Culture of Assessment Matrix
Kimberly Walker, Ph.D.

Abstract: The Culture of Assessment Matrix (Appendix A) is a one-page rubric intended to provide institutions of higher education with a simplistic way to quickly gauge the status of their institution's assessment culture and the degree to which the culture is an integral part of the institution's operations, expectations, methods of accountability, and reward systems. While the notion of ascertaining assessment culture in higher education is not novel, the ability to do so quickly and without the expense of surveys and consultants is novel to the degree to which it is largely inaccessible to most institutions unless there are dedicated institutional assessment staff available on the campus. Consultants and dedicated staff can be a cost-prohibitive asset that is not necessary for all college campuses. With that being stated, the Culture of Assessment Matrix requires no more than dedicated professionals who can assess their institution with a critical eye and willingness to improve (Appendix B).

Background

The key components of an institutional culture of assessment have been defined and accepted (Banta, 2002; Fuller, 2013; Maki, 2010). Traditionally, culture of assessment has been explored through the lens of academic program assessment as it relates to student learning (Suskie, 2004); however, the culture of assessment is now being more broadly defined as institutions of higher learning are meeting the new accountability standards of data driven decision making (Walker, 2018). This means that institutions of higher learning can borrow some of the key components of foundational cultural assessment for academic programs and empower faculty and staff to work on assessment, make assessment relevant, provide opportunities to learn about assessment, and increase flexibility regarding assessment activities (Suskie, 2004). This process helps to set clear expectations and broaden assessment activities to include functional units such as Human Resources, Cashier's Office, and Admissions.

The broadening assessment culture moving beyond academic assessment means the inclusion of strategic planning, assessment, institutional effectiveness, and regional accreditation in a manner that is fluid, inclusive, and continuously evolving. The process of including strategic development, policy development, and institutional effectiveness in academic assessment processes is not novel (Gannon-Slater, Ikenberry, Jankowsi & Kuh, 2014) nor is the measurement thereof. However, the aggregation and collation of related theories in a practical manner have been intermittent. The *New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability* states, in part, that "Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change" (2012). The inherently interwoven nature of successful cultures of assessment can be fully recognized if access to the information, measurements, and expectations are outlined in a manner that is simplistic, easy to read, and utilized on a continual basis for improvement.

Creating a culture of assessment is a natural aspect of strategic planning processes that require accountability, continuous improvements efforts, and opportunities for reflection (Baker, Jankowski, Provezis, & Kinzie, 2012). When the strategic planning is clear, data centered, and supported by administrative leadership (Gannon-Slater, Ikenberry, Jankowski, & Kuh, 2014), the evolution of a culture of assessment is a logical next step that is not guaranteed. The culture of assessment must be intentionally created and supported, but this is easier to accomplish when the infrastructure is in place to encourage the growth of this mindset. Moreover, the recognition of the culture of assessment as a mindset is integral to success because it helps to bring attention to the fact that there is an associated set of ideas and assumptions regarding assessment on every campus that will either need to be challenged or adjusted (Bolman & Deal, 2008) when instituting this particular model for a culture of assessment.

This mindset must be addressed in a manner that recognizes the traditional interpretations of cultures of assessment. These traditional interpretations include the notion that a core group of interested faculty and staff conduct assessment (usually accreditation) related activities in a vacuum while the remainder of a campus community continues with 'business as usual' (Ennis, 2010). The aforementioned would not be considered a Culture of Assessment based on the desired outcomes of the forthcoming Culture of Assessment Matrix. The utilization of this tool will focus on aspects that are embedded in the daily processes of every unit, academic program, and division on campus. It will no longer be a set of activities, a series of data collection, collation, and stagnant reports (Ennis, 2010). This process strives to avoid engaging in the tradition of unnecessary conversations regarding whether assessment or assessment culture is useful, meaningful, or appropriate (Baas, Rhoads, & Thomas, 2016)

which is commonly referred to as the "Culture War."

In the realm of assessment and institutional effectiveness, the value of a rubric is touted and reiterated often as it relates to the measurement of student learning (Chowdhury, 2019) and evaluating program assessment plans (Bresciani, 2004). However, the same support for a rubric has not been fully applied to the work within the field when attempting to recognize, quantify, and improve assessment efforts on individual campuses. The value of the rubric should be brought into the realm of identifying, improving, and implementing cultures of assessment. What this entails will vary from campus to campus and will require a concerted effort to develop into a useful tool.

