

Improving the Education of Minnesota's Students from Pre-K through College: Measuring Student Progress and Using Data to Drive Decision Making

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Data-driven decision making creates learning opportunities at St. Paul's Como Park Elementary School. Here, students explore reading through story telling in the library.

Minnesota is a national leader in educational outcomes and, on many indicators, provides a national model of performance. However, Minnesota also faces many educational challenges, including achievement gaps among subgroups of students. Nationally, many educational outcomes for pre-kindergarten to 12th grade (P-12) are well defined and have been tracked for years.¹ However, the

¹ Examples of sources of outcome data include the National Assessment of Educational Progress (*The Nation's Report Card*; nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard), the annual *Digest of Education Statistics* (nces.ed.gov/programs/digest), and *The Condition of Education* (nces.ed.gov/programs/coe), all from the National Center for Education Statistics.

current federal regulations regarding school accountability (largely due to the No Child Left Behind Act that was enacted in 2001) define school success in a very narrow way, typically performance on a single-event state exam, attendance rates, and graduation rates. Schools continue to struggle with identifying the means to address critical issues of success for students in some subgroups, particularly students of color, students from families in poverty, students who are English-language learners, and students receiving special-education services.

In the higher education arena, outcomes are poorly defined and not tracked to the extent seen in P-12, and

outcomes and measures of success are generally less visible. In *A Culture of Evidence: Postsecondary Assessment and Learning Outcomes*, Educational Testing Service researchers stated: "What is needed is a systemic, 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." To meet this need, they proposed a comprehensive system for determining various aspects of higher education learning, with a call for individual institutions to develop their own context-specific outcomes valued at their institution. Although such guidance is limited, it is available—yet such

guidance has not had a strong presence in the planning processes of higher education institutions.

Conversations about measuring higher education quality are occurring at our home institutions. At the University of Minnesota, internal conversations about learning outcomes have become more prominent in the last few years, where administrators and faculty have been asking: What are the indicators of success for our students? In 2007, the University of Minnesota adopted a set of undergraduate student-learning outcomes and is now engaged with departments across campus in a process of linking program goals to student-learning outcomes and developing assessment plans for measuring relevant student-learning outcomes. Members of St. Catherine University in St. Paul have been engaged in such conversations much longer, through a long-standing assessment committee and a coordinated effort to respond to inquiries regarding assessments and evidence of learning outcomes from accreditation agencies for its licensure and certificate programs. Such questions are gaining importance as legislative bodies around the country face increasing demands for higher education accountability.

Because Minnesota has traditionally achieved high levels of success in educational attainment and related outcomes, it is well positioned to create indicators of higher education outcomes for students, as well as tools to help schools use available data to improve decision making at all levels of education. In addressing student outcomes at all levels, Minnesota can begin to secure the success of all its students and improve the success of the state well into the future.

In our recent work, we have had two goals that built on a common objective: improved decision making by educational leaders and educators, resulting in greater success of all students in Minnesota educational programs. The first goal was to explore and identify the extent to which P-12 school leaders and educators use data to inform their decision making. This work, moving from indicators of student and school success to action steps, creates increased potential for accomplishing our second goal, which was to inform the development of data-driven systems to assess important higher education outcomes. This article describes the results of two studies that we recently completed that addressed these two goals. In the first,



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Minneapolis high school students participate in after-school tutoring through the University of Minnesota's Upward Bound program.

we examined how P-12 institutions in Minnesota use *data-driven decision making*; in the second, we investigated how higher education institutions in Minnesota assess *student-learning outcomes*. The research upon which this article is based was supported by a grant from CURA's Faculty Interactive Research Program.

Data-Driven Decision Making in Minnesota P-12 Schools

In our first study, we interviewed P-12 school leaders, educators, and other school staff in Minnesota to investigate how their schools used data-driven decision making (DDDM). DDDM is a process of identifying important goals and relevant evidence and then using that information to improve decision making—simply put, gathering and using information to make good decisions.

