

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

April 2015

Focused on What Matters: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at Minority-Serving Institutions

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National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions

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Please cite as:

Montenegro, E., & Jankowski, N. A. (2015, April). *Focused on What Matters: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at Minority-Serving Institutions*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

NILOA Mission

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

Acknowledgments

We very much appreciate the assistance of the faculty, staff, and students at the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions in the preparation of this report.





Foreword

It is now common but disconcerting knowledge that the United States no longer leads the world in educational attainment. In response, federal and state governments along with philanthropic organizations have issued clarion calls for increasing the number of adults with postsecondary credentials and degrees to 60% by 2025.

At the same time, colleges and universities across the country are being pressed to demonstrate that students are learning what they need to know to survive and thrive during college and beyond. Indeed, one of the things that policymakers, business leaders, and pundits all agree on is that college graduates must know and be able to do more than previous cohorts if America's economy and democracy are to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

But degrees and credentials are hollow achievements if students who hold them do not attain the knowledge, proficiencies, and dispositions that prepare them to be economically self-sufficient and civically responsible after college. The best way – maybe the only legitimate way – of determining educational quality is to regularly collect evidence of student accomplishment and to use that evidence to improve teaching and learning. Happily, there are more efforts underway to assess and document student learning than ever before (Kuh, Ikenberry, Jankowski & Associates, 2015).

It is also good news, as this study shows, that Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) are actively involved in this important assessment work, inasmuch as they educate 40% of currently enrolled students in postsecondary education who are from historically underrepresented groups. For a host of economic and social reasons, it is imperative that students attending MSIs earn high quality degrees and credentials. Assessment efforts, specifically understanding what these institutions do to assess student learning and how assessment results are used, can help increase underrepresented students' academic achievement.

As the authors of this report point out, MSIs are similar to other types of institutions in that the kinds of assessment tools and approaches they employ vary substantially. And as with other sectors, there is considerable variation within the universe of MSIs in terms of how and to what ends individual MSIs do assessment work. Even so, compared with many other schools, MSIs as a group seem to be more focused on *using* the results of student outcomes assessment (Conrad, Gasman, & Associates, 2013). Indeed, what has become abundantly clear in recent years is that to have value, assessment efforts must be intentionally designed to yield actionable evidence that can inform and guide the consequential ends of enhanced student learning and institutional effectiveness (Kuh et al., 2015). MSIs offer examples of how assessment work can function as a lever for institutional change.

Consider El Paso Community College, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) that exemplifies the productive use of student assessment data and participated in national Tuning efforts. The institution has designed a comprehensive process for assessing students' academic readiness and simultaneously guiding students toward their educational goals. The college designs a customized plan for each student – one that integrates information from student transcripts and initial placement test scores with information about academic program requirements and outcomes. The college shares its approach to data usage with students during orientation and during advising sessions throughout students' enrollment at the institution. Students are shown how to track their own progress and how to use assessment tools to ensure their own success (Conrad, Gasman & Associates, 2013).

Another noteworthy example is North Carolina A&T State University, a Historically Black College & University (HBCU) that has developed a culture of inquiry related to student learning outcomes assessment and participated in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) project. Administrators at the institution encourage collaboration on learning outcomes assessment activities on



Foreword continued

campus, which increases the potential for program improvement and informed decision-making. Faculty members are engaged in assessment efforts through professional development opportunities designed to help them use assessment data in their course improvement efforts. Equally important is the university's active use of student feedback on key institutional goals. The student feedback is shared with the campus community and directly involves students in leading and carrying out assessment efforts on campus (Baker, 2012).

The Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions and the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment salute researchers Erick Montenegro, NILOA research analyst, and Natasha Jankowski, NILOA associate director and assistant research professor at the University of Illinois, for preparing this important report. It is, to our knowledge, the first of its kind. We are also grateful to Andrés Castro Samayoa, a Ph.D. Candidate in Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania and a research assistant at the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions, for assisting with the preparation for this report. It is a most timely contribution to the literature on student learning outcomes assessment and especially to our understanding of the nature of the work MSIs are doing in this arena.

Marybeth Gasman
Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions

George Kuh
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

As the US morphs into a "minority" nation, it is essential we understand the experiences of students of color at institutions that today educate two fifths of this cohort. This report is important because it brings into the national conversation the good work being done assessing the learning outcomes of a student population that will become the nation's majority.