Theoretical Foundation

Following Fuller's model for a culture of assessment, the rubric should either directly or indirectly indicate the following: (a) Shared Institutional Commitment; (b) Clear Conceptual Framework for Assessment; (c) A Cross Institutional Responsibility; (d) Transparency of Findings; (e) Connection to Change-Making Processes; and (f) Recognition of Leadership Involvement in Assessment (Fuller, 2013). Fuller's model takes assessment past the step where most institutions cease the episodic process of reporting out the results. The model undergirds the process of *closing the loop* by drawing attention to the updates, changes, and adjustments made to processes within an institution based on that data.

Fuller's model is based upon a survey titled "Survey of Assessment Culture" that was extended to 917 randomly sampled institutions. Three-hundred and sixteen institutions responded to Fuller's survey. The Survey of Assessment Culture focused on why assessment was completed on a given campus and whether key leadership groups on campus where supportive, resistant, or indifferent. The respondents indicated that the primary reason

for conducting campus-wide assessment efforts were for the improvement of student learning followed by accreditation and accountability. Although some respondents reported compliance with government mandates (1.2% of respondents) and tradition (8% of respondents) as reasons for their assessment efforts, they were far fewer than those who reported improving student learning (49% of respondents), accountability (8.4%), and accreditation (40.6% of respondents).

Fuller's survey subsequently asks participants to identity the degree to which specific groups of campus leadership were supportive of assessment efforts. The groups were each rated as *Supportive, Resistant,* or *Indifferent/Unaware* of campus assessment activities. The groups were (a) Board of Trustee Members, (b) President, (c) Provost, (d) Faculty, (e) Student Affairs Administrators, (f) Faculty Senate Leaders, (g) Fundraising/Development Officers, (h) Alumni Groups, (i) Academic Advisors, and (j) Student Government Leaders. Of the groups that were rated, the campus President (91.6%), Provost (90.6%), and Student Affairs Administrators (88.5%) received the greatest percentage of *Supported*. Conversely, Faculty (22.9%) and Faculty Senate Leaders (17%) received relatively high percentages of *Resistant*. Alumni Groups (69.5%), Student Government Leaders (49.3%) and Fundraising/Development Offices (42.9%) reported the highest percentages of those who were *Indifferent/Unaware*.

The Survey of Assessment Culture is intended to initiate campus dialogue, provide quantitative data regarding institutional cultures of assessment, provide a framework for culture of assessment, and highlight similarities and differences regarding how various campuses implement assessment activities on their campuses (Survey of Assessment Culture, 2020). Since Fuller's initial publication, the Survey of Assessment Culture has become a widely

accepted instrument for measuring institutions' assessment cultures. South Dakota State University utilized Fuller's Academic and Student Affairs Culture of Assessment surveys in 2016 to begin improving the university's assessment processes and began a integrate assessment across the institution beginning with academic and student affairs units (Helling, 2016). Ultimately, this process led to the creation of a campus wide assessment academy that supported the institution's quality initiatives.

Culture of Assessment Matrix

With Fuller's model in mind, the Culture of Assessment Matrix integrates five core components of institutional effectiveness that should be addressed within an institution if there is intention of ongoing continuous improvement efforts. The five core components are (a) Administrative Leadership, (b) Faculty Liaisons, (c) Resources, (d) Technological Infrastructure, and the (e) 50,000-Foot View, and they ensure accountability across the institution and require that all stakeholders buy-in and actively participate to the fullest extent of their ability.

Administrative Leadership

The support of administrative leadership is important in the success of all institutional effectiveness efforts. Administrative leaders often have multiple tasks, stakeholders, and constituencies to consider when crafting the best outcomes for their given institution. Inherent to this process is that of the Leader as Planner. Although the administrators may not perform day-to-day tasks, it is a commonly held belief that planning processes are integral to the success of any leadership (Burns, 1978) and has been a demonstrable aspect of ongoing success in multiple arenas that include higher education.

Faculty Liaisons

Faculty Liaisons are central to institutional efforts in that they act as a conduit between institutional assessment offices and the work

performed within classrooms to not only educate students, but also be able to prove the educational processes are taking place (Walker, 2018). The faculty are the foremost stakeholder in academic program assessment (Higher Education Quality, 2016) and the Faculty Liaisons provide perspective, information, and opportunity for institutions to ensure that this viewpoint is appropriately integrated across the university's assessment efforts that are both academic and non-academic.