Methodology. We spoke with 48 educators at 48 different Minnesota schools, 14 in the Twin Cities and 34 in suburban and rural areas. The individuals who participated in interviews were P-12 educators and included 15 general-education teachers; 4 special-education teachers; 2 early-childhood teachers; 2 English-as-a-second-language teachers; 9 principals; 13 counselors, school psychologists, or social workers; 2 assessment coordinators; and 1 superintendent. University of Minnesota graduate students enrolled in an educational measurement and evaluation course met one-on-one with these educators and took notes during their conversations

based on a common question: Does your school have a data-driven decision-making process? We asked each educator whether they personally collect or use data formally or informally. If they responded yes, we asked for examples of the kinds of data collected or used, the ways these data were used, and whether and how the use of data has made a difference. If they responded no, we asked if their school or district communicated with school staff about their information needs, the kinds of access to data they have, and to what kinds of information they would like to have access. For those schools with a DDDM process, we explored the process used by the school and were provided with examples of its use. All questions were open-ended with structured follow-ups. In all, 41 of these educators saw themselves as a decision maker and 45 freely used the language of “data-driven decision making” during the interview. In addition, 37 of these educators reported that support or training was available for DDDM in their school or district.

Results. In interviews, educators mentioned many reasons for engaging in DDDM (Table 1). Educators primarily engaged in DDDM to meet the needs of individual students and to evaluate if schoolwide goals and improvement had been achieved. These educators also identified more than 50 unique kinds of data that they used to inform decision making (Table 2). Overwhelmingly, they identified assessment results—including state, district, and classroom assessment information—as important to DDDM.

Nonacademic data, including information about student backgrounds and behavior, were mentioned far less often.

Through our interviews with educators, we found that, overall, data played an important and often central role in decision making at all levels within a school, but the need for information and the ability to use relevant information appropriately varied widely among educators. Educators expressed a great need for appropriate and meaningful information and reported concerns about the quality and relevance of the information currently available. In some cases, educators reported that the use of data had resulted in significant and important outcomes for their schools, staff, and students (Table 3). The specific outcomes were quite varied, including improved academic and behavioral outcomes, reduced need for special-education interventions, improved communication with parents, and a generally improved process for using data for continuous school improvement efforts. One educator summarized her school's DDDM efforts this way: "We live and breathe DDDM every day. It drives what we do and when we do it." However, in other cases, educators reported that gains at their schools had been less apparent.

We found from interviewee responses that the quality of data and data use were most often attributed to the level of training of school leaders, particularly the principal. In some cases, teachers reported to us that they noticed that more new teachers were arriving in school ready to engage in DDDM, and attributed this trend to improved college and university teacher preparation. Interestingly, two principals we interviewed noted that they had participated in DDDM training at the University of Minnesota and are now using data at a noticeably higher rate than neighboring schools. During our conversations, educators and school staff identified several recommendations for improving the use of data in decision-making processes (Table 4). These recommendations largely included the gathering of new kinds of information and the implementation of training to put that information to use.

Summary. It is difficult to make generalizations based on interview results that apply across a wide variety of schools, given the unique nature of students, staff, and communities. However, we offer two observations from our study results.

Table 1. Most Commonly Cited Reasons that Minnesota P–12 Educators Engaged in Data-Driven Decision Making

Reason	Count
Provides individualized effort and intervention to students	33
Determines if school goals are being met	30
Assesses current and future needs—proactive planning	27
Engages in continuous improvement	19
Identifies causes of problems	17
Decides what needs to change	16
Meets accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act	14
Aligns instruction (or work) to standards, goals, objectives	13
Places student or determines eligibility for special services	11

Note: Count is the number of the 48 educator-interviewees who noted this response. Interviewees could cite more than one reason. Other reasons cited included keeping stakeholders and parents informed about student and school progress, addressing issues related to staff professional development, addressing the achievement gap, learning about school climate, monitoring staff performance, supporting teacher planning, and supporting student planning and goal setting.

