

ASSESSMENT MATTERS

Even more than before!

QUALITY AND EQUITY

Remember when we used to travel to conferences? Actually, plan your travel, ground or air, make a hotel reservation early enough to get into the host hotel, pack, find a pet sitter and all those other arrangements you make so you can go and learn something? Ah, those were the days, and I am sure we will get back to them. But in the meantime, many of the annual conferences have gone virtual. Have you attended one of those, usually from the comfort of your home office? Despite all good intentions, something always gets in the way of some of those sessions you have planned to attend. Well, that has been my experience and I am now going back to some of those recorded sessions and learning something. One of those sessions talked about assessment focused on Quality and Equity and I want to share some of the great questions and key points of this plenary session¹.

THINK ABOUT ASSESSMENT AS A *VEHICLE FOR EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT*

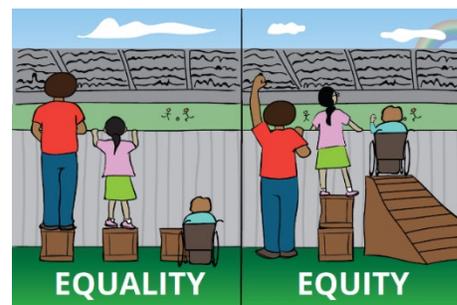
Periodically, it is necessary to reflect on our practices and ask ourselves if they are effective or if some change is indicated. With regard to assessment, many faculty members consider it a chore, a requirement for accreditation, or a mandate from the administration. We need to change that perspective and think about assessment as a *vehicle for educational improvement*. When questions about educational mission and values are skipped, assessment threatens to become an exercise in what's easy to measure rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

Quality Assessment

So, what makes an assessment of sufficient quality to be meaningful? We can talk about *reliability*, *validity*, *awareness of bias*, *practicality* and *actionality*, but the first question is to ask whether the assessment has a **clear purpose**. Why are you using this measure? What do you want to learn? How will you report it? And most importantly, how will you use the findings from what you learn? When your faculty members are thinking about their assessment plans, these are questions they should be asking themselves and discussing. Assess for meaning. Otherwise, just creating measures to fill in the blanks is meaningless.

Equity

As we saw in the [October, 2020 newsletter](#), *Equality* does not mean *Equity*. Equity-minded assessment should be collaborative, learner-centered, and actionable and should exemplify leadership (lead by example). There are absolutely challenges associated with creating equitable assessments, including resources, cost, culture, and perceptions, but equitable assessments give opportunities for collaboration, changing the culture, using the data to close the loop and changing perceptions around assessment itself.



As we get closer to the end of the semester and those last findings are being collected for the 2020-2021 academic year, try to think about the value of your measures and whether they are providing the data you need to make good, informed decisions about your program. Action plans should be a result of faculty discussions of the findings and could include something simple like adjusting a rubric, or something more drastic such as identifying a brand-new measure to use the next year. Whatever you choose to do, base it on the evidence, quality and equity, not just what is easy.

¹ AAC&U Conference on General Education, Pedagogy and Assessment; Plenary session by Dr. Bethany Miller: Stepping Back to Move Forward—Assessment Focused on Quality and Equity. Although we continue to work remotely, we are always available for a consult via Zoom or email. Ingrid's email is novod@arizona.edu and Elaine's is cvm@arizona.edu.