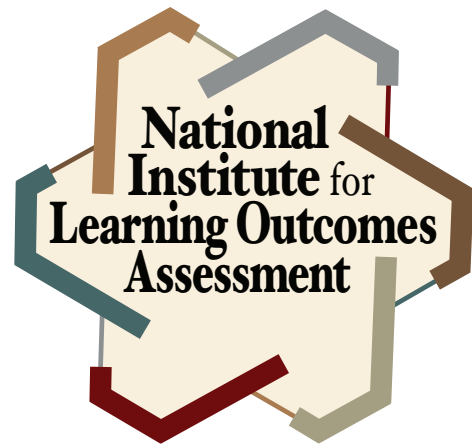


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Assessment Professional Development Competencies: Applications of the Assessment Skills Framework

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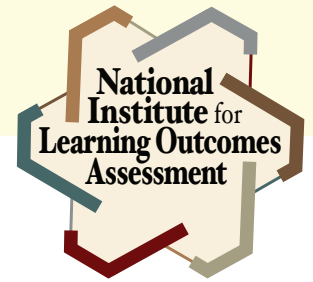
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*Note: Both authors contributed equally to this work.

NILOA Mission

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), established in 2008, is a research and resource-development organization dedicated to documenting, advocating, and facilitating the systematic use of learning outcomes assessment to improve student learning.



Abstract

In this occasional paper, we invite readers into a conversation about the need for and usefulness of a set of learning objectives or competencies for the field of assessment. We briefly discuss the slow solidification of the field of assessment as a discipline, the diverse paths of entry into the field of assessment, and the increasing need for assessment-related professional development and training. We then present one example of a set of assessment knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the *Assessment Skills Framework* (Horst & Prendergast, 2020), a taxonomy of assessment-related learning outcomes. Applications of the framework are offered in light of ten benefits that a coherent set of assessment competencies could offer to our field. Although the *Assessment Skills Framework* is highlighted, we hope that the discussion serves in continuing the conversation regarding assessment competencies at the broader professional level.

Assessment Professional Development Competencies: Applications of the Assessment Skills Framework

Caroline O. Prendergast & S. Jeanne Horst

Although the roots of formal higher education assessment trace to the early 1980s (Banta et al., 2016; Ewell, 2002; Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018), assessment continues to solidify into a discipline. Currently, there is no single path into the practice of assessment (Curtis et al., 2020; Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018; Polychronopoulos & Leaderman, 2019). As Curtis and colleagues (2020) noted, the route to becoming an assessment practitioner is often “uncertain and chaotic” (p. 1).

The practice of assessment attracts people from many backgrounds and disciplines, bringing a variety of skill sets, identities, and worldviews (Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018; Polychronopoulos & Leaderman, 2019). Moreover, at our institution and likely many others, we employ full-time assessment professionals in addition to the diverse group of faculty assessment coordinators who conduct assessment for their roughly 120 programs. Faculty and staff frequently rotate in and out of assessment coordinator roles. This means that a large number of people on our campus have some familiarity with assessment practice. Popham (2009) argued, in the context of K-12 education, that assessment literacy among educators provides innumerable benefits to teachers, students, and schools alike, while strengthening assessment practices and providing necessary critiques of assessment systems. However, this approach can also prevent the development of richer skill sets that accompany sustained responsibility for assessment. The situation has created the need for ongoing professional development and training related to assessment to ensure that all faculty and staff with assessment responsibilities have access to the tools they need to execute the high-quality assessment practices we strive to achieve.

Our campus is not alone in seeking high-quality assessment-related professional development for our faculty and staff. The 2018 AALHE/Watermark report (Ariovich et al., 2018) included findings from a University of Kentucky survey of assessment professionals, which found that one third of the respondents had been in their current assessment position for 2-5 years and 39% for fewer than two years. Although the findings may suggest rapid turnover within the field, they also suggest the ongoing need for assessment-related professional development or training to support the faculty and staff newly responsible for conducting this work. In the same survey, 78% of the assessment professional respondents reported participation in professional development opportunities with preference for training or development from conferences, webinars, and journals.

Given the diverse paths of entry into assessment practice, growth of positions, and new entry of people into the field, there is an ongoing need for assessment-related professional development and training (Curtis et al., 2020). In a recent survey of provosts, nearly half (46%) identified professional development and 30% identified greater institutional assessment staff capacity as one of their greatest needs (Jankowski et al., 2018). As Ariovich and colleagues (2018) summarized, “As the assessment profession continues to evolve, so does the need for a flexible and effective approach to professional development in the field” (p. 49).

