Centering Equity in Assessment: Theories, Models and Practices

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Centering Equity in Assessment: Theories, Models and Practices
WMU Measures of Success
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The Hope Center
The Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University
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The Hope Center at Temple University

We are an action research center transforming higher education into a more effective, equitable, and impactful sector using a powerful combination of applied scientific research, technical assistance and educational training services to colleges and universities, policy advising with state and federal governments and agencies, and strategic communications.

We are located in the Department of Urban Health and Population Science in the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University.

We believe that students are humans first and that their basic needs are central conditions for learning.
Assumptions*

- We live in a dominant, colonized culture that affects us all.
- We have all internalized systemic racism (and all the other isms).
- Systemic oppression impacts privileged and marginalized peoples differently.
- Systemic oppression is woven into the fabric of our institutions and institutional practices – including higher education and assessment.
Assumptions*

• Not being aware of privilege, place, identity and their differential impacts causes harm.
• Awareness alone does not lead to action.
• We must notice, reflect and train to develop skillful action to alleviate, prevent and restore harm and live into communities of liberation and freedom.

Adapted from my teacher and friend, Michelle Cassandra Johnson (https://www.michellecjohnson.com/)
When you think of equity-minded or equity-centered assessment, research or evaluation, what comes to mind?
Context
Assessment, Research, Evaluation

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Defining Terms

**Research:** Generalizable knowledge, inquiry can be replicated, contribute to cumulative knowledge

**Evaluation:** Determining merit or worth of program; used by stakeholders for decision-making

**Assessment:** *Student learning* – what a person knows or can do. *Assessment process:* “Any effort to gather, analyze, interpret evidence which describes effectiveness” (Upcraft & Schuh)
The Assessment Cycle

1. Determine Outcomes
2. Consider Methods & Collect Data
3. Analyze Data
4. Use and Share Results
Assessment Landscape in Higher Education

• Changing student demographics/populations
• Accountability for Higher Education outcomes
• Focus on student learning outcomes
• Employability and marketable skills
• Real-time data for continuous improvement
• Retention, persistence, graduation (RPG) data alignment
• Use data to enable institution-specific insights through nuanced analyses
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>the fact or quality of being different (a <em>fact</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>including people from all groups (an <em>action</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>fairness and justice for all (an <em>intention</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>to act to foster a just society with fair and equitable treatment (an <em>intention + action</em>)</td>
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Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Landscape in Higher Education

• Changing demographics/populations
• Opportunity and access disparities
• Higher education as key pathway for social mobility
• Rise of the “chief diversity officer”
• Institutional commitment to promoting student body diversity and inclusion on campus
• Focus on inclusive campus climate
• Support services for historically and culturally marginalized students
Project Partners

- AAC&U
- AAHLE
- ACPA
- Assessment Institute
- CACUSS
- CAS
- NASPA
- NILOA
- SAAL
- Anthology

Survey Components

- Importance of Equity-Centered Assessment (ECA), Self-Reported Skills and Needed Supports
- Definition of ECA & Self-Reflection on Practice using Continuum
- Frequency of ECA Practices Used & Sharing of Practice/Impact of Practice
- Collaboration between DEI and Assessment Offices
- Demographics
Q1. How important is the intersection of equity, diversity, and inclusion and assessment practices to you?
Q5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I have the necessary background, training, and skills to conduct equality-centered assessment.
Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I have the support I need from my organization to conduct equity-centered assessment.
Higher Education: Campus Climate, Outcomes, Racial Injustice, Retention, Access, Student Basic Needs

Assessment

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Equity-Centered Assessment

Assessment Cycle

1. Determine Outcomes
2. Consider Methods & Collect Data
3. Analyze Data
4. Use and Share Results

CONTEXT: Societal Culture
Institutional Context
Assessor Positionality

IMPACT: Institutional Effectiveness
Student Learning
Societal Culture
Erick Montenegro and Natasha A. Jankowski

