# Chapter 13
# REPORTING ASSESSMENT RESULTS AND BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

The purpose of assessment is not simply to systematically collect data and report evidence or to prove the value of an educational program. The ultimate goal of assessment is to use information to ensure quality and to guide improvement actions. Simply put: "Assessment's true aim is using results, *harnessing evidence* to inform educational improvements" (Kinzie, Hutchings, & Jankowski, 2015, p. 56). Presenting assessment as more than measuring, and even more about change and improvement, places a significant emphasis on sharing results and ensuring accountability for making change. Approaches to assessment must be designed to help educators and administrators improve educational effectiveness and quality and, in the end, student learning.

Although the end goals of assessment are to demonstrate accountability and make improvements (see Chapter 1), these aims seldom are reached. Too often, assessment activities get caught in the phase of gathering evidence. Some assessment projects move past this stage, and achieve the production of a sleek, bound report about the quality of a program, or perhaps a dashboard with some flashy interactive graphs that display program participation rates by race-ethnicity or changes in student satisfaction with services over time. However, bringing about change from the results is a whole new level. As Blaich and Wise (2011) learned, their assumption that once an institution had robust assessment results, the data would be put to use for improvement, turned out to be wrong. Rather, most campuses put too much of their energy into getting piles of "perfect" data, and not enough time getting people organized, interested, and engaged all the way through the process, and in sharing information to inspire action on results.

Making the shift from assessment results to taking action is challenging. However, when assessment projects are undertaken in the spirit of continuous improvement, and support for change is high, action can result. For example, a priority of the East Carolina University's Student Affairs Division strategic plan was a comprehensive assessment design that included external program reviews and a series of assessment projects exploring dimensions of student success, such as first-year students' time studying in campus living units and a campus wellness study, with the clear mandate for improvement. The division's report, *Closing the Loop on 2011–2012: Celebrating and Using Assessment Results for Improvement* (East Carolina University, 2012), highlighted improvements completed including organizational restructuring, leadership personnel hiring, new technology enhancements, facility upgrades, and new program development. Another example of assessment activity that resulted in change is illustrated in the collaborative assessment project between institutional research and student affairs to understand student persistence at Grinnell College (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010). Assessment results revealing that student attrition was greater between the second and third year of college than between the first and second year, followed by in-depth focus group findings that exposed unique factors influencing attrition in the second year, led to improved sophomore advising, particularly related to enhanced educational and career planning.

What increases the likelihood of moving from assessment results to taking action to improve? How should results be reported to inspire action? This chapter takes up the vexing challenge of how to ensure that assessment results are used to inform change. Once evidence is collected, what are the ways that results can be reported and shared that engage relevant campus audiences and help inform change? What are the best strategies for putting assessment results to use to bring about improvements?

## The History and Challenges of Assessment for Improvement

Any student or practitioner of assessment should be aware of the history of assessment for the purposes of improvement. The idea that assessment is for improvement is actually a defining characteristic of the work. The origins of assessment are rooted in demands for educational reform and quality improvement in higher education. The National Institute of Education's 1984 report, *Involvement in Learning*, for example, influenced early aspects of the assessment movement by proposing systematic study of what it takes to improve educational quality, such as identifying that organizational strategies, policies, and processes to maximize student learning and development. The report challenged colleges and universities to maximize the use of evidence to inform institutional improvement. This report and other more recent calls for improved educational quality (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006; Harward, 2012; Kuh et al., 2015) envision assessment as a key lever for promoting transformation goals in higher education.

Calls to improve undergraduate education have grown more insistent during the past decade, including demands for greater accountability and transparency, and statements doubting the quality of undergraduate education (Carey & Aldeman, 2008; Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006; Harward, 2012; Leveille, 2006; National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, 2013). Although the press for improvement has been a consistent emphasis, it is sometimes outweighed by the push for accountability, assessment's other goal. Ewell (2009) identified these two assessment goals as being in conflict because the requirement for the demonstration of accountability demands that the unit or program look as good as possible, regardless of underlying performance, while improvement requires the faithful detection of shortcomings that must be reported and acted upon. Discovering deficiencies is one of the major objectives of assessment for improvement yet this is clearly in opposition with the accountability goal.