Ongoing professional development and training related to assessment is needed to ensure that all faculty and staff with assessment responsibilities have access to the tools they need to execute the high-quality assessment practices we strive to achieve.

Once in the assessment field, responsibilities across positions and institutions vary widely. Assessment professionals play a variety of roles on a campus, which often involve the planning and implementation of professional development activities (Ariovich et al., 2018; Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015). Specifically, assessment professionals who fulfill assessment/method expert or narrator/translator roles, are commonly tasked with providing development and training support for faculty on their campuses (Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015). Many institutions offer ongoing professional development or capacity-building opportunities for faculty and staff with implicitly- (e.g., Burrack & Urban, 2014) or explicitly-stated (e.g., Stitt-Bergh, 2016) participant learning outcomes. And, because faculty development and assessment offices are both interested in student learning outcomes, the lines between them are increasingly blurred (Kinzie et al., 2019). If we wish to build assessment capacity, we need high-quality professional development opportunities for faculty and staff (Jankowski et al., 2018) with clearly established outcomes. In other words, we need to apply some of the same frameworks we preach for the development of degree programs to the development of assessment-related professional development opportunities.

We assert that assessment-related professional development offerings for faculty and staff should be viewed as formal, structured learning opportunities. Consequently, the planning and creation of professional development activities should be based upon and tightly aligned to learning objectives, using a backwards-design process (Horst & Prendergast, 2020; McTighe & Wiggins, 2004). In other words, in our planning of professional development activities, we can practice what we preach—that is, we can specify appropriate learning objectives, align theory-based programming to those objectives and implement them with high fidelity, assess faculty members’ knowledge, and use our findings to improve future participants’ learning. Yet, to date, the field of assessment does not have an agreed-upon set of learning objectives for assessment professionals. If we, as a profession, desire growth into a formal discipline, a solidified set of learning objectives will help fulfill that aim by providing a common framework of necessary knowledge and skills.

Assessment Skills Framework: The What and the Why

The purpose of the current occasional paper is to offer a set of assessment knowledge, skills, and attitudes, referred to as the *Assessment Skills Framework (ASF)* (Horst & Prendergast, 2020).¹ In this paper, we build upon the *ASF* and provide examples of ways in which the framework can be applied in the planning and implementation of assessment-related professional development activities. Although the *ASF* is a framework developed at one institution, we encourage readers to think broadly about the value of a commonly held set of objectives for the field of assessment as a whole. We hope that discussion of the *ASF* can encourage the field toward this aim.

We initially developed the *ASF* when realizing that we wanted more focused assessment-related professional development activities than currently offered at our institution. Prior to our center’s explicit focus on assessment-related professional development, we found ourselves building on-demand one-off workshops, and found ourselves frequently reinventing the wheel in the process. A majority of the workshops and training

¹The complete *Assessment Skills Framework* was published in the open-access journal, *Research & Practice in Assessment*, and may be found at <https://www.rpajournal.com/the-assessment-skills-framework-a-taxonomy-of-assessment-knowledge-skills-and-attitudes/>



opportunities that we offered catered to introductory-level assessment knowledge and skills, with very few opportunities appropriate for moderately experienced participants.

Although we realized that we may always have requests for these on-demand workshops, we desired a proactive approach to organizing, classifying, and planning our assessment-related professional development opportunities. Such a system would prevent duplicated work, enable targeted delivery of content and opportunities, and allow us to take stock of our available offerings.

The *ASF* was born out of this process as a central framework of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that assessment practitioners on our campus need in order to fulfill their various responsibilities. The *ASF* includes a bank of assessment-related learning objectives at the novice, intermediate, and advanced levels (Horst & Prendergast, 2020). It was originally developed by the professional development team at our university's assessment office and was revised after extensive feedback from assessment and measurement professionals and graduate students in the Center for Assessment and Research Studies (Horst & Prendergast, 2020). Learning outcomes from existing professional development offerings were compiled into a bank of objectives. Recommendations from the literature also influenced *ASF* content. Specifically, we considered literature in a variety of areas, including assessment (e.g., Suskie, 2018), student affairs assessment skills and competencies (e.g., ACPA, 2006; ACPA & NASPA, 2015, 2016), research on the role of change agents (e.g., Ottaway, 1983), cultural responsiveness (e.g., Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017), implementation fidelity (e.g., Finney & Smith, 2016; Gerstner & Finney, 2013), meta-assessment (e.g., Fulcher & Orem, 2010), and use of results to evidence learning improvement (e.g., Fulcher et al., 2014).

