

UNITY OF PURPOSE MATTERS MORE THAN UNIFORMITY OF PROCESS

Recently, I was at the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Annual Conference and this topic, or ones like it, kept coming up. A presenter asked the group about assessment which matters more, uniform processes or unity of purpose. As we all know, while making policies and procedures, it is far too easy to get hung up on the process and lose sight of the purpose. Having recently spent a year updating our assessment process handbook, I can relate.

But assessment is not about the uniform methods we use to document our processes. Rather, assessment is about our unity of purpose, commitment, and dedication to ensure our students are learning what they came here to learn.

The assessment institute participants represent a diverse group of faculty and staff from many circumstances, locations, and experiences. Their courses range from one day to a full term and their students vary from traditional to weekend warriors. In this sense, there is nothing uniform about them.

But regardless of their situation, when you talk about students, it is clear we are all unified in purpose and focus. Throughout the Assessment Institute as I spoke about the various assessment processes, the participants would always perk up when I covered the benefit to students. Clearly the why matters more than the how.

I learned early in my career at Barton that assessment can refocus your attention from using gut reactions and anecdotal comments to using data about your students and their learning to improve. Consequently, assessment has the potential to take an average faculty or staff member and make them exceptional.

As shown by their completion of the program, distinguished guests, please allow me to present an exceptional group of faculty and staff, the graduating class of the Assessment Institute.

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