The first realization we came to was the profound impact that culture had on the process of assessment. Culture is the aggregate of values, beliefs, assumptions, languages, and behaviors of a group of people. These elements of culture impact every step of the assessment process from the design of assessment projects and questions through data analysis and interpretation. To perform effective assessment, we need to better understand how culture affects that work.
Rich History of Scholarship

- Responsive evaluation (Jackson, 1935)
- Culturally competent evaluation (Merryfield, 1985; Symonette, 2004; SenGupta et al., 2004)
- Feminist assessment (Shapiro, 1992; Brisolara & Whitmore, 2002)
- Inclusive evaluation (Mertens, 1999)
- Multicultural evaluation (Hopson, 2004)
- Culturally responsive evaluation (Hopson, 2009; Hood et al., 2015)
- Decolonizing assessment (La France & Nichols, 2010; Cram, 2016; Cushman, 2016; Nelson Barber & Trumbull, 2017)
- Bias-free assessment (Popham, 2012)
Rich History of Scholarship

- **Critical assessment** (DeLuca Fernandez, 2015; Heiser et al., 2017; Magnus, et al., 2018; Benjes-Small et al., 2019)
- **Socially just assessment** (McArthur, 2016; Dorimé-Williams, 2018; Henning & Lundquist, 2018; Zerquera et al., 2018)
- **Mindful assessment** (Watts, 2016; Consilio & Kennedy, 2019)
- **Culturally responsive assessment** (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017)
- **Culturally relevant assessment** (Singer-Freeman et al., 2019)
- **Anti-racist assessment** (Inoue, 2019)
- **Healing-centered assessment** (Jankowski, 2020)
- **Equity-centered assessment** (Lundquist & Henning, 2020, 2021; Henning et al., 2022)
Equity-Minded

- Equity-minded
  - Lens for assessment
  - Goal = equitable assessment

Equity-Centered

- Equity-centered
  - Focus of assessment
  - Goal = use assessment to further equity
Framework for Equity-Minded and Equity-Centered Assessment
(Lundquist & Henning, 2021)

EMERGING APPROACHES
Feminist Assessment
Healing-Centered Assessment
Mindful Assessment
Behavior
Language
Symbols
Attitudes
Patriarchy
White supremacy
Heternormativity
Cisgenderism

Systems of Power and Oppression
“Often, assessment follows non-justice based paradigms, serves neoliberal external mandates, and reflects research practices that further marginalize underserved students.”

Zerquera, Hernandez, and Berumen, 2018

Assessment and Social Justice: Pushing Through Paradox
Acknowledging Knowledge Systems

- What we know and how did we come to know it
- Parameters for what is considered knowledge
- The accepted ways to gather or generate knowledge (e.g., objectivity)
- Knowledge systems are cultural: “Certain ways of knowing oppress other ways of knowing” (Yunkaporta, Sand Talk)
Acknowledging Knowledge Systems

- “We are all the product of our worldviews - even scientists who claim pure objectivity.” (Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*)
- “English (language) inevitably places settler worldviews at the center of every concept, obscuring true understanding.” (Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*)
- Knowledge/information is the currency of assessment
- “Research [and assessment] is very much a colonial discourse.” (Martin, 2003)
“Western values implicitly guide approaches to every aspect of schooling, from academic content to the organization of classrooms, expected styles of speaking and interacting, instructional practices, and means of assessing student learning.”