The *ASF* consists of ten categories, outlined in Figure 1. Skill Areas 1 through 7 align with the assessment-learning or improvement cycle that is commonly used across institutions: 1) specifying student learning objectives, 2) planning and mapping curriculum to those objectives, 3) selecting or designing instruments, 4) examining implementation fidelity, 5) collecting outcomes information, 6) analyzing, reporting, interpreting findings, and 7) using the results to show evidence of learning improvement. Although assessment or improvement cycles may differ slightly from institution to institution, most include similar components and emphasis on the use of assessment data to show evidence of student learning. Skill Area 8 consists of three traits/domains that reach across the assessment-learning cycle, and that serve as cross-cutting themes for professional development activities: 1) evaluating the quality of an assessment plan, 2) promoting value for assessment, and 3) promoting ethics, diversity, and inclusion.

Each Skill Area consists of one or more traits/domains. Within each trait/domain are learning objectives aligned to various levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), addressing novice, intermediate, or advanced levels of skill. Figure 2 contains an excerpt of Skill Area 1: Specify Student Learning Outcomes (Horst & Prendergast, 2020). Novice-level objectives are written at the lower-levels of Bloom's taxonomy and include verbs such as recognize or describe. Intermediate-level objectives are written at the application level (e.g., writes, considers, incorporates) and often include the application of assessment knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the participant's own assessment context. Advanced-level objectives are written to reflect a high-level of practice (e.g., develops, captures), indicating independence and leadership.

The *ASF* was originally developed as a bank of learning objectives for use in planning and organizing our own professional development activities. We do not expect that every person will attain all of the objectives, nor do we expect that every professional development offering will include all objectives.

Prerequisite Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Knowledge of program/understanding of context</i>
Foundational Assessment Knowledge & Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Distinguishing student learning outcomes assessment from other assessment and evaluation processes</i> • <i>Describing the assessment cycle</i> • <i>Identifying the purposes of assessment</i> • <i>Distinguishing between various levels of assessment</i>
Skill Area 1: Specify Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Developing student learning outcomes (SLOs)</i>
Skill Area 2: Create and Map Programming to Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Developing theory-based programs</i> • <i>Mapping of SLOS with curriculum</i>
Skill Area 3: Select & Design Instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Evaluating instruments – alignment</i> • <i>Evaluating instruments – context & resource considerations</i> • <i>Evaluating instruments – reliability & validity considerations</i> • <i>Designing selected response measures</i> • <i>Designing non-cognitive/attitudinal measures</i> • <i>Designing performance assessment measures</i>
Skill Area 4: Examine Implementation Fidelity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Designing implementation fidelity studies</i> • <i>Collecting implementation fidelity data</i> • <i>Interpreting implementation fidelity results</i>
Skill Area 5: Collect Outcomes Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Planning a data collection design</i> • <i>Selecting a data collection method</i>
Skill Area 6: Analyze Data, Interpret and Report Results, & Maintain Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Item analysis</i> • <i>Reliability of score inferences</i> • <i>Validity of score inferences</i> • <i>Analyzing data - quantitative</i> • <i>Analyzing data - qualitative</i> • <i>Analyzing data - mixed methods</i> • <i>Displaying data</i> • <i>Interpreting results</i> • <i>Writing reports</i> • <i>Maintaining information</i>
Skill Area 7: Use Results to Improve Student Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Using results to improve student learning</i>
Skill Area 8: Assessment in Practice - Additional Skills for Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Evaluating the quality of an assessment plan</i> • <i>Promoting value for assessment</i> • <i>Promoting ethics, diversity, and inclusion</i>

Figure 1. *ASF* Skill Areas and Domains/Traits

The *ASF* was originally developed as a bank of learning objectives for use in planning and organizing our own professional development activities. We do not expect that every person will attain all of the objectives, nor do we expect that every professional development offering will include all objectives. Further, we expect that assessment professionals on other campuses may prioritize traits and domains that we have not included in the

framework. The goal is for the *ASF* to provide a framework and a bank from which to select objectives for use in planning and organizing assessment-related professional development and training. We provide it here as a springboard or conversation-starter (Curtis et al., 2020; Horst & Prendergast, 2020) to advance the discourse and standards within the growing discipline of assessment. Recent professional organization work (e.g., AALHE Professional Development Committee) focuses on developing a set of assessment competencies to aid in pulling the field of assessment closer to this aim. We hope that the *ASF* can contribute to the broader conversation within the profession.