Resources

Resources are necessary to lead, support, and continue successful institutional effectiveness efforts. Arguably, the most important resource is that of human capital. Ensuring that the individuals seeking to improve the institution (beyond institutional effectiveness staff) are knowledgeable of assessment best practice requires that the organization invest in training, education, and collaboration. This is referred to as "assessment literacy" (Davies & Taras, 2018).

Technological Infrastructure

The technological infrastructure is an aspect of institutional effectiveness that requires close collaborative efforts with an organization's information technology and institutional research teams. Without the appropriate technological infrastructure, teams can spend excessive amounts of time collating and aggregating data within systems that are not designed to perform those specific tasks. The technological infrastructure can also be resource intensive and require institutions to prioritize budget related costs.

50,000-Foot View

The 50,000 Foot View is a colloquial term that suggests that the appropriate level of involvement with program or unit level assessment is one of high-level review for institutional effectiveness staff at a given institution. Once processes have been appropriately implemented and continually

utilized, the goal of the institutional effectiveness team should be one of best-practice and intermittent help as needed. When considering the five core components of the Culture of Assessment Matrix (Administrative Leadership, Faculty Liaisons, Resources, Technological Infrastructure, and the 50,000-Foot View) they should be considered equally integral to the success of an institution's culture of assessment. If one component is under-developed or ignored, the rest of the components are hindered as well. Therefore, the Culture of Assessment Matrix provides a quick visual aid that helps to guide the thinking and the focus of those who wish to improve their institution's overall effectiveness while intentionally building the Culture of Assessment that is proven to focus attention and resources towards sustaining the institution.

Application of the Culture of Assessment Matrix
In September of 2019, the Culture of Assessment Matrix was presented to a group of assessment, institutional effectiveness, and institutional research professionals at the Southern Association for Institutional Research (SAIR). SAIR offers an annual conference for member states that include Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland. The conference presentation titled "Culture of Assessment Matrix Development" sought to (a) recognize the importance of the five core components of institutional effectiveness when determining a college or university's Culture of Assessment, (b) obtain a basic understanding of the rubric rating system and how each area of the rubric indicates the level of assessment integration, (c) help attendees determine their institutions' current level of integrated assessment, and (d) assist attendees in planning a path forward regarding assessment culture within their institutions (Walker, 2019). Twenty-three institutional representatives attended the conference session with eighteen

of those using the laminated placard of the Culture of Assessment Matrix to indicate where they believed their institution was operating for each of the five core components (Table 1). Upon discussion, institutional representatives indicated that the Culture of Assessment Matrix provided sufficient direction for application of the rubric and the absence of assessment specific jargon proved to be an asset when attempting to apply the rubric beyond the conference proceedings. Moreover, thirteen of the attendees followed-up via email to receive a digital copy of the matrix to continue application of the rubric on their individual campuses.

Table 1

Institutional Representative Initial Reporting of Institution Stage

	Currently Unaddressed	Discussion Phase	Implementation Stage – early	Implementation Stage – Advanced	Fully Integrated	Total
Administrative Leadership	0	12	4	2	0	18
Faculty Liaisons	3	4	4	5	1	17
Resources	2	6	3	6	0	17
Technological Infrastructure	2	6	5	1	2	16
50,000-Foot View	4	4	4	4	1	17

Institutional representatives indicated that most of their institutions (Table 1) where either in the Discussion Phase or Implementation Stage – Early for each of the five core components. Moreover, very few reported full integration in any category. Technological Infrastructure received the highest number of Fully Integrated with two campuses reporting that their institutions had appropriate data systems and IT support, access to data, and user-friendly data. Of the institutions that were represented, the 50,000-Foot View had the most even distribution with campuses reporting equally across the matrix except for Fully Integrated. Administrative Leadership presented the most skewed of all five core components, with twelve of the eighteen representatives reporting their institutions to be in the Discussion Phase.

Next Steps

Given the small sample size, the Culture of Assessment Matrix would benefit from a larger application to colleges and universities outside of the SAIR region. Also, the sample of institutional representatives constitute a group of professionals who are likely to be more invested assessment culture. The intent of the Culture of Assessment Matrix is to provide a tool that can be utilized by institutional representatives across an institution. Providing opportunities for non-assessment professionals to use and review the Culture of Assessment Matrix could impact where intuitions report their current progress.