Table 2. Most Commonly Cited Kinds of Data that Minnesota P–12 Educators Used in Data-Driven Decision-Making

Kinds of Data	Count
State test results	26
Informal assessments	25
Classroom assessments	23
Other achievement test data	21
District test results	19
Student background information	17
Behavior records	16
Classroom grades	12
Attendance	11
Previous student-school history information	10
Student surveys	10
Discipline referrals	5

Note: Count is the number of the 48 educator-interviewees who noted this response. Interviewees could cite more than one kind of data. Other kinds of data cited by these educators included family/community surveys, staff performance data, student health and mental health screening, finance data, college applications, and scholarship awards.

First, our results indicated that DDDM was already a core element of P–12 school functioning and that staff members were concerned about making the most of the information they have. One common recommendation regarded training and the development of a more structured DDDM process implemented schoolwide or districtwide. In the cases where centralized guidance

was high, where the staff participated in data retreats, and where data were a regular part of ongoing discussions and decisions, staff easily identified specific outcomes. The requests for training and professional development were strongest among the teachers who asked for process training—how to gather high-quality information, interpret it meaningfully, and use it appropriately.

Teachers were looking for ways to inform and improve their classroom instruction and how they interact with students and families.

Second, our results highlighted the importance of central administrative support and leadership in implementing DDDM. Educators considered the role of the principal pivotal in making DDDM an integral part of the school's work. If central administration supported DDDM, more staff were included throughout the planning processes in a school. Where that central leadership was not evident, DDDM was not consistently apparent throughout the school, and educators saw limitations in the decision-making activities.

Assessment of Student-Learning Outcomes in Minnesota Higher Education Institutions

In our second study, we used interviews with college and university officials to examine how higher education institutions in Minnesota assess student-learning outcomes, which measure student progress resulting from participation in a program of study (see sidebar on page 10).

Methodology. We interviewed 12 administrators or faculty responsible for the assessment of student-learning outcomes (SLOs) on 12 different campuses around Minnesota: Bethel University, Century College, the College of St. Catherine (now St. Catherine University), Inver Hills Community College, Metropolitan State University, Minnesota State University at Mankato, St. Cloud State University, St. John's University and College of St. Benedict, St. Mary's University of Minnesota, St. Olaf College, the University of Minnesota at Morris, and the University of Minnesota at Twin Cities. For breadth, we included private four-year universities (with total student enrollments of approximately 3,500–5,500), public four-year and comprehensive universities (with total student enrollments of approximately 17,000–52,000), and community colleges. We asked each interviewee eight open-ended questions about aspects of the assessment of student-learning outcomes, including the motivation for such assessments, lines of responsibility, the nature and use of the assessments, and whether any observable outcomes have emerged from assessment activities on campus. In each case, administrators were engaged in the discussions and quite forthcoming

Table 3. Outcomes Achieved through Data-Driven Decision Making Cited by Minnesota P–12 Educators

Outcomes Reported
Improved transition times to alleviate issues during passing time
Instituted periodic data-review meetings
Uncovered motivation issues from discrepancies between Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments and district assessments
Improved summaries of great quantities of information through effective graphical displays
Improved academic and behavioral outcomes
Eliminated some individualized intervention programs
Improved identification of students struggling with specific academic content
Improved school improvement plans with stronger objectives
Reduced special-education referrals and inappropriate referrals
Improved communication with parents
Increased graduation rates and number of National Merit Scholars
Increased scores on Advanced Placement exams
Achieved 100% graduation of English-language learner students
Identified and implemented effective reading program, targeting the skills needed to improve performance
Developed study-skills plans for middle-school students
Received positive parent feedback and response to data presented in informative ways

Table 4. Recommendations for Improving School-Based Data-Driven Decision Making Cited by Minnesota P–12 Educators