To distinguish the two paradigms of assessment, Ewell (2009) outlined their features along eight dimensions, including the strategic purpose of assessment, methods, and reporting and use of results, and so on (see Table 13.1). In the “Improvement Paradigm,” for example, the communication of results is through multiple internal channels and media and results are put to use in numerous feedback loops; in contrast in the "Accountability Paradigm" results are for public consumption and simply used for reporting evidence. Although the differences may not be this stark in real assessment practice, understanding the contrast is useful for pinpointing tensions in assessment work.

**Table 13.1** Two Paradigms of Assessment

| | ***Assessment for Improvement Paradigm*** | ***Assessment for Accountability Paradigm*** |
|---|---|---|
| **Strategic Dimensions** | | |
| Intent | Formative (improvement) | Summative (judgment) |
| Stance | Internal | External |
| Predominant Ethos | Engagement | Compliance |
| **Application Choices** | | |
| Instrumentation | Multiple/triangulation | Standardized |
| Nature of Evidence | Quantitative and qualitative | Quantitative |
| Reference Points | Over time, comparative, established goal | Comparative or fixed standard |
| Communication of Results | Multiple internal channels and media | Public communication |
| Uses of Results | Multiple feedback loops | Reporting |

*Source*: From Ewell (2009, p. 8).

## First-Year Student Interest Groups at Mid-North College

To illustrate the tension between assessment for improvement and accountability (Ewell, 2009) and how this can influence how assessment plays out in practice, consider, for example, an assessment project that starts out as an exploration of the influence of Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) to first-year student retention and learning that is undertaken to assess and enhance the FIG program at Mid-North College (MNC).

*MNC's FIG director wanted to make sure that the influence of the program was assessed systematically and planned to undertake a mixed-methods project, that included assessing the extent to which students who participated in the program were retained by the college for their sophomore year. The director also was interested in student learning, and planned to conduct a number of focus groups when the students returned for their sophomore year to explore such issues as how participating in the groups affected the participants' thinking about their college experience, what they had learned from their FIG experience, and how it affected their plans for their sophomore year. Preliminary analysis conducted in the early* *summer after the conclusion of the academic year indicated that participation in the FIGs had a positive influence on retention in that participants had registered for fall classes at a rate higher than those who had not participated in FIGs, but additional analysis needs to be undertaken to confirm actual persistence. And, the focus groups would not be conducted until the early fall. However, when the dean of undergraduate studies saw some early positive results, and started asking for more robust statistical tests, comparable groups, and a public communication plan—before the staff who run the FIGs had even had a chance to review or consider what the results suggest for improving the program or had conducted deeper levels of analysis—it was evident that the purpose of the assessment project had shifted from a formative study to a summative report on the value of FIGs*.

This example offers a quick depiction of how the dual purposes of assessment can creep into assessment activities and shift the purpose and direction of a project.

To close our discussion of the practical considerations of the two tracks of assessment for improvement and accountability, it is important to point out the role that these dual purposes have had in terms of inspiring reform initiatives at most colleges and universities to improve student success and demonstrate educational effectiveness (Ewell, 2009; Harward, 2012; Kezar, 2009; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, 2013). Yet, while most institutions have increased their assessment activities and are better at using formative and summative information to support campus change efforts and to monitor progress (Banta, 2009; Banta & Palomba, 2015; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014; Maki, 2004), there is less evidence that assessment results have been put to use to directly inform the *direction and scope* of improvement activities, and even less that the assessment loop has been closed—examining whether changes undertaken have produced improvements (Banta, 2009; Banta & Palomba, 2015; Kuh et al., 2015; Suskie, 2004). Students and practitioners of assessment are encouraged to do more to put assessment results to greater use to guide and inform improvement and to initiate the kinds of follow-up assessment that substantiate institutional change.

## Reporting and Sharing Assessment Results

Once assessment data are collected the next step is to compile evidence in a form that facilitates data interpretation and use and to disseminate to individuals and offices that can be informed by the work. Of course the trick is to assemble and report assessment results in ways that interest stakeholders, draw findings into contexts for decision-making, and profitably inform improvement efforts. This stage of assessment work requires thoughtful attention to what and how results are reported and to whom.