We also recognize that the *ASF* document (or any set of objectives) should not remain stagnant. Assessment competencies will grow and change as the field of assessment flexibly adapts to society over time (e.g., recent global pandemic and crucial emphasis on systemic racism; Hong & Moloney, 2020). For example, our original inclusion, diversity, and equity traits/domain reflected our understanding at the time of creating the *ASF* (Skill Area 8, Promoting ethics, diversity, and inclusion trait/domain; Horst & Prendergast, 2020). We would expect additions or changes to this trait/domain as our own understanding and societal structures change.

Skill Area 1: Specify Student Learning Outcomes

Trait/Domain	Novice	Intermediate	Advanced
<i>Developing student learning outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes the need for clear student learning objectives. Describes various taxonomies used to classify student learning objectives (e.g., Blooms, Finks, SOLO). Writes a student learning objective and identifies a measurable verb at an appropriate level of Bloom's or another taxonomy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writes SLOs including appropriate level of Bloom's or another taxonomy for their own program with some guidance. Independently identifies common issues with SLOs (e.g., double-barreled SLOs, vague language, unmeasurable verbs, or inappropriate level of verb usage). With guidance, considers and incorporates relevant theories in the development of SLOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independently develops SLOs for their own program according to best practice and relevant theories. Captures the spirit of the program in the SLOs. SLOs are aligned with the mission and vision of the program.

Figure 2. Skill Area 1: Specify Student Learning Outcomes (From Horst & Prendergast, 2020, p. 11)

Example of Application of Assessment Skills Framework

The following is an example of a way in which the *ASF* could be used for either planning or selecting a professional development or training offering. The example illustrates the benefit that a clear set of assessment learning objectives could offer in the planning and selection of professional development opportunities.

Imagine a conference proposal for a workshop training session on rubric development, described in *ASF* Skill Area 3, "Designing performance assessment measures" trait/domain (Horst & Prendergast, 2020, p. 15). This may be a popular conference event, given that it relates to the trend toward increased use of rubrics in course-embedded assessments (Jankowski et al., 2018). It is feasible to imagine a workshop, in which attendees come away with *novice-level* information, as specified in the following learning objectives:

- 'Identifies basic rubric components (e.g., elements, rating scale, scoring criteria)'; and
- 'Distinguishes between holistic and analytic rubrics and identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each' (Horst & Prendergast, 2020, p. 15).

It is just as feasible to imagine a workshop, in which attendees come away with *intermediate-level* information, such as specified in the following learning objectives:

- Develops an appropriate prompt or task that will be rated by a rubric for their own program;
- Designs a rubric mapped to their own program's student learning outcome(s) that appropriately implements the following skills: selects the appropriate rubric type, effectively describes elements/traits, determines rating scale and score levels, and develops scoring criteria; and
- Assists in developing rater training (Horst & Prendergast, 2020, p. 15).

Both sessions offer relevant information for developing rubrics. Someone who is unfamiliar with rubric development may benefit from the novice-level option and may be overwhelmed by the intermediate-level option. However, someone who desires hands-on rubric development training may be highly dissatisfied with the novice-level option, preferring the applied experiences offered in the intermediate-level option. A shared set of objectives or competencies at various skill levels could provide additional transparency in professional development offerings to what currently exists, saving attendees and presenters alike time and frustration.

When considering the various functions that assessment professionals undertake, a set of clearly defined competencies could support a variety of roles (Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015). Not only could the clear delineation of skills help assessment and methodological experts in their own professional development, but they could help those serving in a facilitator/guide role to navigate the process of mentoring faculty and staff in their own skill and knowledge development. Professionals fulfilling the narrator/translator or visionary/believer roles may seek opportunities to strengthen skills listed at the "Advanced" level of the *ASF*, which involve the capability to lead others in assessment-related activities. In the case of the rubric development workshop above, this might mean training opportunities that emphasize leading a team tasked with developing a rubric, a performance assessment process, or a rater training session.

