

Mellon Evidence-Based Teaching Initiatives Gant Workshop:

# Demystifying Assessment

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# How do you feel about assessment?

- Turn to the person next to you, in front of you, or behind you.
- If you don't already know each other, introduce yourselves!
- In pairs or trios, take a couple minutes to share the sentence-ender that you chose and why you chose it.

**For me,  
assessment  
is...**

As you discuss, think about:

- What opinions do you share about assessment?
- Do any of your opinions about assessment differ?

# Common concerns about assessment

- I don't know anything about assessment.
- I've never done assessment before.
- Assessment is so complicated.
- It takes more effort than it is worth.

# Goals for Today

- Realizations (I hope) you will have by the end of today's workshop:
  - You know more about assessment than you think you do.
  - You are already doing assessment.
  - Assessment does not have to be complicated to be worthwhile.

# Outline

A blue-tinted photograph of a staircase with text overlaid on it. The text is arranged vertically from top to bottom: 'Questions', 'Feedback', 'Key resources', 'How to plan an assessment', and 'Assessment terminology'. The staircase is made of dark steps and a brick wall is visible on the right side.

Questions

Feedback

Key resources

How to plan an  
assessment

Assessment terminology

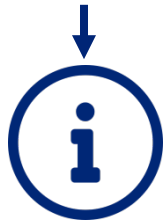
# What is assessment?

“Assessment is the **systematic collection of information** about student learning, **using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available**, in order **to inform decisions** that affect student learning.”

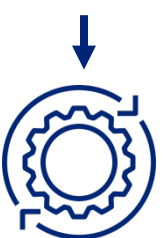
–Barbara Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, 2010



1. Identify the course or program goals



2. Collect information



3. Act on the information

# Without Assessment...

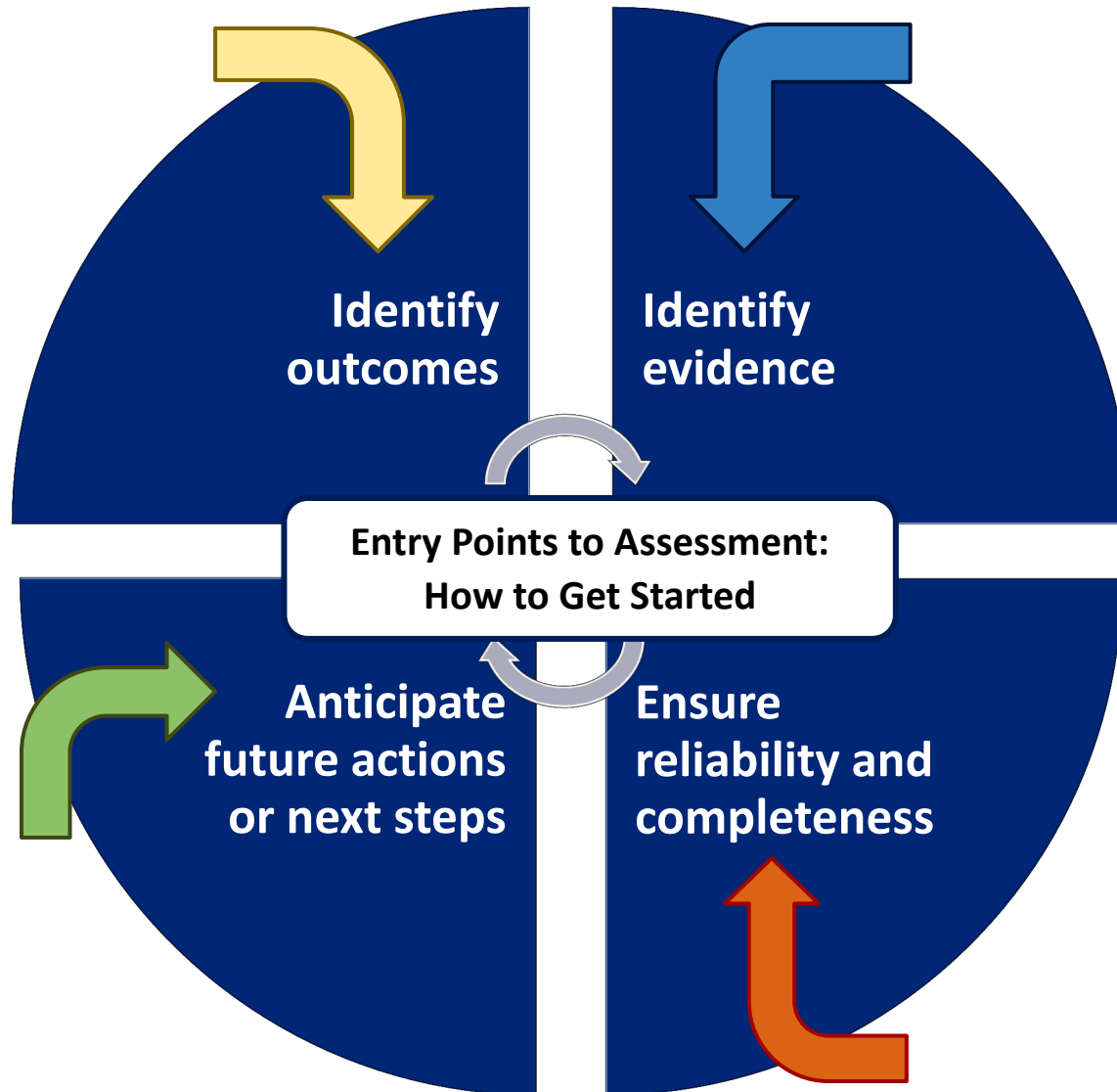
We make decisions based on:

- Intuition
- Anecdotes
- Casual observations
  - What comes to mind first? What stands out to us the most?

“Without assessment, **decisions become a matter of who has the power and interest to prevent or enforce change.** More than anything else, **assessment is about sharing the privilege** held by decision-makers to determine what is to be valued and how to value it.”

*–Guiding Principles for Designing Transformative Multicultural Initiatives, 2015*

# Planning An Assessment





# Identify Outcomes

**Identify outcomes that are meaningful, observable, and attainable**

- Ask yourself, “*What will participants do or learn?*”
- Recognize diversity of purpose and experience:
  - What do I see as the key outcomes?
  - What do participants see as key outcomes?
  - What do other stakeholders see as key outcomes?



**Quick Write:** *Think of a course or program that you are assessing or planning to assess. Write down at least one key outcome.*

# Identify Evidence

“Performance is what we can observe and measure during instruction or training. **Learning**—that is, the more or less permanent change in knowledge or understanding that is the target of instruction—**is something we must try to infer, and current performance can be a highly unreliable index of whether learning has occurred.**”

–Bjork & Bjork, 2014, *Psychology and the Real World*

## Direct Assessment

Demonstration of change or condition

- Pre/post test
- Exam questions
- Portfolio evaluation
- Recording of performance
- Presentation

## Indirect Assessment

Perception of change or condition

- Thoughts about knowledge
- Perceptions of skills
- Beliefs
- Opinions about the learning process

# Identify Evidence

- Related to the final step of assessment: Action
  - What do you want to be able to do with the evidence you collect?
  - When and how do you collect the evidence?
- Formative assessment – am I on the right track?
  - Monitor learning throughout the process
  - Low stakes
  - Often quick, immediate feedback
- Summative assessment – did I get there?
  - Evaluate an outcome or achievement at the end of an experience
  - Higher stakes

# Identify Evidence

## Identify evidence that will show progress toward your outcomes

- Consider:
  - What exactly am I hoping to see?
  - What would I tell others to look for if they were trying something similar?
  - What kinds of evidence would help others see meaning or success?
  - How would I know if I needed to change something moving forward?
  - What is so important, that if I did not see it happening, I would stop and change what I am doing immediately?



Quick write: Refer back to the outcome you wrote about. What information could you collect as evidence of the outcome you wrote about?

