

## Equity in Assessment

<https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/A-New-Decade-for-Assessment.pdf>

### Essential takeaways:

“Assessment should strive to serve as a mechanism that helps close opportunity, persistence, and attainment gaps between different student populations.”

“Socially just assessment raises awareness on how assessment can be a process inherent of structures of power and oppression”

“Disregar[d] the objectivity myth and accepting that assessment is inherently subjective and guided by the biases and experiences of those conducting assessment”

“Equity-minded Assessment is about challenging what we think and exploring what others think, need, and are affected by which we may not understand or experience.”

### Notes on the Article:

#### What does “assessment” mean in the context of this article?

- Assessments are designed to collect data that will tell professors if their educational goals are being met
  - The definition in the paper is fairly ambiguous. We interpret assessment as referring to graded assignments (tests, papers, presentations, discussions) as well as student surveys to get feedback
  - Professors and institutions then use this data to improve their teaching
  - Equitable assessment practice means that all learners have an equal and unbiased opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and achievements
    - This involves allowing students to demonstrate knowledge in different ways
- For more information about some of the pedagogical terms used in this paper, follow this link to the [NILOA Assessment Glossary](#)

#### Why assess students?

- The data we gain from assessments help us plan for future activities
- Indicate areas where teaching and learning can be improved

**Assessment data is not objective or apolitical. It's not helping us actually better serve our students.**

- Assessment methods we select often come only from white voices, privileging white ways of knowing and minoritizing BIPOC ways of knowing

#### **Before giving students an assessment:**

- **Interrogate the tacit assumptions that your assessments rest on**
  - One of the easiest ways to check your assumptions is to actively involve students in the process of assessment
  - If we do not interrogate biases, you risk acting upon assumptions which may be inappropriate for students, *even with the best intentions*
  - Assessment processes that are not *actively mindful* of equity risk becoming tools that produce inequality, even unintentionally.
- Remember that this is a constant process- your assessments will evolve over the years as you learn more

#### **Where to start:**

- Start with statements of learning outcomes for your course- ensure that these statements of learning outcomes are themselves inclusive
  - If your learning outcomes are not inclusive or contain bias, then your entire educational design will contain bias

#### **Equity-minded assessment**

- Assessors of student learning need to recognize in what ways their assessment methods are rooted in white supremacist notions
- We can push back against white supremacy and create assessments that are equitable— that take into account how the contexts of our students and institutions influence ways of knowing. We do this (according to the article) with Equity-minded assessment

The following is a list of the principle elements of equity-minded assessment as presented in the paper:

#### **1. Meaningful Student Involvement**

#### **2. Data**

- a. Make sure you are measuring what students learned, and not their ability to navigate assessments (i.e. good test taking skills)
- b. Make sure you are not assessing students' adherence to a [hidden curriculum](#)
  - i. Interrogate your course structure closely for what hidden curriculum your course might contain

#### **3. Context Specific Approaches and Responses**

- a. “The context of the institution/program, the person(s) conducting the assessment, and the learners need to be understood and reflected upon in order to properly create and execute an assessment plan that will yield appropriate and equitable results”

#### **4. Equity Embedded in all things Assessment: **these are your Action Steps****

- a. Check biases and ask reflective questions throughout the assessment process to address assumptions and positions of privilege
- b. Use multiple sources of evidence appropriate for the students being assessed and assessment effort
- c. Include student perspectives and take action based on perspectives
- d. Increase transparency in assessment results and actions
  - i. One Haverford prof in a partnership over the 2020 summer recounts that she anonymously shares the results of all surveys with her class
- e. Ensure collected data can be meaningfully disaggregated and interrogated
  - i. What does this mean?:
    1. Make sure that data can be broken down into important categories
    2. Reflect carefully before designing your assessments on what these categories should be
  - ii. In his talk [“Equity or Equality”](#), Jeff Duncan-Andrade says that it’s not just about being data driven, it’s about being driven by the *right* data
  - iii. You need to be asking the right questions in order to get helpful answers from data
- f. Make evidence-based changes that address issues of equity that are context-specific.

## Central principles

- **Meaningful student involvement**
  - a. The college student population is diversifying, but traditional assessment methods are white biased
  - b. Challenge biased assessment methods and biased learning objective statements, since these statements inform assessment
  - c. Ask all students, especially marginalized students, to tell you how you can support their learning.
  - d. Objectives must be understandable by and communicated to all stakeholders
- **Data disaggregation, exploration, and action**
  - a. Assessment data can contain a significant amount of “noise” if assessments are measuring the student’s ability to navigate the test, assignment, or course rather than the actual material
    - i. Data from these types of assessments can perpetuate harmful and false narratives about the competence and ability of BIPOC or non-neurotypical students
  - b. It is important to disaggregate data by student identity; however, it is equally important to determine the equity of the assessment itself
  - c. Note: “ To support equity-minded assessment discussions informed by data, professional development may be needed prior to data discussions to interrogate biases and assumptions” (12).
- **Context-specific approaches and responses**

- a. Assessment is ingrained in the United States' educational system and will be difficult to eradicate as a whole—but we can focus on making changes in our institutional contexts
  - b. Those designing assessments must first understand the inequities that matter at their institution
  - c. “Assessment professionals need to sensitively navigate institutional initiative space, working to make the case and connect the dots between equity and assessment for faculty, staff, and administrators” (13).
- **Equity embedded in all things assessment**
    - a. Equity needs to be at the forefront of assessment designers' minds before, during, and after the assessment