Recommendations Cited
Expand the use of achievement data
Move data from discussions about school Adequate Yearly Progress (a requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act) to student performance, and focus more attention on those students with the greatest needs
Provide ongoing training and support to engage in DDDM for all school staff
Implement buildingwide progress-monitoring practices
Improve reporting time of achievement data collected at the state and district levels
Improve methods of data presentations for teachers, innovative data displays that make important features of the data meaningful and accessible
Implement a model of Response to Intervention approach to target interventions to students who need them most
Develop longitudinal models of student progress on classwork that provide more diagnostic information about strengths and weaknesses
Gather student-engagement data to address solution strategies

about the challenges, impacts, and promises of their assessment activities. Each interview was audiotaped, and the

interviewer took notes and summarized the conversation immediately following the interview.

Results. From our interviews, we identified the motivations for colleges and universities to assess SLOs, the approaches that their home institutions used for assessing SLOs, how the individual institutions used the evidence gathered from SLO assessment, and how they expected to use the assessment of SLOs over time.

Motivation for Assessing SLOs.

Across the interviews, our interviewees mentioned multiple motivations for assessing SLOs. Interviewees described both external and internal motivators (Table 5). External motivators primarily included the need to meet accreditation requirements and, secondarily, to communicate important outcomes to key stakeholders such as alumni, parents, peer institutions, and employers. Internal motivators were more consistent across campuses, largely focusing on the importance of central leadership and a mission-driven focus on improving teaching and learning. We found that, for most institutions, motivation that came from faculty and academic programs seemed to be a powerful force that resulted in effective assessment activities that drove change on campuses.

Methods for Assessing SLOs. The individuals we interviewed reported that the primary responsibility for the assessment of SLOs rested with their faculty, and accordingly their faculty conducted the vast majority of assessments on the campuses we studied. However, interviewees provided a great diversity of responses regarding how the assessment of SLOs was accomplished across the institutions we visited. The methods for assessing learning outcomes were primarily based on one of three models (Table 6). Classroom assessments were the most common assessment method used, but they also provide one of the greatest challenges to institutions with respect to the process required to accumulate such data and aggregate the results in meaningful ways.

Our interviewees reported that the content of those assessments varied as much as the different programs of study did. Officials frequently identified the use of outcomes that assessed critical thinking, writing, global perspectives, problem solving, leadership, communication, civic engagement, ethics, field-specific content knowledge, and in some cases, lifelong learning or special mission-driven outcomes such as faith and spirituality. As we reviewed the SLOs identified by officials across our



High school students attend a college prep course through the University of Minnesota’s Upward Bound program. Supplemental services such as Upward Bound provide important resources to schools in their support of all students.

Table 5. Motivations for Assessing Learning Outcomes among Minnesota Institutions of Higher Education

External Motivators
Meeting accreditation requirements (e.g., licensure programs)
Communicating outcomes to alumni, parents, peer institutions
Developing community visibility and support
Competing for resources (e.g., grants and state funding)
Communicating outcomes to employers and others interested in hiring graduates
Addressing increased federal attention to the measurement of student-learning outcomes
Internal Motivators
Leadership regarding the importance of learning outcomes from central administration
Campuswide commitment to improvement
Mission-driven focus on improving teaching and learning
Faculty commitment to improve their teaching and meet students’ needs

sample of institutions, we found most institutions had college-, department-, or program-specific SLOs, but few had institution-wide SLOs. Interviewees from public institutions frequently mentioned that a common source of learning outcomes used at their school came from the 10 goals expressed in the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum. However, these curriculum goals were designed to ensure successful transfer of students among Minnesota institutions of higher education through recommended courses (for example, to transfer

from a two-year community college to a four-year state university), and do not specify learning outcomes.

Similarly, we found from our interviews that the tools employed to measure SLOs varied a great deal across the institutions that our interviewees represented. All the institutions used more than one, and no institution used all, of the instruments found across the campuses we surveyed. Among the instruments used at these institutions were nationally available measures of academic achievement; critical thinking; and student experience,

engagement, and satisfaction. Interviewees reported that many other instruments used at their college or university were developed within the institution, including surveys of campus climate, student engagement, student satisfaction, and others.

