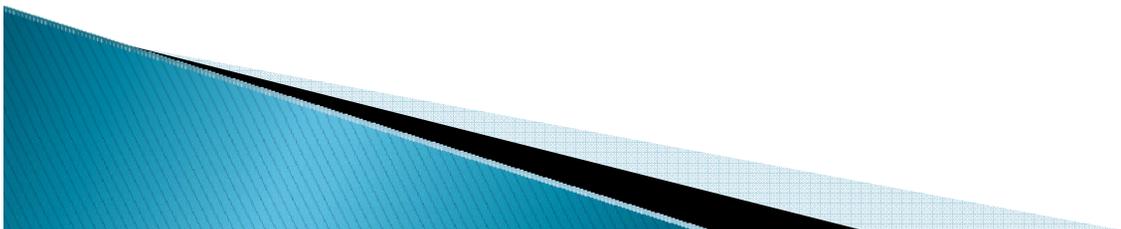
“Clearly Defined Outcomes”

- ▶ What a student can *do* with what he/she knows
- ▶ What a student carries with himself/herself as s/he moves through courses, through levels, and into the field or employment
- ▶ What the course’s/major’s/institution’s influence has been on the student’s ability to use what s/he has learned



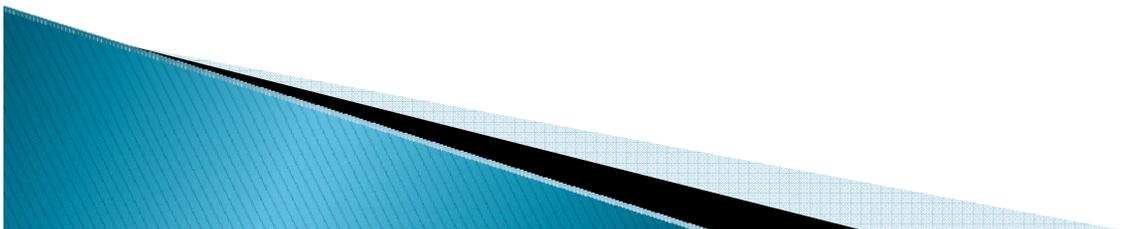
“Clearly Defined Outcomes”

- ▶ *Institutional Level*: What should our graduates be able to do as a result of their experience here?
- ▶ *Major/Program Level*: How well have we prepared students with the core skills needed for success in the careers associated with this major/program?
- ▶ *Course/section level*: What knowledge and skills will students apply in the courses to follow? How do the courses build those skills?



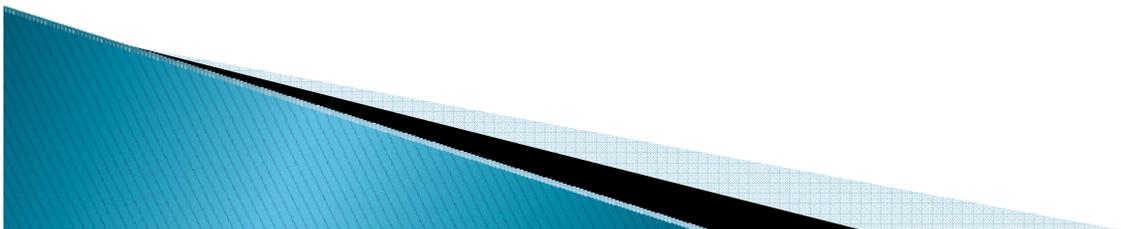
Which Program Outcome Is More Clearly Defined and Assessable?

- ▶ “Students will appreciate the unique contribution of Minoan art to world culture”
- ▶ “Students will apply generally accepted principles of art criticism, combined with their knowledge of Minoan culture, in aesthetic evaluations of Minoan artifacts.”



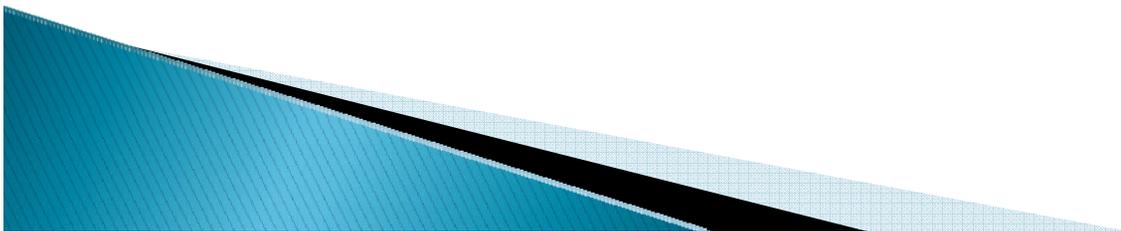
“Clearly Defined Outcomes”

- ▶ *Institutional level:* “Critical Thinking”
- ▶ *Major/Program Level:* “Students have the ability to apply knowledge from a variety of sources to analyze a problem or phenomenon, and to make recommendations as a result of that analysis.”
- ▶ *Course level:* Developmental approach to the major/program level—from understanding and defining to analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating



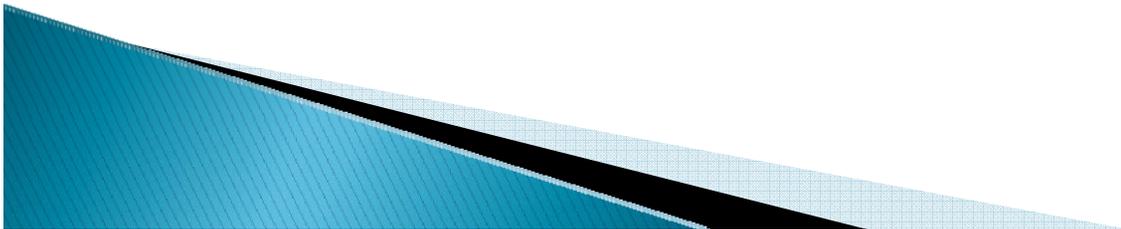
“Clearly Defined Outcomes”

- ▶ Start at the end
- ▶ Map outcome development through curriculum—first year students may be at an early level in Bloom’s taxonomy, but graduating students should be at the final stages
- ▶ Assessment can show snapshots or chart progress, depending on the instrument used (CLA vs. in-house common rubrics)



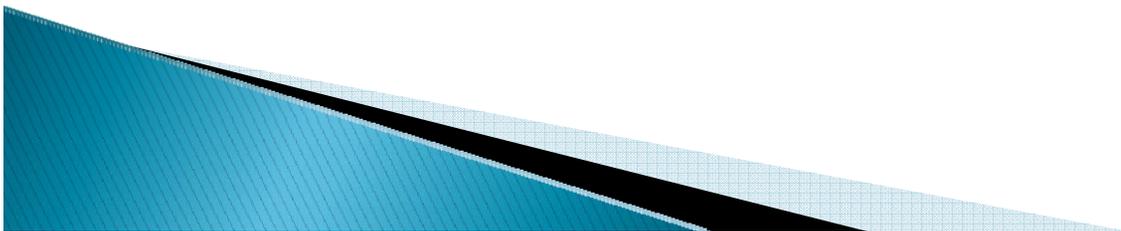
Implications for Practice

- ▶ A wide range of data-collecting strategies are possible, so long as they serve institutional needs in improving learning
 - Standardized tests are not required
 - Subjective professional judgments based on common outcomes and criteria (rubrics) are powerful
 - Home-grown assessments that formalize the work faculty and staff already do can work well to serve both accountability and improvement imperatives
 - Should be a mix of direct (performance-based) and indirect (surveys, grades) measures



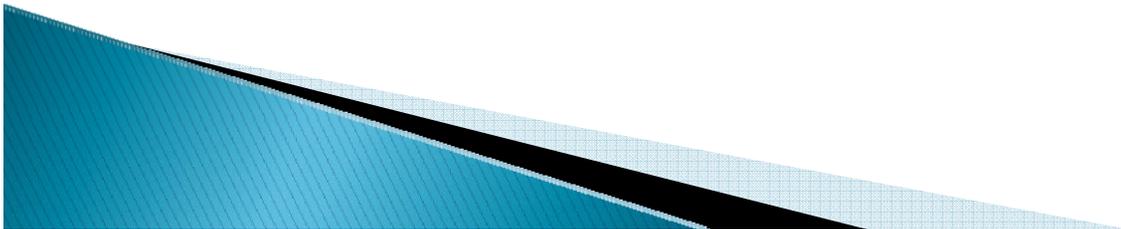
Implications for Practice

- ▶ Attention must be given to assessing learning in non-classroom settings—and to shared responsibility for that learning
 - “Shared responsibility” means that all on campus are responsible for learning in some way
 - Consider the contribution of Student Affairs, for example, to institutional or general education outcomes (*Learning Reconsidered*)



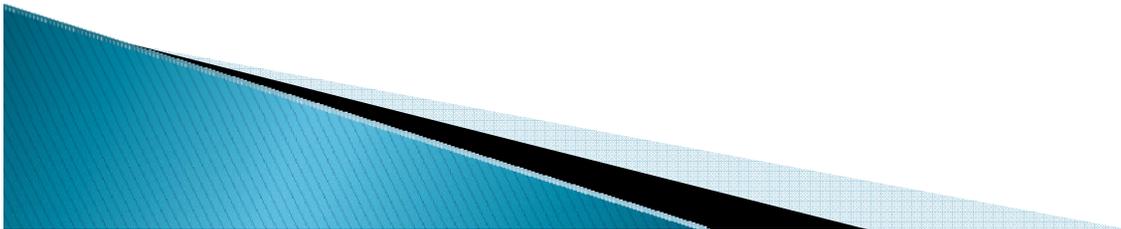
Implications for Practice

- ▶ Assessment strategies must be appropriate and credible, not uniform across the institution—or the state
- ▶ Mission drives learning, curriculum, and pedagogy, so it should also drive assessment
- ▶ Assessment information must be useful, so assessment tools must focus on producing useful data
- ▶ Assessment information must be *used* to improve learning outcomes