-Mildred Garcia, president, California State University, Fullerton

Focused on What Matters: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at Minority-Serving Institutions

Abstract

This report features the assessment work being done at Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Comparisons are made between assessment activities at MSIs and those underway at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) as well as those at different types of MSIs such as Tribal Colleges, Historically Black, Hispanic-Serving, and others. Four main findings are discussed including the internal use of assessment data at MSIs, using assessment data for improvement, different assessment approaches at different types of MSIs, and subcategories of MSIs' use of assessment to address different institutional needs and interests. Implications are presented for understanding assessment activities in MSIs, and how such understandings can help advance assessment efforts at all postsecondary institutions.

Focused on What Matters: Assessment of Student Learning at Minority-Serving Institutions

Erick Montenegro & Natasha A. Jankowski

Colleges and universities collect information about student learning in order to document the extent to which students are attaining proficiencies consistent with the institution's educational mission and the other ways in which students benefit from attendance. Because of varying institutional missions, educational programs, and student characteristics, it is no surprise that there is no single best assessment model or approach (Kezar, 2013; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014).

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) periodically takes stock of the nature of assessment work in U.S. postsecondary education, while also providing resources for colleges and universities to learn about and improve their assessment efforts (Ewell, Paulson, & Kinzie, 2011; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). NILOA's most recent survey of institutional assessment activities, released in 2014, offers insights on the main drivers and obstacles institutions face when assessing learning outcomes while also describing institutional approaches and the state of affairs of assessment (Kuh, et al, 2014). These data can also be analyzed to better understand how different types of institutions approach this work.

This report focuses on an important segment of postsecondary education: Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs).

The Warrant for Focusing on MSIs

As the population of the United States becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, the academic success of minority students in higher education is increasingly important especially since it is estimated that by the year 2020 approximately 43% of the total U.S. population will be comprised of minority populations; extending to approximately 57% by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The important role of MSIs is further highlighted by the fact that in 2014 they served 40% of underrepresented students (IHEP, 2014) totaling approximately 3.8 million students (DiMaria, 2014), or 26% of all college students (Conrad & Gasman, 2015).

Overall, the students served by the various MSIs share certain characteristics: they are mostly low income, predominantly women, more likely to be employed full-time, more likely to live at home, more likely to enroll part-time, and more likely to require developmental education. In addition, a higher proportion of MSI students are first-generation compared to students enrolled at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008; Fann, 2002; Harmon, 2012; Hubbard & Stage, 2009; Medina & Posadas, 2012; Teranishi, 2012). MSIs help address these challenges by creating environments and curricula which better meet the needs of underrepresented students. For example, attending an MSI is found to increase underrepresented students' self-esteem, help identity formation processes, increase critical thinking skills, increase leadership opportunities, and help to better engage students in the classroom; all of which help to ensure students' persistence through college (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008; Gasman & Conrad, 2013; Harmon, 2012).

Student learning outcomes will play an increasingly important role in facilitating student success at MSIs, which is essential to achieving the national goal for educational attainment. This report provides a robust understanding of current assessment practices at these institutions.

*~ William Serrata, president,
El Paso Community College*

The majority of MSIs face common challenges that affect their ability to efficiently and effectively conduct assessment to better serve their student populations, and meet demands for accountability and transparency. Perhaps the largest issue is fiscal, which leaves the majority of MSIs underfunded, understaffed, and with facilities in need of repair (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Hubbard & Stage, 2009; IHEP, 2014).

Despite their important role in fostering the success of the students they serve, there is a dearth of research on the practices of MSIs (Conrad, Gasman & Associates, 2013) with little known specifically about assessment practices. Collecting and using assessment data are essential steps to determine the efficacy of their efforts. In addition, better understanding of student learning outcomes assessment at MSIs can provide instructive information for benchmarking practices while beginning conversations around assessment with diverse student populations and further representing the varied landscape of assessment practices in U.S. higher education.

This report summarizes MSI assessment activity as compared to PWIs, as well as examines the variance within MSI categories in their approaches to assess student learning.¹

Assessment at Minority-Serving Institutions: The Variation Within

As with other postsecondary sectors, putting all MSIs together into a single group obscures meaningful variations in educational purposes and programs. Equally important, not all MSIs have comparable financial resources to support their work with students. For instance, according to DiMaria (2014, p.11), “In 2010 federal funding for Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) averaged \$3,446 per student compared to an average of \$5,242 at Predominantly White Institutions.” In this paper we examine assessment activities at five of seven types of MSIs as defined by the criteria outlined in the Higher Education Act of 1965:

- Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
- Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs)
- Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)
- Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs)
- Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian (ANNHs)
- Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions (NASNTIs)

Despite their important role in fostering the success of the students they serve, there is a dearth of research on the practices of MSIs.