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Appendix A

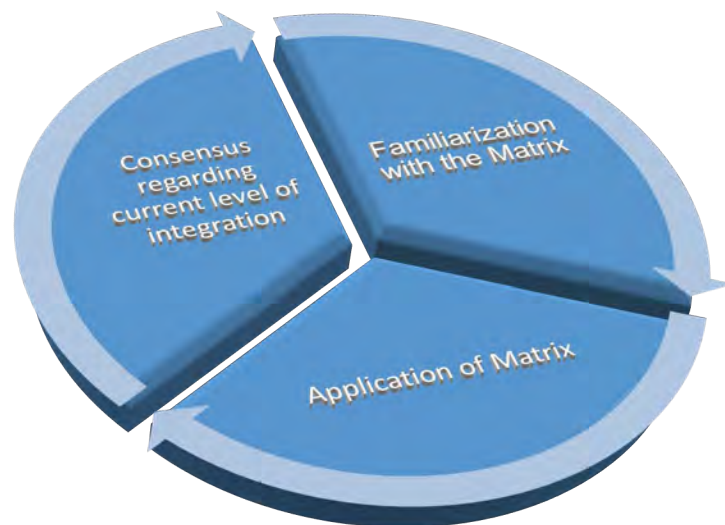|	CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT MATRIX				
	Currently Unaddressed (0)	**Discussion Phase (1)**	**Implementation Stage – Early (2)**	**Implementation Stage – Advanced (3)**	**Fully Integrated (4)**
Administrative Leadership	• There have been no campus wide initiatives or communications regarding continuous improvement nor the need for the utilization of data for decision-making	• Recognition of the need for data to be utilized for continuous improvement • Formation of a task-force, committee, or fact-finding committee of diverse individuals across the campus community	• Clear messaging from the President/Chancellor and administrative leaders of the organization regarding the expectation and importance of continuous improvement • Notable attempts to institute campus-wide efforts which may include the usage of consultants and shared expectations of data usage for improvement • Actionable plans from a task-force, committee, or fact-finding group	• Clear messaging from the President/Chancellor and administrative leaders of the organization regarding the expectation and importance of continuous improvement • Institutional emphasis on continuous improvement for academic programs and functional units (Financial Aid, Enrollment Services, Facilities, Human Resources, etc) • Implementation of continuous improvement efforts across the institution with the expectation of accountability and continuity	• Clear messaging from the President/Chancellor and administrative leaders of the organization regarding the expectation and importance of continuous improvement • Institutional emphasis on continuous improvement for academic programs and functional units (Financial Aid, Enrollment Services, Facilities, Human Resources, etc) • Utilization of data for resource allocation and institutional decisions • The focus of the process is continuous improvement. Process is not focused on external factors such as regional accreditors, rankings, or politics
Faculty Liaisons	• No campus-wide efforts to meaningfully involve faculty in any institution level assessment efforts outside of required plans and reports for external accreditors.	• Faculty are aware of the expectations regarding involvement and leadership of academic program assessment efforts.	• Faculty are involved with leading and improving academic program assessment efforts across the campus which include general education • Faculty are aware of expectations regarding involvement with the assessment of functional units	• Appointed faculty lead all academic assessment processes on campus including general education and academic program assessment • Faculty sit on committees or are integrally involved with the assessment of functional units	• Appointed faculty lead all academic assessment processes on campus including general education, academic program assessment, and are integrally involved with the assessment of functional units • Faculty are supported through resource allocations (conferences, stipends, professional development) and official recognition by the institution for assessment efforts
Resources	• Regardless of levels of buy-in or extent of buy-in, continuous improvement efforts receive no ongoing budgetary or dedicated personnel support	• There is recognition for the need of consistent resource allocation for continuous improvement efforts by administrative leadership	• Relevant professional development is available across the institution for all units including academic and non-academic • When necessary, additional funds and resources are provided to assessment efforts	• Identified support personnel are available to assist faculty and functional units with continuous improvement efforts across the institution • Relevant professional development is available across the institution for all units including academic and non-academic • When necessary, additional funds and resources are provided to assessment efforts	• Campus wide assessment efforts are supported via a continuous budget allocation through a specific office • Relevant professional development is available across the institution for all units including academic and non-academic • Campus-wide continuous improvement efforts are supported by dedicated personnel including assessment experts and fully staffed offices outside of regional accreditation liaisons
Technological Infrastructure	• Existing data and systems infrastructure that support data and continuous improvement efforts are either non-existent; so cumbersome as to discourage engagement; or unsupported by IT professionals	• Systems are in place to support data and information inquiries • Systems are incorrect, unreliable, or unsupported by IT professionals	• Upon request, campus stakeholders are able to receive consistent access to up-to-date and user-friendly data • IT personnel are available to address issues that may arise, even if they are not dedicated solely to the data-related software systems	• Campus stakeholders have consistent access to the most up-to-date, accurate, and user friendly data • Dedicated IT personnel for the support of assessment and data systems	• Campus stakeholders have consistent access to the most up-to-date, accurate, and user friendly data • Dedicated IT personnel for the support of assessment and data systems • Assessment and data systems are appropriate for the scope and types of assessment processes taking place at the institution
50,000 foot view	• It is known and accepted that institutional effectiveness, assessment, or institutional research staff bear sole responsibility for continuous improvement efforts across the institution with minimal involvement from faculty, staff, or administrative leadership	• There is acknowledgement that academic related assessment efforts should be led by faculty AND that functional unit assessment should be led by appropriate administrative leadership with IE/IR staff support as necessary	• Campus wide efforts for continuous improvement are lead by appropriate administrative leadership and faculty with substantial involvement from institutional effectiveness, assessment, and institutional research staff	• Institutional effectiveness, assessment and institutional research staff support – but do not lead – academic program and functional unit assessment efforts	• Institutional effectiveness, assessment and institutional research staff support – but do not lead – academic program assessment efforts • Administrative leadership support and lead – but do not dictate – best practice for continuous improvement and the identification of opportunities for improvement across campus