Elise Trumbull & Sharon Nelson-Barber (2019)
The Ongoing Quest for Culturally-Responsive Assessment for Indigenous Students in the U.S.
Documenting institutional quality assurance through reporting frameworks

- Bureaucratic
- Laborious
- Time consuming
- Separated from teaching and learning
- Add on
- Accountability and quality assurance
- Reporting and archive
- Lots of data collection, minimal use

*Is assessment destroying the liberal arts? ~Karin Brown*
MEASUREMENT PARADIGM

Built upon scientific principles or empirical research, objective, rational, validity, and reliability

- Testing and standardization
- Must be measurable
- Goal driven
- Focused on process
- Interventions
- Comparisons

Equity is in disaggregation, same measures, and measure fairness
Accreditation/Program Review

External Review → Write Outcomes → Align Content → Assess Learning → Submit Reports

Equity is a box on the report or an additional question
Assessment, Research and Evaluation Methods and Procedures

Foundational Assumptions, Knowledge Systems, Philosophical Paradigms, Worldview, Culture, Structural Bias
AER is Not Free From Bias

- Planned and carried out by people
- Conducted within social institutions guided by norms, policies, assumptions and preferences
- Bias is inherently part of the process, because it is socially situated
- “We must learn how to expose, navigate, and/or dismantle oft-hidden, insidious, systemic, and institutionalized forces of oppression” (Bheda, “The Assessment Activist,” Reframing Assessment to Center Equity, p. 24)
Assessment...should be conceived as a practice that attends more fully to the social and political position that it occupies within institutions.

*Wall, Hursh, & Rodgers, 2014*
It is impossible to dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools.

What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the narrowest of parameters of change are possible and allowable.

Audre Lorde, 2007
“To be genuinely inclusive of all students requires more than simply their greater involvement in assessment. It requires questioning a myriad of taken for-granted assumptions about the nature and purposes of assessment....

Reforming assessment...involves changes not simply in our assessment practices but in how we understand our roles as assessors... and how we understand our relationships with our students.”

McArthur, J., 2017
Recognize, Disrupt, Reframe *Ourselves*
Throughout the assessment process, reflect on and articulate our own...

Positionality

Agency

Power
Ask Ourselves These Essential Questions

“How do I understand not only my assessment practices, but my role as an assessor?”

“What is my role in doing racial justice and decolonization work?”
Transformational Assessment

- Explore and engage your worldview, biases, and cultural assumptions
- Investigate and discuss who decides, who benefits from assessment
- Confront emphases on procedures and methods
- Consider how value is attached to what is measured
- Discuss and critique how meaning is attached to data, results
- Recognize and address the extent to which assessment work prevents social justice and structural transformations

Dr. Sonja DeLuca Fernandez
Associate Vice Provost for Educational Equity
The Pennsylvania State University
Become an Equity Inquirer

- Ground in history: Who designed the systems that we are straining under? Who benefits the most? Who is bearing the brunt of system failure en masse?
- Listen to those most impacted: Who in our communities are being most impacted right now? Are we asking the people most affected what they need? Are we willing to put their ideas and voices at the center?
- Advocate for radical change: Can we offer solutions beyond the status quo? Can we do more than tinker around the edges?
- Build and iterate: How can we test our ideas and iterate quickly?

Adapted from The Equity Lab: https://www.theequitylab.org/blog/lets-not-go-back
An Aware Assessor...

- Explores and engages their worldview, biases, and cultural assumptions
- Adopts an inquisitive, compassionate approach to their own growth and self-awareness
- Actively engages in learning from and with others different from themselves
- Recognizes and addresses the extent to which assessment work prevents social justice and structural transformations
- Sits with their own discomfort
- Places a pause when more inclusion, dialogue or reflection is needed
- Moves into wise action informed by deep wisdom that is greater than one’s own experience and knowledge
Centering Equity in Assessment Requires Equity Pauses

1. **Awareness**: How does identity, power, privilege and positionality impact thinking and actions? What are our blindspots and biases?

2. **Acknowledgement**: How are we acknowledging and including the cultural context (societal, higher education, institutional)?

3. **Inclusion, Voice & Relationship**: Who are we not hearing from and why? Where and how are those most harmed or impacted (and those whose voices and perspectives have been marginalized or silenced) included? Where and how can we involve students?

4. **Process and Practice**: Who decides and who benefits from assessment processes and results?