# Ensure Reliability and Completeness

## Strive to increase the trustworthiness of your findings

- Consider alternative evidence, perspectives, and interpretations as they relate to your assessment
- For example:
  - More than one type of evidence
  - More than one perspective represented in the evidence
  - More than one point in time
  - More than one audience acknowledged
- Recognize that there are always limitations (time, resources, etc.)—do your best to mitigate them



Discuss: Share your source(s) of evidence with someone next to you. Discuss how you might increase the trustworthiness of your findings .

# Common Evidence Pitfalls

- Dismissing evidence too early
  - “It doesn’t tell the whole story, so it isn’t worth looking at.”
    - But can it tell us something?
    - What can it tell us?
- Trying to do too much
  - More isn’t always better
- Taking the easy road
  - Choosing evidence that is readily available or easy to work with, rather than evidence that will actually demonstrate progress toward our intended outcomes.

**“...using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available...”**

# Anticipate future actions

## Plan to take action

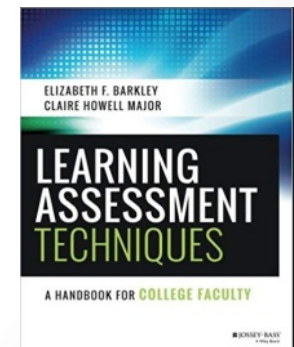
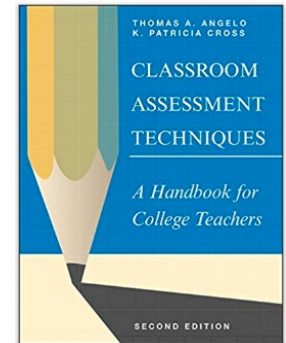
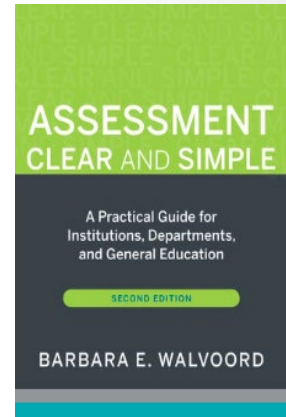
- Ask yourself, “*What do I want to be able to do with the information from this assessment?*”
- For example, you might plan to:
  - Share, showcase, or acknowledge success
  - Identify changes that are needed
  - Determine what went well and should be continued in the future
  - Convince others to adopt similar practices
  - Determine needs for further assessment



**Reflect:** *Does your assessment plan support your intended future action? What might you add or change to be sure that you have the information you need?*

# Helpful Books

- Walvoord, B. E. (2010). *Assessment clear and simple: A practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Barkley, E. F., & Major, C. H. (2016). *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. John Wiley & Sons.





# Examples from Wellesley

- Handout: Summary of Assessment Methods 2018-19
  - Organized list of assessments of student learning that departments are currently using
  - Ordered by frequency of use
  - Based on information shared for accreditation