Using Data from SLOs on Campus.

Our discussions with higher education officials indicated that more work is needed in assessing SLOs and using the data to inform substantive changes for better outcomes. Although our assessment leaders reported common methods for reporting the results of assessment activities, the impact and use of such information was in no way uniform across campuses or within any single campus (Table 7).

Many of the institutions we visited had no campuswide practice for the use of SLO data. In most cases, the use of assessment information depended on the program and faculty leadership at the local level. In a small number of cases, the individuals we interviewed could identify departments, programs, or individual faculty who made extensive use of assessment results and relied on learning-outcome data to do their work (Table 7). However, where the use of assessment results was a prominent activity on a campus and others were aware of it, interviewees reported that in some cases it was not motivating to everyone.

Expected Uses of SLO Assessments in the Future. All the higher education officials we interviewed had hopes and expectations for the future of SLO assessment on their campus. Most often, we heard a wish for an institutionalized system to drive change based on evidence (much like DDDM, Table 7). According to our interviewees, some campuses were moving toward the development of campuswide SLOs. One assessment director we interviewed said that he wished his campus faculty and administration would address the question: What should a graduate from our institution know and be able to do? Moreover, some of our interviewees noted that they would like to see every department and program on campus link their curriculum to relevant common SLOs as a means for developing a culture of evidence on campus. To that end, many interviewees also expressed the need to clarify roles in these efforts across campus, from presidents, deans, and department chairs to program coordinators, individual faculty, and others in integral positions found across institutions.

Table 6. Methods for Assessing Learning Outcomes among Minnesota Institutions of Higher Education

Sources of Coordination for Assessment Activities
The office of institutional research (primarily coordinates campuswide surveys and sampling of learning outcomes)
Faculty governance and a campus assessment committee (primarily coordinates program-level assessment activities)
The director of assessment (not commonly found on all campuses)
Models of Assessing Learning Outcomes
A “value-added” approach, evaluating change among students from first year to final year of studies
Program-specific achievement, summarizing performance in capstone courses (a culminating experience) or major program final projects
Classroom-specific achievement, summarizing performance in specific core courses within a program or field

Table 7. Impact of Measuring Learning Outcomes on Minnesota Campuses

Reports of SLOs on campus
Compiled summaries of SLO assessment activities for accreditation reports*
Made assessment results available to faculty through online resources
Summarized and reported assessment results directly to faculty and administrators in print format
Uses of SLO information
Redesign courses
Restructure or enhance curriculum and course offerings
Support grant writing
Identify new approaches to student services
Implement new academic and social services
Hopes for future improvements in the use of SLO information
Develop collegewide SLOs
Identify and train assessment leaders across campus
Create an environment that appreciates assessment
Focus on the value of the academic nature of assessment
Create peer-consulting program to support assessment development and use
Improve documentation and reporting of the impact of SLO activities
Disseminate exemplar models of uses of assessment results
Document improvements in instruction and learning campuswide

* Used by every institution in our sample

Summary. On each campus we visited, the assessment of learning outcomes was an important endeavor. The motivations for pursuing

assessment were many, with the common goal of improving outcomes for students. The articulation of common SLOs has been achieved on

some campuses and was a goal on each of the others. Campus assessment leaders were asking for stronger definitions regarding the roles of various individuals with responsibilities for the assessment of SLOs and stronger leadership on the use of assessment results in decision making throughout campus. The individuals with assessment responsibilities who spoke with us were all looking for ways to build these efforts seamlessly into the regular functions of the institution, to create a culture of assessment, evidence, informed decision making, and continuous improvement.