The formats for reporting and sharing results vary widely in student affairs assessment. The variation is, in part, a function of the many purposes and uses of assessment. Assessment work in some instances has become an annual reporting expectation; thus, at many institutions assessment results from all units are annually compiled into comprehensive reports and submitted to the assessment office or committee. Other times, assessment projects are launched and results are pulled together in response to a particular project need, or to address a campus concern, and are only disseminated to the committee or program responsible for the project to act on the results. Assessment results may also be compiled and shared with relevant stakeholders with the goal of providing current metrics on effectiveness to inform practice. These results and other statistics about program effectiveness or performance may be posted publically on assessment webpages, and made available to anyone who is interested. Primarily in the spirit of transparency, many more student affairs units are taking advantage of websites to post results, along with a range of technology-enabled data management platforms and dashboards to increase interactivity and to continuously update and display key performance indicators for decision-making.

The variety of means of reporting also raises questions about with whom results are shared. More formal reporting may only be reviewed by administrators or assessment leadership, whereas posting results to websites could be designed to inform students, the general public and others on campus about program effectiveness and performance. Bresciani, Moore Gardner, and Hickmott (2010) assert that after collecting and interpreting assessment results, one must involve others in determining how the results will be used as well as in effectively communicating the results and decisions to institutional and community stakeholders. The effective execution of this step is critical to increasing the acceptance of the assessment process and to ensuring that results help bring about change.

## Assessment Reporting 101

The most basic report on any assessment project should at least include a description of the assessment work undertaken, the purpose and goals of the work, a summary of results, discussion about conclusions or recommendations, and information about data use. Comprehensive or topical assessment reports benefit from an executive summary (one to two pages), which is a short description of findings. Assessment reports must be written in simple formats that summarize the findings for various stakeholders and are disseminated to suit their needs. Specific plans for sharing information on websites, with committees/departments, in briefings, in marketing, and soliciting feedback where appropriate are also necessary.

The conclusion or recommendation section of assessment reports should include thoughtful discussion about what the results mean in relation to why the assessment was undertaken, or to address program or institutional goals. Portland State University's Assessment Handbook (2011) provides some helpful discussion prompts for the conclusion of departmental assessment reports, including: “How do your results provide evidence for your outcomes? What do your results say about your program process and the impact of the program on students' learning and development? Based on the results, what decisions will you make or what action will you take regarding programs, policies, and services as well as improvements/refinements to the assessment process?” (p. 17). These prompts, particularly the last one about discussing planned action for improving the assessment process and for applying results, are important to address to strengthen the connection between assessment and improvement and to foster action on results.

## Scheduled or Annual Assessment Reporting

Given the press for assessment in higher education, it is not surprising that most student affairs divisions across all institutions have established regular cycles and processes for conducting assessment and for reporting results. Banta and Palomba (2015) indicate that annual reports of assessment findings are required for most students affairs units, and many include follow-ups and evidence of action taken on results. For example, Ball State University's assessment reports are due by June 1 of each year, with highlights presented to the vice president of student affairs in May. All departments in Enrollment Management and Student Affairs at Portland State University are required to complete an assessment form each year to plan assessment activities and then to submit an annual report that addresses goals and outcomes and discusses how previous year's goals were met. The assessment form invites departments to outline the department vision, mission, and goals and link to student affairs and University goals, and then to specify the steps to determine the effectiveness of programs and services, approaches to gather evidence of student learning, student development, and evidence of how well the program is functioning, and how results affect the next assessment cycle.

The assessment process in the division of student affairs at California State University, Sacramento, follows a fairly structured, ongoing process coordinated and facilitated by the vice president for student affairs and colleagues from the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) (Varlotta, 2009). A reporting template ensures that relevant topics are addressed and the information is collected and disseminated consistently throughout the division. The template requires information about six steps:

Step 1: Writing the departmental mission

Step 2: Formulating planning goals

Step 3: Identifying program objectives and student learning outcomes

Step 4: Mapping out the methodology

Step 5: Collecting and analyzing data

Step 6: Using the emergent information to make data-driven decisions

These steps illustrate the most basic outline for annual assessment reporting.

The development of a common template for reporting assessment results is fairly standard in larger divisions of student affairs. For example, Oregon State University developed a shared format for Division of Student Affairs Departmental Assessment Plans and Reports (Oregon State University, 2012). This format is used to lay out plans and then to report at the end of each year. Each unit identifies and assesses one or two outcomes per year under the larger overarching goals for the department. Reports conforming to the submitted plan must specify: the type of outcome; delineating if it is a business or service outcome or a learning outcome; the assessment methods employed, and when and how assessment activities were implemented; information about results; and how results were shared and used to inform actions and make decisions. The report template provides a basic and uniform approach to planning and reporting on assessment projects.

