

Assessment as Systematic and Systemic Inquiry

Assessing for learning is a systematic and systemic process of inquiry into what and how well students learn over the progression of their studies and is driven by intellectual curiosity about the efficacy of collective educational practices. That professional context anchors assessment as a core institutional process guided by questions about how well students learn what we expect them to learn--based on pedagogy; the design of curricula, co-curricula, and instruction; and other educational opportunities. Through examining students' work, texts, performances, research, responses, and behaviors across the continuum of their learning, we gain knowledge about the efficacy of our work. . . .

This collective inquiry among faculty, staff, administrators, and students seeks evidence of students' abilities to integrate, apply, and transfer learning, as well as to construct their own meaning [A]ssessment is a process of ascertaining how well students achieve higher education's complex expectations through the multiple experiences and avenues inside and outside of the classroom. This process that is embedded in our professional commitment to develop undergraduate and graduate students' knowledge, understanding, abilities, habits of mind, ways of thinking, knowing, and behaving then becomes the collective responsibility of all educators in our higher-education institutions. It brings constituencies together from across a campus or across a program, as well as external constituencies who contribute to our students' education through internships, practica, and community based projects. . . .

Educators are by nature curious: they observe and analyze from multiple perspectives. Learning more about how well students translate our intentions into their own work extends that curiosity into the profession of teaching. What we learn promotes programmatic and institutional self-reflection about our practices. This self-reflection, in turn, stimulates innovations, reform, modification, revisions, or rethinking of educational practices to improve or strengthen student learning.

From the preface to *Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment Across the Institution* by Peggy Maki (Sterling, VA: American Association for Higher Education, 2004)