

*Assessment or Academic
Freedom:
Must They Be at Odds?*

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Assessment and Academic Freedom:
Emerging Tensions between Two Higher Education Traditions

- Will answer organizing question of this presentation right away:
 - Assessment and academic freedom **are not *fundamentally*** at odds...
 - ...but there are changes afoot that alter their traditional relationship, creating tensions in faculty work.

Assessment and Academic Freedom: Emerging Tensions between Two Higher Education Traditions

- Traditionally, assessment has been the domain of faculty as individuals working independently in educational programs that envisioned learning as a knowledge accumulation process.
- Traditionally, shared governance has been the institutional tool of academic freedom, giving faculty dominion over teaching, learning, and assessment arrangements. I would argue that these traditions of academic life are not fundamentally threatened by what has been called “the assessment movement.”

Sources of Emerging Tensions

- Epistemological Roots: A shift from a knowledge accumulation model to epistemological views that are more dynamic
- Cognitive Science: A shift to active, student-centered views of learning that link content knowledge to its likely applications and the dispositions necessary to put the knowledge to use
- Systems Thinking: A shift from looking at curricula as sets of sequenced courses (or smorgasbords of courses) to a recursive view of learning experiences that may not be in a traditional classroom in order to see “the system” from a student perspective

Assessment Defined

- *Assessment* is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning.
 - Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 8

Assessment Assumptions

- Assessment has its roots in disciplinary understandings and modes of inquiry. Assessment is rightfully a faculty prerogative, but assessment cannot be the domain of solitary faculty on a course-by-course basis. Faculty have to talk to each other in order to center the instructional program on learning rather than on teaching.

How These Assessment Assumptions Change Shared Governance

- Considering these assumptions, shared governance for assessment means:
 - Faculty develop a few core disciplinary values that capture the distinctive nature of the institution, program, or curriculum, often stating them as intended learning outcomes or research questions. These should be something everyone can live with.
 - Faculty develop means of gathering an array of evidence in order to “develop a deep understanding” of what students know, can do with what they know, and what they care about as a result of educational experiences.
 - Faculty must then use the evidence to improve programs and their learning outcomes, always seeking “deep understanding.”
 - Faculty selectively develop means to communicate the program’s core values and the results of programming for these values to external audiences.

Factors Affecting Shared Governance and Assessment Implementation

Sector

Institution

Discipline

Accountability Environment

Course

Unit

Lesson

Standards and the Demands of Accountability: Choosing the Paradigm Before It Is Chosen for Us

- **Standards in Education: Tensions between Improvement and Accountability**
 - Academic freedom is well-served when standards are broad representations of core values stated as intended learning outcomes or essential research questions.
 - Standards must be used to ensure a “guaranteed curriculum” *writ large* without constraining legitimate faculty choice. Curricular coherence should be the primary goal.

Case Study: One Core Course

- *EAF228: Social Foundations of Education:*
Coherence through Intended Learning Outcomes
- Institution and College of Education Strategic Framework: Realizing the Democratic Ideal (Moral and Intellectual Virtues)
- Illinois Professional Teaching Standards
- Department developed and cross-walked 8 intended learning outcomes from the course from applicable standards

EAF228: Social Foundations of Education: Shared Governance

- Same course descriptors and list of 8 intended learning outcomes, shared by the majority of instructors, including adjuncts.
- Individual faculty choice as to disciplinary lenses, readings, and most significantly assessments to help them “deeply understand” what students understand.

Samples from EAF228 Syllabi

- **Disciplinary lenses of *Foundations*:**
 - Anthropology
 - Economics
 - Philosophy
 - Sociology
 - Policy (Political Science)
- **Other scholarly lenses**
 - Critical approaches
 - Interdisciplinary approaches
 - International approaches (comparative education)

Pedagogical Differences

- Vary widely from what Freire has called the “banking method” to more cognitive/situationist approaches
- One on-line version of the course is an interesting case in point:
- <http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/rpriegle/eaf228/>

Texts

- A core group that meets most frequently uses Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, but faculty are free to select their own readings. They vary widely from “school & society”-type textbooks to broad, interdisciplinary bibliographies representing different disciplines and social locations in a broader discourse about education and its purposes. Faculty are often drawn to critical perspectives, but this is not universally the case.

EAF228: Assessments from Two Sections Using *Freire & Michie*

● NJB Sections:

- Preparation for class by writing critical questions for discussion
- *Freire* Dialogic Analysis Paper
- *Michie* Course Theme Analysis Paper
- Creative Performance
- Practitioner Interview
- Reflective Papers

● LTE Sections:

- Take Home Exam
- In-Class Exam
- Reflections Paper on Diversity in Illinois
- Small group book project
- Optional Reading Journal on *Freire*

Program Level Assessment: Possibilities for EAF228

- Develop a single common assignment that becomes part of student e-portfolios
- Take common threads from existing assessments and develop a sampling process for joint review
- Faculty collaborative analysis of student work
- All of these options are consistent with faculty shared governance.