Committed to building a collaborative culture of inquiry and accountability for acting on results, Oregon State enhanced its assessment reporting process by adding a consultation process following the submission of the report. The Assessment Council Consultants aim to assist student affairs departments and units in developing, refining and better reporting the outcomes of their work, and to help clarify and improve the assessment work. First, a consultant reviews the report employing a common rubric to evaluate the extent to which the department met the standards for assessment related to mission, goals, learning outcomes or business/service outcomes, methods, results, and decisions and action. Then, in a meeting between the consultant and department, representatives from the department present their assessment work, along with any questions or issues upon which they would like feedback, and respond to five questions: "(1) What question or questions was/were your assessment designed to answer? What did you want to learn from your assessment? (2) To what degree did your results provide you with information to answer the question you had? (3) What specific findings helped you to make a decision, alter a program or teaching method, etc.? (4) How did you use the information? What actions were taken? Who will you share this information with and how? (5) What if anything would you do differently next time?" (Oregon State University, 2012, p. 3). The meeting is an intentional conversation about the work of the department and how the assessment council members can be helpful in answering questions, and offering suggestions, related to the assessment work.

One of the core principles of Oregon State's assessment process is that "the reporting of data is necessary, but not sufficient in the assessment process." Rather, "An evaluation of the data and its usefulness in helping to answer the question or measure the degree to which an outcome was met is essential" (Oregon State University, 2012, p. 1). This emphasis is furthered by the effective use of prompts in the assessment report form that demand the thoughtful integration of results with plans to improve both the program and the assessment activities. Even more, the consultant review meeting provides support and accountability for programmatic change and to devise a plan for improving the assessment work itself.

## Reporting and Sharing

Once the assessment data are assembled, communicating and sharing results is a critical step in ensuring that assessment results make a difference. The division of student affairs at Marquette University has outlined a thoughtful approach for designing and implementing assessment measures that provide evidence of program effectiveness and processes to routinely collect and use assessment data to make improvements to programs and student learning. To facilitate data sharing and use, Marquette developed an extensive, accessible repository for assessment results, including an assessment webpage featuring reports from a range of surveys including the institution's New Student Survey, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a Graduating Senior Survey, and several alumni postcollege outcome surveys (see www.marquette.edu/dsa/assessment/). Meaningful summary statistics from various surveys are also on display. The institution's Campus Labs platform fosters the collection of data of interest to student affairs and also connects data across units to encourage administrators to make informed, data-driven decisions about strategic planning, cocurricular programming and other student success concerns. Dashboard displays of key measures increase the functionality of results, guiding decision making between academic and cocurricular units. The department also created a webpage "Your Voice" featuring information for students about what Marquette does with the survey information they collect. Student learning assessment also is tied to other forms of needs assessment and program evaluation and these data collectively inform planning and fiscal decisions.

The creation of specialized reporting to specific audiences and interesting visual displays is increasing being used in student affairs assessment. Clemson University created tailored reports about its NSSE results to reflect the interests of various constituencies including student affairs, student government, and academic affairs. Short topical reports featuring data about cocurricular involvement, students' experiences with diversity and data about participation in enriching experiences including service-learning, undergraduate research and internships were provided to audiences with vested interests in the results. Even more, Clemson created the "Student Affairs Dashboard," an informative and visually interesting display using the picture of a gear shift and the symbols "D" (drive), "N" (neutral), or "R" (reverse) to indicate progress on the goal, and a paragraph of explanation of assessment data on six student affairs goals. For example, the report for Goal 1—"Increase Undergraduate Student Retention and Engagement"—described the progress made in the quest to increase this goal. The paragraph describes how NSSE scores of interest to the campus related to positive relationships with peers, involvement in cocurricular activities, and positive relationships with administrators and staff remain strong, and to what the campus attributes these strengths, and how student affairs has invested in activities to support these results. The narrative also includes data on increases in internship postings in the career center and upturns in numbers of students completing internships. The explanation closes with next steps, including a commitment to examining data by student subpopulations to identify pockets of opportunity to decrease attrition during, and after, the first year (Clemson University, Student Affairs Dashboard https://www.clemson.edu/administration/student-affairs/documents/scorecard/10-11.pdf).