Securing the Success of All Minnesota Students: Pre-K through College (and Beyond)

In completing our studies, we identified many resources to support the DDDM work in P-12 schools and the assessment of student-learning outcomes in higher education, and reviewed a large body of literature on related topics. At the higher education level, the resources available to support the measurement of SLOs are relatively limited. However, what resources are available are useful. The literature is full of case-studies covering forms of assessment and data for school-based decision making, methods of analysis and reporting, and models for effective use of data. In fact, it is these three aspects of DDDM that most authors address: the collection, analysis, and use of data. At the same time, we found that the most common barriers for schools were based on lack of training or expertise to carry out these activities. Even if data were collected and analyzed, personnel in both P-12 schools and institutions of higher education of various sizes reported limited understanding of what to do with the data.

We do not argue that assessment of important student-learning outcomes is a panacea, but rather that it is a necessary part of securing the educational success of all Minnesota students in pre-K through higher education and beyond. We believe that all educators agree that assessment of learning outcomes is an important tool in evaluating and improving efforts as educators, and that informed decision making is superior to uninformed decision making. We also believe that not all assessments or assessment activities are useful, meaningful, or appropriate. In terms of identifying effective assessments, the educational-measurement field has provided a fair amount of

guidance through standards for testing and assessment at all levels. However, much of that guidance is inaccessible to untrained individuals, and, particularly at the higher education level, teachers, instructors, and faculty are not equally prepared to undertake the important role of assessment.

Policy and Practice Implications.

Many recommendations made directly by our P-12 and higher education interviewees, and many more that resulted from analyses of these discussions, could be used to shape education policy or practice. Clearly, educators at all levels are in need of high-quality data to improve their own performance and the outcomes of their students. However, this general goal has not been fully realized. Educators are motivated by both internal and external factors, but motivation is perhaps mostly enhanced by central leadership. Therefore, school and institutional leaders must step up to support the efforts of their educators. The preparation of school leaders must include strong training in DDDM and assessment in general. Similarly, teacher preparation programs must include aspects of DDDM as a core element of training and practice. Very few teacher preparation programs nationally include a full course on assessment, even though teachers engage in assessment-related activities on a daily basis. This need is no less important in institutions of higher education, where most faculty members have no formal training in instruction, let alone assessment. Campuses must provide ongoing support to faculty regarding assessment and opportunities for improving their instructional practice. In addition, an incentive structure must be in place in formal performance reviews to recognize efforts to improve instruction and assessment practice.

The nation and the state of Minnesota place a high degree of importance on educational outcomes at all levels. Unfortunately, the level of training, support, and recognition for exemplary practice in the areas of instruction and assessment are not commensurate given the high level of expectations. One simple way to begin to bridge the divide between expectations and practice is to provide opportunities to share models of practice, as well as opportunities for ongoing training and support. The Minnesota Department of Education and Office of Higher Education could provide additional leadership by gathering case-studies of exemplary practices and

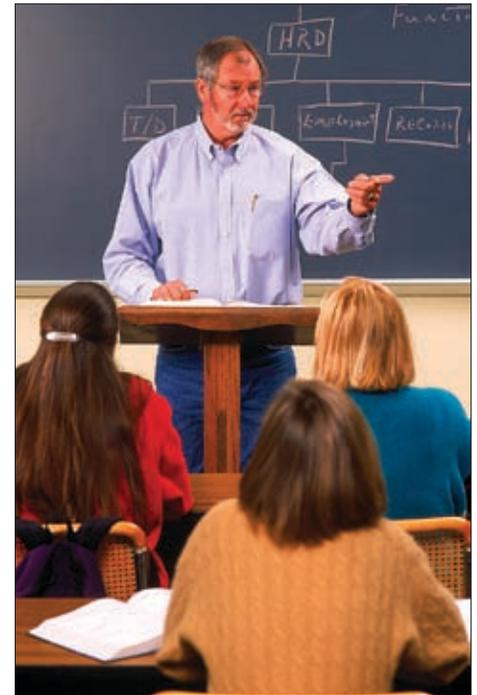


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Because most faculty have no formal training in instruction or assessment, campuses should provide ongoing support to faculty regarding assessment and opportunities for improving their instructional practice.

outcomes and making them available to others online. Throughout our interviews, educators frequently requested access to resources to support their work, and virtually all were interested in the outcomes of this research project.