Summary of Assessment Methods 2018–19

Assessment type	Number of Majors or Programs	Major/Program
Course-related materials or course-embedded assessments	30	Africana Studies, Architecture, Art History, Astronomy, Astrophysics, Biochemistry, Biological Sciences, Cinema and Media Studies, Classical Studies, Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences, Comparative Literature, Computer Science, Economics, Education, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Geosciences, German Studies, International Relations – Economics, Italian Studies, Mathematics, Media Arts and Sciences, Middle Eastern Studies, Neuroscience, Philosophy, PERA, Psychology, Quantitative Reasoning Program, Studio Art, Writing Program
Specific course(s) or sequence of courses (not capstone)	21	Cinema and Media Studies, Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences, Computer Science, East Asian Languages and Cultures, East Asian Studies Program, Economics, Environmental Studies, History, International, Relations - Economics, International Relations - History, Italian Studies, Mathematics, Media Arts and Sciences, Music, Neuroscience, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Spanish, Studio Art
Student Portfolio or ePortfolio	16	American Studies (new), Anthropology, Architecture, Cinema and Media Studies (informal), East Asian Languages and Cultures (under consideration), East Asian Studies (under consideration), Education, Engineering, English and Creative Writing (recent), Latin American Studies, Media Arts and Sciences, Middle Eastern Studies, Sociology, Spanish (new), Studio Art, Women's and Gender Studies
Presentations at conferences on- or off-campus	16	Architecture, Art History, Astronomy, Astrophysics, Biochemistry, Biological Sciences, Chemical Physics, Chemistry, Computer Science, Geosciences, History, International Relations – History, Mathematics, Media Arts and Sciences, Psychology, Russian Area Studies
Senior Thesis or Independent Study	14	Africana Studies, Biochemistry, Chemical Physics, Chemistry, Classical Studies, Computer Science, Geosciences, Jewish Studies, Music, Peace and Justice Studies, Philosophy, Spanish, Theatre Studies, Women's and Gender Studies
Tracking alumnae outcomes (grad school/jobs)	14	Africana Studies, Architecture, Art History, Biological Sciences, Chemical Physics, Computer Science, Education, Environmental Studies, International Relations - Political Science, Mathematics, Media Arts and Sciences, Physics, Political Science, Psychology
Student research participation, internships or fellowships	13	Architecture, Art History, Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Computer Science, Education, Geosciences, Italian Studies, Mathematics, Media Arts and Sciences, Physics, Psychology, Spanish
Alumnae Feedback or Survey	12	Astronomy, Astrophysics, Cinema and Media Studies, Computer Science, East Asian Languages and Cultures, East Asian Studies Program, English and Creative Writing, International Relations - Political Science, Italian Studies, Mathematics, Media Arts and Sciences, Political Science
Honors Program	11	Astronomy, Astrophysics, Biological Sciences, Classical Studies, Comparative Literature, Geosciences, German Studies, Italian Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Physics, Spanish
Capstone Course	10	Comparative Literature, East Asian Languages and Cultures, East Asian Studies, Environmental Studies, German Studies, Music, Neuroscience, Peace and Justice Studies, Religion, Women's and Gender Studies
Other	10	Chemistry (senior challenge); Education (student teaching evaluations); Environmental Studies (evaluation by external parties); German Studies (study abroad & Wintersession participation; one-on-one conferences with professors & students); History (essay prize competition); Mathematics (study abroad participation); PERA (fitness tests & biofeedback) Psychology (feedback from internship supervisors); Quantitative Reasoning (transcript analyses, feedback

# On-Campus Resources

**Pamela Taylor,**

Director of  
Institutional Research



Accreditation aficionado  
& all-around institutional,  
program, course  
assessment expert

**Hui Xiong,**

Associate Director of  
Institutional Research



Tableau guru &  
institutional data  
reporting extraordinaire

**Sarah Pociask,**

Teaching and Learning  
Assessment Specialist



Supporter of course-  
based assessment for  
Mellon and HHMI  
Grants

**Rachael Coombes,**

Business Intelligence  
Specialist



WANDA expert &  
general data wrangler

# Feedback



**Final quick write:**

- One thing you learned today
- One thing you'd like to learn more about or think about more deeply.

# Questions/comments?

Thanks for your attention!

# References and Photo credits

Bjork, E. L., & Bjork, R. A. (2014). Making things hard on yourself, but in a good way: Creating desirable difficulties to enhance learning. In M. A. Gernsbacher and J. Pomerantz (Eds.), *Psychology and the real world: Essays illustrating fundamental contributions to society (2nd edition)*. (pp. 59-68). New York: Worth.

Jacobson, W., & Grooters, S., (2017, January). *Assessing the Promise of Our Work With Scholarly Rigor, Inclusiveness, and Integrity*. POD/AACU Organizational Development Institute. San Francisco, CA

Walvoord, B. E. (2010). *Assessment clear and simple: A practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education*. John Wiley & Sons.

Watt, S. K. (2015). *Designing transformative multicultural initiatives: Theoretical foundations, practical applications, and facilitator considerations*.