5. **Goals**: Are we moving toward more and/or improved equity or away from it?

Adapted from Equity Pause Questions from Public Design for Equity
Recognize, Disrupt, Reframe Systems and Practices
Equity-Centered Assessment, Evaluation, Research

- Methodological diversity
- Context specific
- Agency, voice, power (assessors/researchers; participants; those impacted; decision-makers)
- Critical lenses – systems, power, oppression, privilege
- Inquiry, reflection
- Healing and repairing harm
Principles for Creating Equity by Design
Center for Urban Equity, USC

**Principle 1:** Clarity in language, goals, and measures is vital to effective equitable practices.

**Principle 2:** ‘Equity-mindedness’ should be the guiding paradigm for language and action.

**Principle 3:** Equitable practice and policies are designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of student’s learning—not to treat all students the same.

**Principle 4:** Enacting equity requires a continual process of learning, disaggregating data, and questioning assumptions about relevance and effectiveness.

**Principle 5:** Equity must be enacted as a pervasive institution- and system-wide principle
Rethink SLOs

• Driven by the values of the institution (therefore, not neutral) and sometimes "constrained by tortuous bureaucratic processes" (McArthur, 2016)

• Reflect on what is expected and what constitutes "learning"

• Evaluate the language used in the SLOs for bias, cultural assumptions, relevance to various student populations – include many stakeholders

• Include students in writing SLOs
STUDENT-CENTERED

Focused on the student and their individual learning, self-reflection, and transference of learning.

- Co-create assignments
- Joint Problem Solving with Student
- Shift in power differential
- Students put forward demonstrations of their learning
- Students are aware of and understand the curriculum intent and structure
- Language in learning outcomes is student friendly
"If we write learning outcomes statements for and with students, we increase the chances of students understanding what is expected of them. In addition, instead of students' knowledge conforming to how we traditionally measure it, students would now have agency in how to demonstrate learning."

Montenegro & Jankowski (2017, p. 12)
Including students in the assessment process is beneficial. When students are included, they feel a sense of belonging and are better able to assist with improvement plans for various units that will benefit the student body.

Dr. Kellie M. Dixon, Ph.D.
Director of Student Affairs
Assessment and Staff Development
North Carolina A&T
"Closely related to the framing of questions or statements of desired learning is the matter of what will be accepted as trustworthy evidence in formulating answers. Conversations among stakeholders may reveal different perspectives on what 'counts' as credible evidence."

Hood, Hopson, and Kirkhart, 2015, p. 294
Portland State University: Diversity in Demonstrations of Learning

“Equitable assessment practice includes space for all students and faculty to participate in ways that are meaningful to them and that are grounded in an appreciation of their strengths and in the understanding that it is assessment’s job to find ways to support them in improvement. At its best, equitable assessment processes consider multiple pieces of evidence of student learning, ideally curated by the student so that their understanding of their learning is part of the assessment process. Equitable assessment seeks to understand whether there are groups of students who may be underserved by the institution and takes into account multiple intersecting identities whenever possible.”

1. Adopt principles of universal design because not all students are able to show their learning in the same way.
2. Consider role of eportfolios in reflecting upon and building the case for different examples including from inside and outside the classroom.
3. Disaggregate data by subgroups and intersections of subgroups
"Beyond the tools or instruments themselves, the procedures surrounding their use must also be responsive to cultural context. This applies equally to the collection of qualitative and quantitative data."

_Hood, Hopson, and Kirkhart, 2015, p.295_
Collecting Data

- Examine and evaluate language for bias (implicit or explicit), inclusion, signals of “normalcy” or homogeneity, and supportive identity orientation.
- For standardized surveys, examine the theory supporting the survey.
- Use qualitative methods
- Consider multiple methods
- Triangulate findings for robust and dynamic reporting.
Capital University: Campus Climate through Critical Race Theory

Use a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework for examining questions, in this case, about climate. “By utilizing this framework, we went into the approach not assuming that the climate was already equitable for all students, but instead asked the following questions.

