Culture of Assessment at North Carolina State University

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North Carolina State University (NCSU or NC State) is a research-focused, land-grant, and public university (North Carolina State University [NCSU], 2013) located in Raleigh, North Carolina. NCSU is fully committed to fostering a culture of assessment and utilizes the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) Transparency Framework to ensure that processes of assessment are demonstrated in a clear manner (NCSU, 2021a; National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment [NILOA], 2011). A culture of assessment is necessary, "in order to: make better decisions, advocate for our institution, continue to improve our institution, and prepare for accreditation" (Penn State University [PSU], n.d., p. 2)

Elements that are Present that Foster a Culture of Assessment

Commitment to Transparency

It is clear that NCSU is committed to fostering a culture of assessment. Evidence of this can be observed by their commitment to NILOA's website "transparency challenge" (NCSU, 2021a; NILOA, 2011, p. 1). This challenge requires participating institutions to provide updated, intuitive access to information regarding the six components of NILOA's transparency framework shown in the figure below (NILOA, 2011, p. 2).

NCSU's Division of Academic and Student Affairs follows NIOLA's transparency framework to ensure access to evidence of student accomplishments is readily available so it can be used in a meaningful way.

Long-term Commitment to Assessment

Furthermore, NCSU reports that "a goal of the NC State Strategic Plan 2011 – 2020 is to *enhance organization[al] excellence by creating a culture of constant improvement*" through promoting "a culture of assessment, growth, change, and adaptation" (NCSU, 2021a, para. 1). The integration of assessment into the university's 9-year strategic plan is proof that assessment efforts do not only occur for a brief period, "shortly before an accreditation review that [dies] immediately thereafter" but rather reflect a culture of assessment valuing longevity and transparency (Suskie, 2009, p. 73).

Mitigating Sources of Resistance

NC State's website clearly and concisely introduces what NIOLA's transparency framework is, why it has been adopted, what they hope to accomplish by using the framework, and access to more information about the framework. This further supports NCSU's commitment to fostering a culture of assessment through addressing and countering potential "sources of resistance" such as what value and importance assessment has and why it is not something to be feared (Suskie, 2009, p. 70).

Components of the Framework are Considered Individually

The strongest supporting evidence for NCSU's commitment to fostering a culture of assessment is that each component of NILOA's transparency framework has been extracted and listed in a visually pleasing, informative, and accessible way as seen in the screen captures of the webpage below (NCSU, 2021a).

Click the hexagons below to learn how NC State's assessment process fulfills each section of the Transparency Framework:

Student Learning Outcomes Statements — View student learning outcomes statements for Undergraduate Academic Programs Assessment, General Education Competency Assessment, and DASA Assessment.

Current Assessment Activities — View current assessment activities for Undergraduate Academics Assessment, General Education Competency Assessment, and DASA Assessment.

Assessment Plans — View assessment plans for Undergraduate Academic Programs Assessment, General Education Competency Assessment, and DASA Assessment.

Evidence of Student Learning — View evidence of student learning in Undergraduate Academics, General Education Competencies, and DASA Assessment.

Assessment Resources — View assessment resources including templates, information on methods, and relevant theory.

Use of Student Learning Evidence — View uses of student learning evidence in Undergraduate Academics, General Education Competencies, and DASA Assessment.

Each of the hexagons are color-coordinated to match the corresponding hexagon in NILOA's transparency framework that is published at the top of the webpage. Additionally, each hexagon has an embedded hyperlink that will bring the reader to the corresponding webpage that contains a more thorough introduction to the category and easy access to relevant data (NCSU, 2021a).

Recommendations to Leadership

Sustaining a Culture of Assessment

According to Wendy Weiner (2009) "there are fifteen major elements contributing to a true culture of assessment" so naturally, it is unlikely that an institution can sustain excellence within each element (PSU, n.d., p. 2). Fortunately, NCSU's assessment efforts and commitment to transparency are supported by all levels of leadership from the University of North Carolina Governing Board, to NC State's President and Provost, to their faculty and staff (NCSU, 2021a; University of North Carolina Governing Board, n.d.). I recommend that leadership should be

conscious of rewarding and valuing these efforts and avoid becoming complacent by expecting them to continue without due recognition or reward.

For example, before a new program can be established or an existing program can be grown, an application must be submitted to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost reporting on various aspects of how the program will contribute both meaningful and measurable evidence of student learning (NCSU, n.d.). This requires all faculty and staff involved in growing a program to also engage meaningfully with institution-wide assessment measures. It also ensures that assessment efforts are timely and updated as the institution enhances program offerings. Faculty and staff are incentivized for carefully reporting their proposed program's potential for supporting assessment by receiving permission and resources to establish a program (Suskie, 2009). These rewards are vital to maintaining a culture of assessment with large faculty buy-in.

A culture of assessment can also be supported through, "valu[ing] innovation and risk taking, especially in improving teaching and learning" (Suskie, 2009, p. 71). According to NCSU's 2018-19 operating expenditures and its 2020-21 projected operating expenditures, there is a huge proportion of money allocated to academic/student support, instruction, and organized research (NCSU, 2021b). This suggests that NCSU already values and financially supports improvements in teaching and learning. Therefore, I suggest that leaders create a clear application process, similar to that of establishing a new program that asks strategic questions to indicate the potential for collecting assessment data and evidence of student learning. This will strengthen the culture of assessment at the institution while also providing concrete incentives to faculty and staff's potential innovative improvements to teaching and learning.

Finally, it is not immediately obvious how students can become involved in the assessment process, so updating the website with information that could direct interested

students in ways they could contribute to assessment would be a helpful way to strengthen the culture of assessment at NCSU. Along the same lines, there could be additional information about faculty and staff's opinions regarding the effectiveness of the assessment measures currently being used. For example, the school makes it clear that they spend a substantial amount of money to support improvements in teaching and learning, but does this effort effectively address and improve teaching and learning?

Continued support and commitment to assessment is vital to maintaining and growing this culture. All in all, NC State certainly values assessment and is committed to constant improvement through the use of best assessment practices. Surely, their goals for data-supported improvement will soon be a reality!

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