¹ In total, the responses of 912 institutions were analyzed to examine whether MSIs (f =147) and Non-MSIs (f =765) responses differed. Additionally, the various MSI sub-categories were analyzed to determine if survey responses on assessment practice differed significantly from each other. Due to the limited sample size of MSI respondents to the national survey, within MSI analysis in terms of public/private, institutional type, and regional accreditation were not examined in this analysis. The data comparing MSIs to Non-MSIs were analyzed using cross-tabulation with Pearson's chi square test (goodness of fit). The survey data for the various MSI categories were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA test with a Bonferroni post-hoc test to confirm the results, and identify the association. Both were conducted with a 95% confidence interval. The null-hypothesis was, of course, that assessment methods, drivers, support systems, dissemination of results, etc. looked the same from one institution to the next. Once the analyses were run using IBM's SPSS software (version 22), the outputs were examined to identify statistically significant instances and common traits in the data. Two MSI categories - ANNH and NASNTI - were left out due to a low sample size. Missing survey responses were accounted for utilizing a list-wise analysis once it was determined that the missing responses were random occurrences. Appendix A shows our sample size and its comparison to national percentages of MSIs.

The exact number of institutions within some categories could vary from year to year due to classification criteria, such as the minority student enrollment at certain types of institutions. See Appendix B for additional information on the various types of MSIs.

Assessment and Minority-Serving Institutions

Drawing on the data collected by NILOA's 2013 survey of provosts, most MSI respondents (82%) have adopted learning outcomes that apply to all their students, which is very similar to other institutional types at 83%. While it is useful to know the percentage of institutions with institution-wide outcome statements, it is equally important to examine which assessment approaches are used to measure undergraduate student learning in relation to those outcomes. The four major findings below summarize the patterns of assessment approaches and practices that differ between MSIs and PWIs.

Assessment work at Minority-Serving Institutions is focused primarily to serve internal interests and needs.

As Figure 1 indicates:

- MSIs are more likely than PWIs to use incoming placement exams to determine student pre-college achievement levels and to use classroom-based assessments or in class assignments such as simulations, comprehensive exams, and critiques.
- MSIs are less likely than PWIs to use national student surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and/or First Year Experience Survey, as well as alumni surveys.

The most frequently used assessment approaches at MSIs differ from PWIs, in that internally faced assessments, such as classroom-based performance assessment and incoming student placement exams, take prominence over national student surveys. Further, MSIs are more likely to engage in locally developed surveys and measures over externally situated ones. This may be due in part to the cost of administering the tests which has led some institutions to implement a student assessment fee in order to participate in national instruments (Baker, 2012).

The more common use of incoming placement exams is explained, to an extent, by the student populations MSIs enroll, many of whom require remedial or developmental education. In addition, 46% of MSIs are community colleges (Nguyen, Lundy-Wagner, & Associates, 2015) which are more likely than other institutional types to use incoming placement exams and also enroll many students who are underprepared for postsecondary coursework.

Figure 2 indicates that MSIs are comparable to PWIs in using assessment results for accreditation requirements and external accountability – a driver for institutions of all kinds. However, MSIs are more likely than PWIs to use assessment results for such internal purposes as strategic planning, institutional benchmarking, resource allocation and budgeting, and prospective student/family communications. Further, compared with PWIs, MSIs are more likely to share the results of assessment with alumni. Thus, while accreditation and transparency requirements may prompt MSIs to engage in assessment, the use of results is not solely for those purposes.

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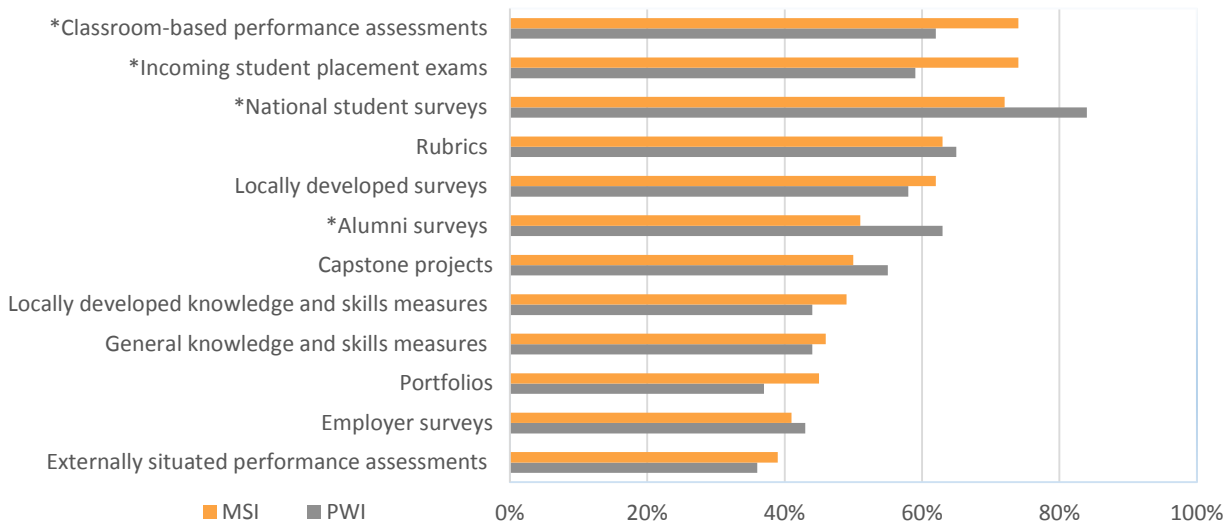