Ten Contributions of a Common Set of Competencies to Assessment as a Discipline

Regardless of whether the set of professional competencies/objectives is the *ASF* or another framework (e.g., current work by the AALHE Professional Development Committee), we strongly believe in the value that a set of agreed-upon competencies/objectives could offer the field. An analogy can be drawn between the usefulness of a common set of assessments objectives or competencies and the student affairs professional standards (e.g., ACPA, 2006; ACPA & NASPA, 2015, 2016; CAS, 2015; Finney & Horst, 2019). Within the field of student affairs, proposed uses for the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2015) standards are many, including

program development, continuous improvement, self-study for accreditation or review, staff development, student development, program planning, program evaluation, acceptance of and education about student affairs services and programs, political maneuverability, budgetary assistance, ethical practice, and standardized language in functional areas... they provide 'criteria by which programs of professional preparation can be judged'. (Arminio, 2009, p. 190)



We believe that a common set of learning objectives or competencies for the field of assessment could provide the following ten contributions to the development of assessment as a discipline:

1. A common language across and within institutions, further solidifying assessment as a discipline. Through a shared set of assessment-related objectives or competencies, we can further solidify ourselves as a discipline. A shared language and understanding would be useful both across and within institutions. It makes sense for this work to emerge from a broad conversation across multiple professional organizations.

Recognizing the diverse pathways into assessment and varied identities of assessment professionals (Curtis et al., 2020; Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018; Polychronopoulos & Leaderman, 2019), a shared language could potentially help to advance us as a discipline. On the other hand, given the diverse entry routes into the profession, the set of objectives will also need to remain respectful and inclusive of multiple worldviews regarding assessment data (e.g., mixed methods, qualitative, quantitative, and critical theories), data collection methods (e.g., course-embedded), and types of assessments (e.g., performance assessments, selected-response assessments, attitudinal assessments).

2. A set of standards for assessment practitioners and professionals, aiding in communication of our identities. Many disciplines or fields maintain a set of professional standards (e.g., CAS, 2015). In the case of assessment, we may ask “What defines someone as an assessment professional?” and “What is the set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to conduct high-quality assessment?” The competencies could provide the basis and description for a variety of professional development or training formats (Curtis et al., 2020). They could accommodate diverse backgrounds and roles of assessment practitioners (Ariovich et al., 2018; Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015; Polychronopoulos & Leaderman, 2019) as well as disciplinary perspectives, yet provide a basic understanding of shared knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

3. Efficient identification of professional development needs via retroactive mapping of existing programs at the institutional level, as well as the broad professional level. Assessment offices may wish to retroactively map their existing professional development offerings to the *ASF* or agreed-upon set of objectives. This serves several purposes. It can provide an accounting of available offerings, helping with efficiency and organization, and can also highlight areas of need for additional professional development.

For example, we retroactively mapped the professional development activities offered through our campus assessment office back to the *ASF*. Faculty and staff at our university's assessment office each mapped their professional development offerings and PhD courses (which are often open to assessment practitioners on our campus) back to the *ASF* Skill Areas, traits/domains, and learning objectives. Ongoing professional development and training opportunities, such as our week-long Assessment 101 workshop and Certificate program, were also mapped back to the *ASF* Skill Areas, traits/domains, and learning objectives. When considered in sum, the information allowed us to conduct a fit-gap analysis to identify areas of overlap and areas of need. At the broader professional level, the development of competencies

In the case of assessment, we may ask “What defines someone as an assessment professional?” and “What is the set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to conduct high-quality assessment?”

will permit mapping of existing programs to an agreed-upon set of competencies (e.g., Gregg et al., 2020).

- 4. *The ability for institutions to proactively plan a cohesive set of professional development offerings for faculty and staff.*** An agreed-upon set of assessment learning objectives can provide the basis for designing professional development activities that translate across and within institutions. It enables developers—be they assessment professionals, faculty developers, or other faculty and staff members—to engage in the backwards design process, providing assessment professional development that is tightly aligned to objectives. It also permits meaningful assessment of those professional development activities.