1. What are the actual experiences of students of color?
2. Do students of color have different experiences than White students?
3. Are students’ perceptions of diversity and inclusion different by race?

Each of the five tenets of CRT informed methodology including: (1) permanence of racism, (2) counter-storytelling, (3) critique of liberalism, (4) interest conversion, and (5) Whiteness as property (Hiraldo, 2010).
Data do not speak for themselves; they are given voice by those who interpret them.

Hood, Hopson, and Kirkhart, 2015, p. 296
Analyze Data

- Engage stakeholders in interpretation and reporting to ensure the results are representative of the voices that matter, bias is mitigated, and any deficit orientated language can be more readily identified, removed, and re-written.

- Include data for students from small populations
Analyze Data

- Engage in multiple types of data analysis (e.g., within group and across group analysis).
- Look beyond frequencies and means.
- When comparing across groups, do not hold the White student experiences as the benchmark for comparison.
- Disaggregate data by populations.
Analyzing Small Populations

• Groups experience higher education differently, some groups are small
• Experience of small populations can be lost in aggregate results
• Not studying small populations can further marginalize often-marginalized groups

• Who are the small populations you want to know more about on your campus?
• Percent differences and descriptive analyses are legitimate forms of analysis.

Dr. Jillian Kinzie, Keynote address at New England College Assessment Conference 2020
The ways these data are analyzed and interpreted are important. We encourage you to be conscious of the ways our work may perpetuate problematic and limited understandings of already marginalized groups. In this guide we offer a few tips to consider for more inclusive data sharing and analysis.

Tip 1. Disaggregate your data
Survey data such as NSSE can be used to broadly assess the experiences of students in a way that is efficient and accessible. Examining your institution’s results overall and drilling down to disciplinary or departmental subgroups can quickly give you an overview of students’ common experiences. There is a danger, however, in relying on the results of the “average” student. An average student is likely reflective of an institution’s majority populations, and an overreliance on examining the experiences of our average students likely hides the experiences of more vulnerable populations.

One of the easiest ways to be more inclusive in analyses is to disaggregate your data as aggregated data can mask the variation of experiences within your institution. In your NSSE data files, you will have the ability to disaggregate based on a variety of subgroups including:

- Identity characteristics (racial/ethnic identification, gender identity, sexual orientation, first-generation status, veteran status, diagnosed disabilities or impairments, etc.)
- Student characteristics (transfer status, major or major field, class level, enrollment status, taking courses online, grades, educational aspirations, living situation, etc.)
- Engagement characteristics (participation in high-impact practices, student athlete membership, fraternity or sorority membership, time spent studying, participation in co-curricular activities, etc.)
- The intersection of these and other characteristics

You might also consider incorporating important subgroups specific to your institution in your NSSE population file as a grouping variable which is then returned to you in your data file. Contact your Project Services Team for more details.

Tip 2. Pay attention to small populations
Those interested in disaggregating survey data such as NSSE typically encounter subpopulations with small numbers of respondents. This could be due to a variety of reasons such as a low response rate, a small population from which to elicit responses, or data collection methods that make subpopulation respondents difficult to contact (e.g., inviting respondents with rarely-checked email addresses) or create difficulties for subpopulations to respond (e.g., low access to technology for an online survey).
Avoid Reductionist Approach—Include Many Voices
Share and Use Results

- Get feedback from stakeholders on report before release
- Consider who has the power to determine if results are valid and accurate and how data reports and summaries will be written and shared.
- Actionable findings can serve as an opportunity to advance equity.
Act on Equity Findings

The authentic exercise of equity and equity-mindedness requires explicit attention to structural inequity and institutionalized racism and demands system-changing responses.