## Strategies to Increase Effectiveness of Reporting and Action on Results

Assessment results can be reported and shared in many formats. Common reporting templates, dashboard displays, online data management and display platforms, and short topical reports are all useful and appropriate approaches for reporting and sharing results. However, specific considerations addressed in the reporting phase of assessment are more likely to facilitate use and action:

1. *Ensure that results are relevant*. The quickest way to ensure that assessment results will not be reported, reviewed, or used is to conduct assessment projects that are not connected to work of interest or significance in student affairs. Relevance should be central to the purposes of any assessment project. However, relevancy may need to be re-established as

results are assembled and the report completed. To heighten attention to relevancy at the reporting stage, clarify the salient audiences and departments and, if possible, involve them in the interpretation of results, and then compile the results and shape the report with their concerns in mind. It is important to point out that relevancy can be affected if the motivations for the assessment project change over the course of the project, or if findings are not what program administrators or campus leaders expected, or if campus politics intervene. Revisiting the assessment project in relation to original goals, and considerations of current campus issues may also be necessary to ensure results are shared and used.

2. *Collaborate with related departments*. To have an impact, assessment projects should involve a variety of individuals and units, including assessment experts, data analysts, program or department representatives, and so on. However, too often departments that could really be of help in terms of lending expertise or perspective, or that will be affected by or can positively influence uptake of results are left out of the assessment and reporting process. At California State University, Sacramento, the expertise of the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) staff helped accelerate the assessment process in student affairs, with OIR staff serving as one-on-one assessment consultants to the student affairs directors. At this stage, institutional research staff can help shape what gets reported to ensure accuracy and to develop processes for collecting follow-up data to assess change. The division of student affairs at Marquette benefited from a collaboration with academic affairs to create a shared dashboard display that ultimately helped facilitate communication across the division. Think broadly about individuals and departments that have a related interest, expertise, or influential role, and involve them in reporting and sharing results.

3. *Report results in digestible bites*. The most common mistake in reporting assessment results is to provide a complete, 100-page, all-inclusive report to a wide campus audience. Although a comprehensive report should be assembled, and happily provided by request, it is a mistake to distribute the report and assume that it will be read. Preparing short reports from the whole study that connect directly to the questions or needs of a program, or that feature smaller bites of findings are most likely to generate interest and use. For example, to better communicate NSSE findings, Drake University disaggregated the data into an array of short reports and clear tables focused on college and school level results and topics that were related to the Drake mission, including: "Collaborative Learning among Students, Faculty and Staff," "Preparation for Professional Accomplishments," and "Responsible Global Citizenship" (see http://www.drake.edu/acad/studentoutcomes/). Reorganizing results from the standard issue NSSE reports into clear tables and reports organized by topics of interest to the institution or student affairs program takes some work, but is more likely to get attention. Other short reporting options include: (1) executive summaries (one to two pages) providing a quick overview of the assessment project and highlighting key findings; (2) multiple tables summarizing findings with simple explanatory paragraphs; (3) collection of a few short thematic reports (four pages each) featuring a topical collection of findings; and (4) supplemental reports written for a specific campus audience, which address only their particular question.

4. *Keep reports interesting and accessible*. Assessment reports should be reader friendly and employ a more casual tone and format than a traditional research report or dissertation. Simple, interesting graphics, including figures and tables, may do more to draw the reader in than a long narrative explanation of findings. Write clearly, with little to no jargon, and use plenty of headings to guide the reader. Including recommendations or speculating on the reasons for the findings, and posing alternative explanations, may also draw readers into the findings. Although one school of thought about assessment reports is that the report stops short of offering recommendations, it is clear that reports that ponder what the results mean are not only more likely to draw an audience, but are important to guiding the users of results.
5. *Develop a plan for using the report and taking action on results*. Too often, assessment reports are produced and issued without any thought put into ensuring that reports are used and action is taken on results. The best way to ensure action is to develop an implementation plan for making use of the report and how results will work their way into contexts for decision making.