Conclusions. Many aspects of our educational systems require attention and improvement. We argue that the most efficient way to approach such large-scale improvement is through informed decision making with high-quality data, including assessment results, that address important learning outcomes. Where these efforts have been undertaken with central leadership; coordination and support; resources and training; and public dissemination, review, and participation, the results have been impressive. At all levels of education, Minnesota continues to be a national leader. However, in these times of constrained resources and demands for greater accountability, we need to act decisively and fully participate as educators preparing future Minnesota citizens. Data-driven decision making and the assessment of student-learning outcomes are not just current buzzwords, but rather are important means to progress and to secure the success of all Minnesota students.

Assessing Student Achievement in Higher Education

Compared with P–12 schools, fewer resources regarding the collection of evidence of important outcomes are available for higher education institutions. Student academic performance at all levels took center stage in 1983 with the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s release of *A Nation at Risk*, a foreboding report that uncovered high rates of illiteracy and lower overall academic performance at a time when the demand for highly skilled workers was increasing rapidly. As a result, attention to the role of higher education in the nation’s progress in the world increased. College and university accreditation agencies began to require institutions to include student-learning goals and assessment plans to gather evidence of student academic achievement as part of the accreditation process. In 2005, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings commissioned a study of the future of higher education and called for institutions to be more affordable, accessible, and accountable. In 2007, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education produced the report *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*. Since the release of this report, higher education media have pursued its implications with compelling and alarming headlines, such as “The feds are coming! The feds are coming!,” “No college left behind,” “No graduate left behind,” and “A worldwide test for higher education?”

The current national discussion focuses on the “value added” by participation in a particular institution or program of study by assessing if students learned as a result of their enrollment in the institution. Educators are also debating what learning outcomes, which measure student progress resulting from participation in a program of study, are imperative in today’s world. A consensus is emerging through a series of reports by the nation’s higher education accreditation agencies, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), and other higher education associations that a few learning outcomes are key regardless of major or area of study (including knowledge of human culture and the natural world, intellectual and practical skills, and individual and social responsibility).¹

¹ Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Liberal Education Outcomes: A Preliminary Report on Student Achievement in College* (Washington, D.C.: AACU, 2005). www.aacu.org/advocacy/pdfs/leap_report_final.pdf

The Council of Higher Education Accreditation and AACU released an authoritative response to the Commission on the Future of Higher Education report in their statement *New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability*. They proposed six principles of meaningful educational accountability:

- ▶ The primary responsibility for achieving excellence falls on colleges and universities themselves.
- ▶ Each college and university should develop ambitious, specific, and clearly stated goals for student learning appropriate to its mission, resources, tradition, student body, and community setting.
- ▶ Each college and university should gather evidence about how well students in various programs are achieving learning goals across the curriculum and about the ability of its graduates to succeed in a challenging and rapidly changing world.
- ▶ Each college and university should provide information about its basic characteristics, clearly communicate its educational mission, and describe its strategies for achieving its educational goals and their effectiveness.
- ▶ Understanding that the federal government has a responsibility to see that its funds are properly used, we recognize the importance of its careful monitoring of expenditures of its funds and its reliance on independent accrediting organizations to encourage systematic improvement of educational results.
- ▶ As educational associations, we are committed to high standards for our institutions of higher education and their students.

The terms “standardized assessments” and “universal learning outcomes” are absent from this position statement. Many have suggested that the Commission on the Future of Higher Education report calls for common learning outcomes and common measures across institutions, but as we spoke with administrators and faculty at Minnesota colleges and universities, we found that learning outcomes are local and result from the unique mission and values of each institution.

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