Dr. Estella Bensimon
Director and Professor of Higher Education
Center for Urban Education
University of Southern California

Wake Forest University: Professional Development and Awareness

Campus life assessment committee reviewed theory and practice in equitable assessment to increase awareness and implementation of equitable assessment practices.

The Assessment Committee has an Equity and Research subcommittee that advances efforts around equity-minded assessment. Projects include regular research on and revision of best practices in demographics collection, review of measures for equitable and inclusive language, review of survey sampling and recruitment practices, and providing support for conducting and interpreting disaggregated data analyses.

The Campus Life Assessment Committee sponsors regular Data Dives where participants have an opportunity to dig deeper into an assessment project. Data Dive presentations involve disaggregating data across demographics or other variables, highlighting the need to understand problems from an equity lens increasing awareness of assessment projects and methods for understanding the differential impact of programs across diverse perspectives and identities.
Assessment as Social Justice

- Cannot understand students’ experience without understanding the systems of oppression that they live in
- Uncover and examine biases in the assessment process and then determine how we ensure culturally responsive and socially just assessment
- Intentional shift from implementing assessment to using assessment to deconstruct systems of oppression by first exposing them
- Assessment shouldn’t be transactional or procedural—it should be transformational
Student basic needs insecurity fast facts

Three in five students experience basic needs insecurity while in college.

Nearly half of students experience some form of housing insecurity.

We find that over half of students experiencing basic needs insecurity did not apply for support because they did not know how.
Hope Impact Partnerships (HIP)

Student basic needs survey

Data dashboard

Training & advocacy
The Hope Center Student Basic Needs Survey

- Accessing Transportation & Technology
- Use of Public Benefits
- Use of Campus Supports
- Barriers to Accessing Supports
- Likelihood of Mental Health Support Utilization
- Experiences with Accessing Mental Health Services
- Experiences with Childcare
Using the Data to Support Students

- Documenting Students' Experiences
- Advocating for Resources, Policies
- Writing & Submitting Grant Applications
- Creating Resource Guides for Students, Stakeholders
- Developing Partnerships
"Getting an education is great. I have learned a ton. Yet this has not come without hardships. It is hard to find housing, let alone affordable housing. It is hard to concentrate when you are undernourished. ... Jobs and research positions are competitive. Pay is poor. ... I have no idea how to pay off the loans I am accruing. The price of tuition alone is a joke. ... Campus is inaccessible to people who require wheelchairs or other physical aids. ... There are no vegetarian options for dining and the dining halls close sporadically. ... Still, when my car broke down, I walked a mile each way to get groceries and could only buy what I could carry back across campus in one trip. I did this for over a month. Thank you for doing this survey. Much change is needed."
Equity in Survey Administration

- Center equity at each stage of the planning process
  - Survey communication
  - Promotion
  - Incentives

- Reach out to partners across campus who serve diverse student groups to solicit advice
  - Ask students too!
Equity in Data Use

- Data Dashboard offering disaggregation by:
  - Race/ethnicity, Gender, LGBTQIA+ identification
  - Pell grant status, Enrollment status
  - Parenting status, BNI status

- Partnerships to aggregate data, elevate voices of minoritized communities
Equity-Centered Assessment

At its core, equity-centered assessment calls for those who lead and participate in assessment activities to pay attention and be conscious of how assessment can either feed into cycles that perpetuate inequities or can serve to bring more equity into higher education.
Equity in Assessment is not an Afterthought

“Addressing issues of equity may involve some uncomfortable, challenging and courageous conversations and discussions. Equity data-informed discussions have the power to foster progress.”

Dr. Jillian Kinzie, Associate Director of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Institute
Join the Conversation

- Talk with a colleague
- Partner with others at your institution
- Share your ideas and practices
- Publish your work
- Gather and share resources with others
What ideas resonate with you?

What equity-centered practices are you already engaging in?

What practices or approaches do you want to begin?
Anne Lundquist
Anne.Lundquist@temple.edu

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