- Wellesley stairs: [Helen Makadia Photography](#)
- Wellesley magazine photo of Rachael Coombes: [Richard Howard](#)
- Icons made by [Freepik](#) from [www.flaticon.com](http://www.flaticon.com)

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**Identify evidence**

**Entry Points to Assessment:  
How to Get Started**

**Anticipate future actions or next steps**

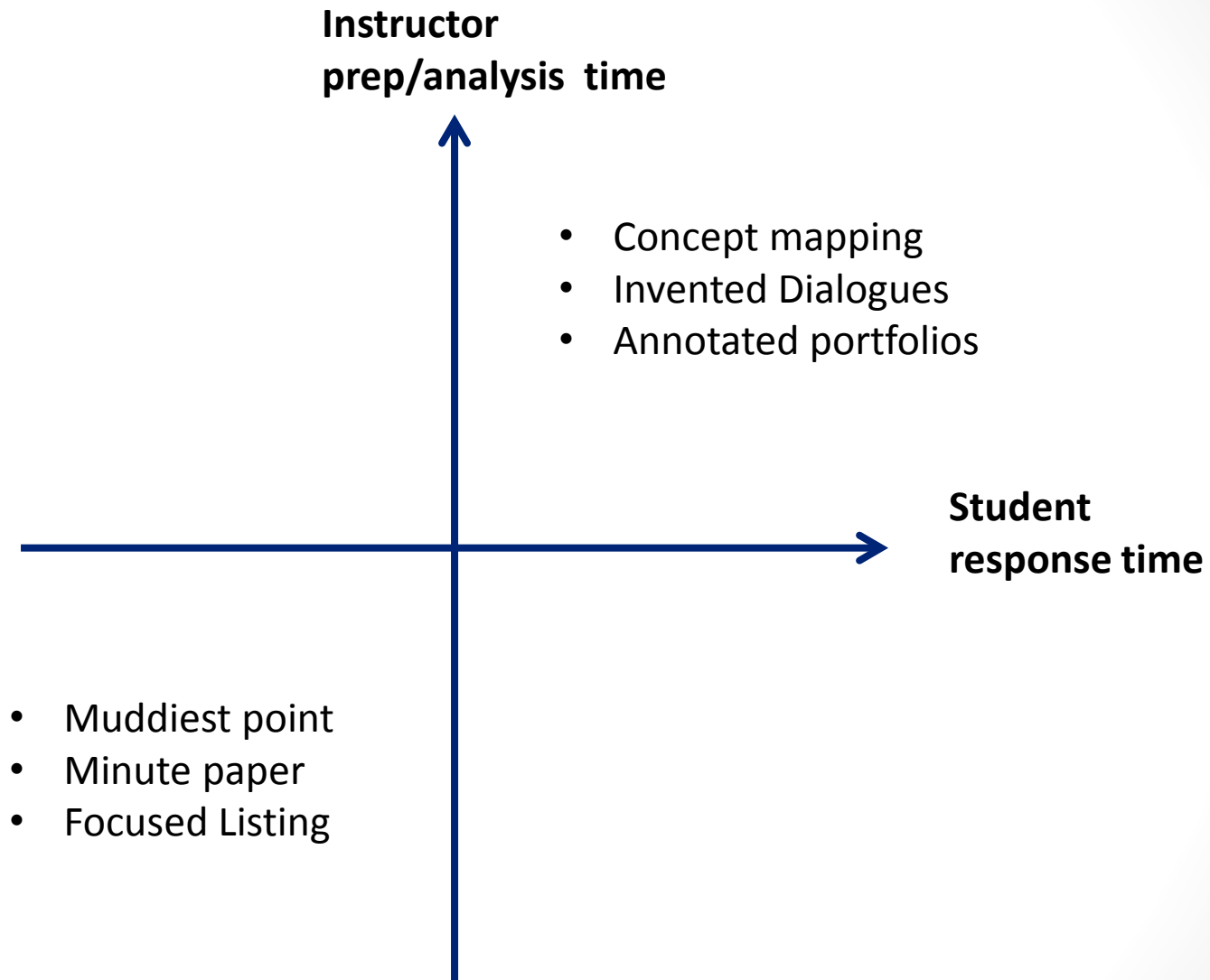
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See, *Classroom Assessment Techniques*, for more details