For example, following a fit-gap analysis we realized that, with the exception of our doctoral-level assessment courses, most of our center’s offerings were at the novice level. Consequently, we are proactively developing an Assessment Academy for purposes of supporting faculty in the development of intermediate- to advanced-level assessment skills. The *ASF* provided the basis for this work and upcoming programming is mapped to the intermediate level across the *ASF* Skill Areas 1 through 7 (Horst & Prendergast, 2020). An Assessment Celebration under development is mapped to all skill levels (novice, intermediate, and advanced) with specific emphasis on attitudinal objectives, such as building value for assessment articulated in the *ASF* Skill Area 8 (Horst & Prendergast, 2020). The *ASF* objectives provide structure and focus for our prospective assessment professional development offerings

Small assessment office may not have the capacity or resources to provide extensive professional development. The *ASF* (or other agreed-upon set of assessment objectives), could help to target content for focused professional-development offerings, or could help faculty locate externally offered professional development offerings aligned to those objectives. For example, if free webinars or website content were mapped to the coherent set of objectives, assessment professionals could accurately pick and choose for themselves, as well as provide curated collections of materials in support of faculty and staff on their campuses

- 5. *Structure for assessment conference planning and organization.*** Conferences are one of assessment professionals’ preferred means for attaining professional development (Ariovich et al., 2018). Assessment conference calls for proposals typically ask presenters to specify the learning outcomes for and the audience levels associated with the presentation. A consistent set of skill areas, learning outcomes, and skill levels could provide consistency and transparency across conferences, provide structure or tracks within the conference, and permit attendees to accurately select sessions to meet their needs (personal correspondence with Robin Anderson, March 2020). Doing so could provide a coherent and organized means of providing professional training and development within and across conferences.

Curtis and colleagues (2020) noted “Many assessment conferences, unfortunately, may fall into the role of covering largely introductory topics as their organizers are aware of the current niche they play in training up the novice practitioner” (p.5). The clear specification of objectives and skill-levels could assist conference planning committees in addressing gaps in workshop training offerings, aligning conference attendee interest to program offerings, and guiding the selection of workshop training



proposals that are relevant to the audience level. For example, addressing the recent trend toward rubric use within course-embedded assessments, a conference track could offer a scaffolded set of offerings from the novice, intermediate, and advanced skills described in *ASF* Skill Area 3, “Designing performance assessment measures” trait/domain (Horst & Prendergast, 2020, p. 15) to clarify levels of complexity targeted by each offering.

6. *Structure for professional webinar series.* In addition to conferences, many professional organizations offer webinars, ranging from one-off events to webinar series. In addition to conferences, Ariovich and colleagues (2018) identified webinars as a preferred source of assessment-related professional development. Such offerings have only expanded in the age of COVID, and it seems unlikely that they will be abandoned in a post-pandemic world, especially in light of dwindling professional development budgets. If the field of assessment had a clear, coherent set of learning objectives or competencies, they could be used for structuring or cataloging webinars, enabling people to identify resources that best fit their needs.

7. *Organizational structure for assessment-related professional development websites.* Given the many people conducting assessment at any given time, our aim is to be able to efficiently point them to the appropriate resources to meet their needs. Currently, our own institution is reconstructing our professional development website using the *ASF* skill areas and traits/domains. We hope that by doing so, we can offer a cohesive set of assessment-related professional development resources. Using the *ASF* allows us to organize materials, not only by skill areas, but also by levels. Further, we can envision the use of the *ASF* to develop, organize, and maintain online repositories of professional development materials that have been successfully used to facilitate workshops, webinars, and presentations about each of the traits and levels. Having a common set of materials that can be accessed freely and used across campuses will reduce duplication of work and enable our field’s rich, collaborative spirit to support campus-level professional development efforts.

8. *A clear definition of assessment-related proficiencies within job descriptions.* In addition to providing a common language for assessment, a cohesive framework of assessment competencies at a variety of skill levels could provide fodder for effective job descriptions. Moreover, if certificates or other training opportunities were aligned to the same set of objectives or competencies, applicants and prospective employers would have further evidence of employee/employer skill set fit. Job seekers would be able to identify and attain the training needed for the desired job.

Clear specification of job responsibilities and requisite skills may also benefit graduate students who intend to work as assessment professionals upon graduation. Much as the CAS standards are used in higher education and student affairs graduate programs to provide students with a road map of their skill development (Finney & Horst, 2019), integrating common language about expected assessment knowledge and skills in job postings could aid graduate students in selecting the educational opportunities and experiences they need to prepare themselves for a career in assessment.