## Using Results to Take Action to Improve

Assessment projects revealing that a program or service is performing above established benchmarks, or at a level of efficiency that exceeds institutional expectations, can be gratifying. Assessment projects showing that, for example, students at Pennsylvania State University are highly involved in clubs and organizations, with over 95 percent participating at least once, and that findings from several years of Student Satisfaction surveys confirmed students reported high levels of satisfaction with their academic and cocurricular opportunities and with student services, with 92 percent indicating they would choose to attend Penn State if starting college again and 90 percent expressing satisfaction with their formal academic experiences (see http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/assessment), provide Penn State's student affairs professionals a reasonable level of confidence in the effectiveness of student life experiences. Even more, assessment reports that demonstrate correspondence to an established standard or outcome or higher-than-expected satisfaction levels addresses the very real demands of accountability. Yet, in keeping with the ethos of assessment for improvement, the Office of Student Affairs Research and Assessment encouraged deeper analyses of variables by student characteristics and the need to take action to address differences.

As the Penn State example suggests, gathering information and data to help student affairs units and other campus educators understand how well student affairs programs are working is an important outcome of assessment (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004). Such assessment reports fulfill expectations for assessment, and they can also be used to convert skeptics, gain greater support across campus, make the case for additional department support, or to request pilot funds to implement a new program. For example, Penn State's positive cocurricular involvement results can make the case for additional investments in union and student activities programs and budgets, and for prioritizing renovation projects in the student center. Even assessment projects that affirm high levels of effectiveness and demonstrate the value of a unit or services can be used to make change.

Many assessment projects are about the systematic use of information to make practical change. However, assessment projects that forefront the value for improvement are more likely to zoom in on where services or experiences are falling short or to set a high bar for achievement to motivate action on results. For example, the student affairs assessment council at Portland State asserts the intention for assessment to lead to change by describing that assessment plans should be designed with the *end in mind*, imploring departments to consider: “What do you want to see occur as a result of your program? Changes in student learning? Changes to program content or delivery? Changes in participation?” (Assessment Handbook, 2011, p. 8).

When assessment results reveal shortcomings in the quality of students' experiences, deficiencies in services, or adverse influences on student persistence and success, the need to take action on results is undeniable. Using results from assessment projects to make improvements should be the most meaningful aspect of assessment. Armed with evidence and a report indicating the need for change, student affairs professionals can proceed with confidence to implement action steps to improve programs and the quality of students' experiences.

A solid assessment project coupled with a strong interest in making improvements can lead to meaningful action. For example, the student life program at Widener University, which coordinates a range of student activities including student clubs and organizations to Family Day and orientation programs, had a history of using student satisfaction measures to assess student satisfaction and gains concerning freshman orientation (Valesey & Allen, 2009). However, concerns about program effectiveness suggested the need for a more formal assessment of the orientation program, so Widener conducted satisfaction surveys and focus groups, and convened an independent orientation advisory committee to examine results and to examine best practices at peer and benchmarked institutions and from the literature. Their assessment project revealed that while some aspects of the orientation program were effective, there were problems with unclear outcomes, poor timing of orientation in relation to athletic schedules and valued student programs, unfocused summer program goals, and a disconnect between orientation and academic requirements. Assessment results guided the implementation of changes to the orientation program, including the development of a three-day formal, mandatory program, greater emphasis on the high school to university transition, on orientation as an academic requirement, and greater faculty and student affairs staff collaboration in workshops and evening presentations. Results also helped make the case for customized orientation sessions for commuters and other student groups and where additional resources for personnel and programming might be needed. Widener was not only thoughtful about taking results seriously, but they also conducted an assessment following the changes to determine if the changes made the intended difference.

Taking action on assessment results is a challenging step in the assessment process. However, the likelihood of bringing about change from assessment results is increased when the goal to take action is embedded in the assessment project from the outset. Assessment plans must not only layout the approaches to gathering evidence but also make transparent the vision, desires, expected outcomes, and steps for taking action on results. Assessment projects designed with the end in mind and that invite departments and units to consider what they plan to do with results, is important to increasing the likelihood of bringing about change. In addition, encouraging wider sharing of results and thoughtful discussions about evidence and how it can be used, can lead to recommendations for institutional improvement and taking action when feasible. Assessment is ultimately about making evidence-based changes in programs and practices and reporting action taken and the improvements that have resulted. Let's work to ensure that meaningful change is an outcome of all assessment activities in student affairs.

## Discussion Questions

1. Which is more important, assessment for improvement or assessment for accountability?
2. How does one balance assessment for accountability with assessment for improvement? Can one conduct an assessment for both purposes?
3. If preliminary results are positive, should those conducting the assessment inform interested stakeholders of the results, or should they wait until all analyses have been conducted?
4. How can one determine the type of report that various stakeholders want or need?

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