Appendix B

How to Read and Implement the Culture of Assessment Matrix

The culture of assessment Matrix is intended to be a guide towards creating an institutional culture of assessment. It is not intended to be a replacement for strategic planning initiatives, leadership, or institutional buy-in from faculty, staff, students, and community stakeholders. In fact, the Culture of Assessment Matrix is a starting point for any institution seeking to begin building a culture of assessment across their institution. Cultures of assessment are never "one size fits all." There are a multitude of variables that must be considered including institutional size, budget, and long-term strategic plans. Use the Matrix as a guide to begin the necessary, but sometimes difficult, conversations surrounding improvement processes and accountability.

How – To – Guide

- The Five Core Components are in the left-most column.
- The levels of integration are in the top row.
- Each core component has five corresponding levels of integration.
- Each level of integration contains 1 to 4 bullet points that indicate the key areas of each level of integration associated with each core component.

The Matrix is intentionally simplistic which allows for application by individuals who are not "assessment experts." The purpose is to provide basic expectations of integration for an institution's culture of assessment that can be recognized by any member of the institutional community.

- When thinking about where an institution might fall within a particular level of integration for a core component, choose the level for which the institution meets all of the bullet points (unless a bullet point is not applicable to the institution).
- If there are extreme differences between components, this likely indicates disconnect within the institution. For example, if an institution is the "Implementation Stage – Advanced" for Administrative Leadership, but only the "Discussion Phase" in Resources, then what is espoused as important is not receiving the appropriate support.
- The Matrix is an iterative process. Each of the five core components should be reviewed at regular intervals for continuous improvement purposes.

CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT MATRIX

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50,000 foot view	• It is known and accepted that institutional effectiveness, assessment, or institutional research staff bear sole responsibility for continuous improvement efforts across the institution with minimal involvement from faculty, staff, or administrative leadership	• There is acknowledgement that academic related assessment efforts should be led by faculty AND that functional unit assessment should be led by appropriate administrative leadership with IE/IR staff support as necessary	• Campus wide efforts for continuous improvement are lead by appropriate administrative leadership and faculty with substantial involvement from institutional effectiveness, assessment, and institutional research staff	• Institutional effectiveness, assessment and institutional research staff support – but do not lead – academic program and functional unit assessment efforts	• Institutional effectiveness, assessment and institutional research staff support – but do not lead – academic program assessment efforts • Administrative leadership support and lead – but do not dictate – best practice for continuous improvement and the identification of opportunities for improvement across campus

Level of Culture of Assessment Integration:

Far left column = lowest level of integration "Currently Unaddressed."

Far Right Column = highest level of integration "Fully Integrated"

The Five Core Components