9. *A tool for self-reflection, self-development, and mentoring.* A set of assessment objectives or competencies is not only useful for planning professional development

Given the many people conducting assessment at any given time, our aim is to be able to efficiently point them to the appropriate resources to meet their needs.

offerings but can be used as a tool for self-reflection and identification of our own ongoing professional development needs. When onboarding graduate student members to the professional development team, we task ourselves with thoroughly reviewing the *ASF* and identifying where we fall on each of the skills. Each person identifies areas of strength, as well as areas of desired growth. We then engage in a discussion of each individual's reflective process. This not only serves the purpose of helping new members become acquainted with the *ASF*, but also aids in team building and productive assignment of tasks for the coming year. During this year's discussion, several team members noted that they would like to attain skills in scale development, whereas others desired growth in the areas of equity, diversity, and inclusion. The faculty mentor can also work toward putting opportunities in place to help the students attain their desired experiences, as well as maximizing students' self-identified strengths. As the year progresses, we will continue to engage in conversations, which may not have occurred without the use of the *ASF* for this purpose.

10. A basis for professional certification. As we (and others) have noted repeatedly, there is currently no one route into the assessment profession (Curtis et al., 2020). Rather, as noted, people enter the profession with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. And, as a field, we benefit and learn from our many identities (Polychronopoulos & Leaderman, 2019). We also benefit from exploring the skills common across the various assessment professional roles (e.g., Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015). An agreed-upon set of objectives or competencies can help to fulfill this aim. At the broad professional level, current work within professional organizations (e.g., AALHE) underscores the importance of identifying a clear set of assessment competencies (Gregg et al., 2020). We view this as an important step in the continued development of assessment as a discipline.

Conclusion

The *ASF* approach described herein was developed at a single institution, but we anticipate that it will provide a useful basis for assessment-related professional development beyond our home institution. Examples of ways in which we apply the *ASF* were provided to illustrate the usefulness of learning objectives or competencies for the broad field of assessment. As Bresciani (2011) noted, in light of the nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning (AAHE, 1991), "Assessment design processes and conversations for improving student learning and development are collaborative, involving people and resources across departments and divisions" (Bresciani, 2011, p. 3). Although Bresciani (2011) was referring to student affairs assessment within the institutional context, we agree that the process of developing a discipline-specific set of competencies needs to be collaborative and allow room for representation from our diverse set of identities and worldviews. It is time for a conversation.

But without common language and goals, conversations are unlikely to be successful in moving toward action. The development of a framework of assessment knowledge and skills (like the *ASF*, outlined here) is an important first step in codifying a set of competencies necessary for high-quality assessment practice. Importantly, any framework must be considered as a living document: as a discipline, we can (and should) debate the ongoing relevance of each area as technological capabilities and societal needs change and add new domains and traits as our field matures and solidifies. The core language presented here allows us to begin engaging in that conversation, although it certainly does not provide an end point.



The adoption of a common framework provides additional benefits beyond fostering conversation. Importantly, we anticipate that a set of outcomes for our discipline will enable more efficient planning of professional development opportunities for those of us developing them, and more useful selection of opportunities for those of us engaging with them to expand our skills. Likely, we all fall into both categories, and thus stand to benefit both as a provider and a consumer of professional development activities.

One of the strengths of the assessment field is the variation in the pathways that lead us to our work. Those pathways lead to diverse skill sets, perspectives, values, and approaches to teaching and learning. Although this has sometimes been cast as a weakness in the field—that few of us receive formal training in assessment, measurement, and data analysis—it also presents us with great opportunity to respond to the varied educational contexts in which we work. By creating a common framework of outcomes and working toward mastery of the skills and knowledge relevant to a particular assessment context, those diverse strengths can be woven into a common fabric of assessment capacity.

Assessment must be dynamic because the education landscape in which it operates is dynamic. Adopting a common, flexible, comprehensive skill set that is linked to learning opportunities for assessment professionals will aid our discipline-wide efforts to enact higher-quality assessment practices, respond to the needs of our campus and disciplinary communities, and develop a new generation of assessment professionals.

The adoption of a common framework provides additional benefits beyond fostering conversation. Importantly, we anticipate that a set of outcomes for our discipline will enable more efficient planning of professional development opportunities for those of us developing them, and more useful selection of opportunities for those of us engaging with them to expand our skills.

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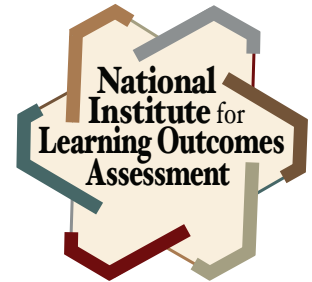
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