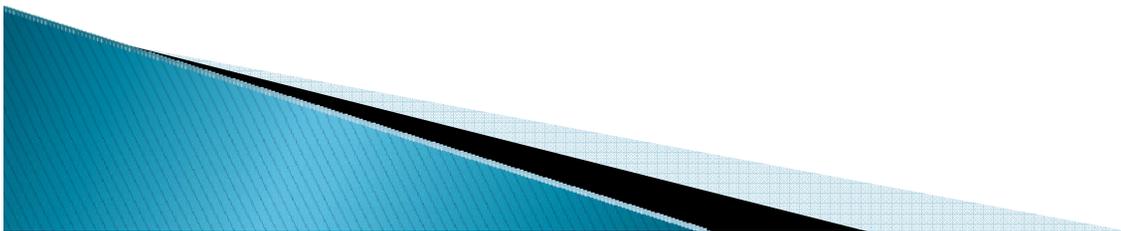
Implications for Practice

- ▶ Assessment strategies must produce information that can:
 - credibly be used to improve learning
 - adequately inform stakeholders of the degree to which outcomes have been achieved
 - be integrated into other processes, like program review, planning, and budgeting



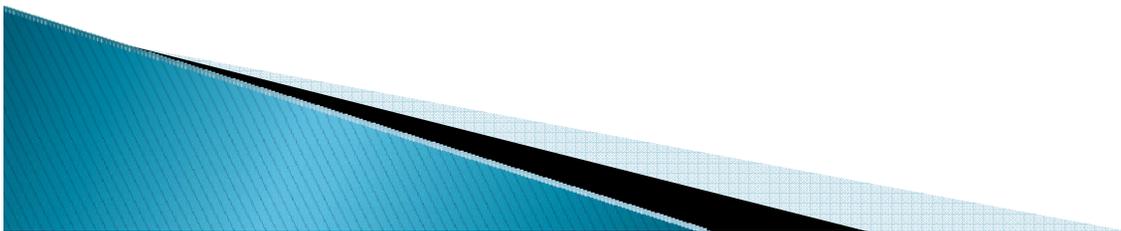
Implications for Practice

- ▶ Institutions must become comfortable with risk—and with the probability of failure—in the service of improved quality of learning
- ▶ Not all assessment strategies work or produce credible information; they can and should be changed
- ▶ Assessment data can show weaknesses in learning, curriculum, and pedagogy; the data should be welcomed and indicate paths to improvement



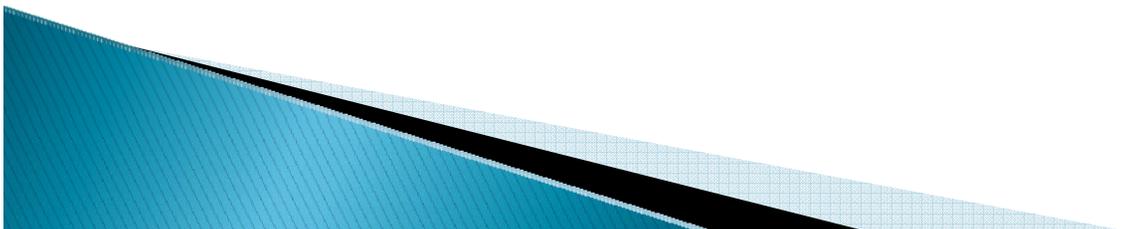
Implications for Practice

- ▶ Assessment data must be seen as the basis for institutional conversations about learning, not as a process of self-justification
- ▶ Focus on continuous improvement, not on competitive scores



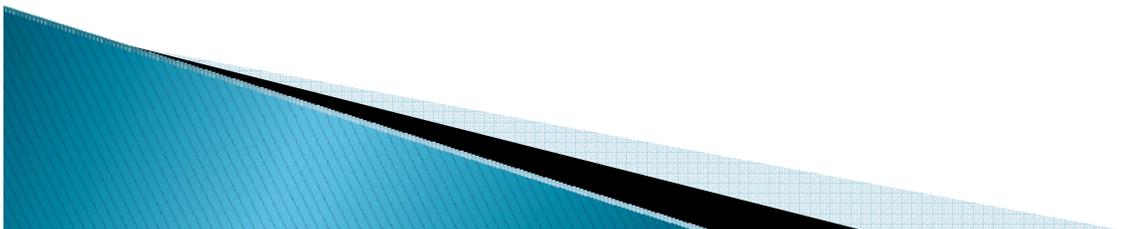
Implications for Practice

- ▶ The quality, credibility, and integrity of an institution are reflected in its effectiveness in producing student learning
- ▶ This effectiveness should be reflected on the course, major, and institutional levels, based on core outcomes that align with institutional mission



The Key Points:

- ▣ Assessment is ongoing
- ▣ Assessment is related to institutional and individual planning
- ▣ Assessment looks at the integration of efforts to produce outcomes
- ▣ Assessment is both individual and cross-institutional
- ▣ Assessment has both public and private aspects



The Key Points:

- ▣ Assessment is a conversation with our stakeholders and with ourselves about what matters most
- ▣ Assessment is more about learning than data
- ▣ Assessment values data *use* over data *collection or reporting*
- ▣ *Assessment is less about evidence than inquiry*
- ▣ Assessment is learning about learning