Figure 1. Percentage of Minority-Serving and Predominantly White Institutions employing different assessment approaches at the institution-level to represent undergraduate student learning. Responses with an asterisk (*) are those which were found to be statistically significant.

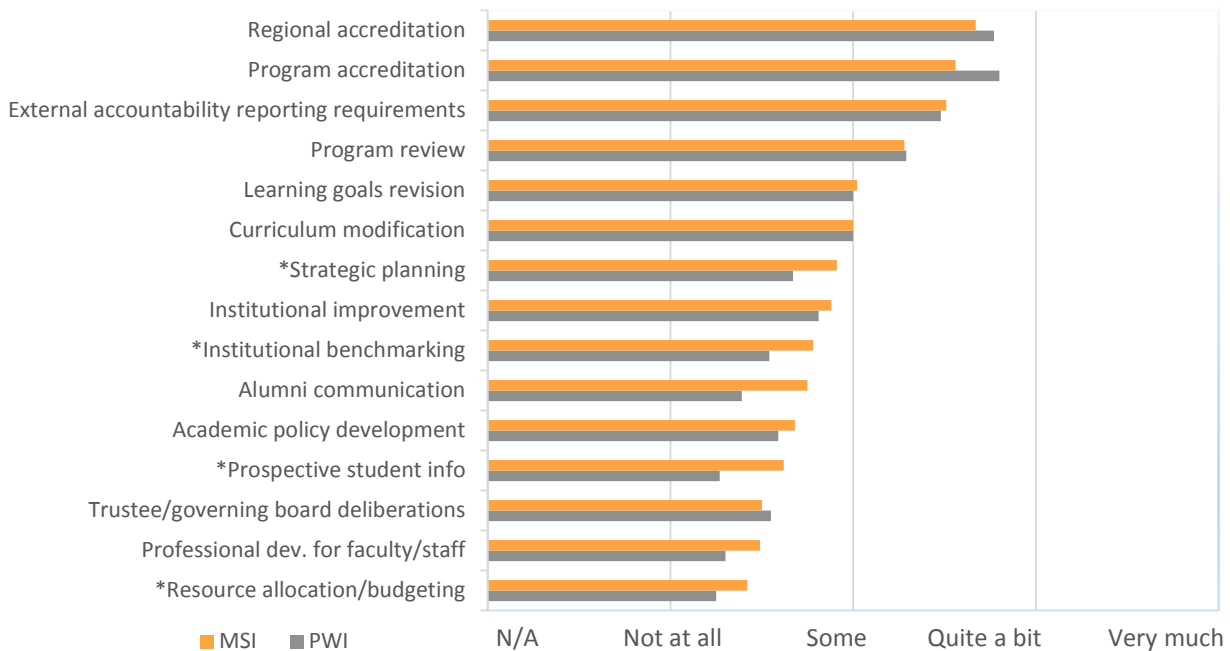


Figure 2. Extent of use of assessment results within Minority-Serving Institutions for various purposes, as compared to Predominantly White Institutions. Responses with an asterisk (*) are those which were found to be statistically significant.

In addition, more MSIs report having internally focused support structures for their assessment endeavors. While the majority of provosts from all types of institutional respondents indicated that their institutions provided ample support for learning outcomes assessment activities on their campus (Kuh et al., 2014), MSI respondents were more likely than PWIs to indicate that professional development opportunities, involvement of student affairs staff, funds targeted for assessment, assessment management system and software, and recognition/reward for faculty involvement were supportive of assessment (Figure 3).

- MSIs are more likely than PWIs to support and reward faculty and staff involvement in assessment activities and find staff whose job is to oversee or coordinate assessment to be supportive of assessment efforts.

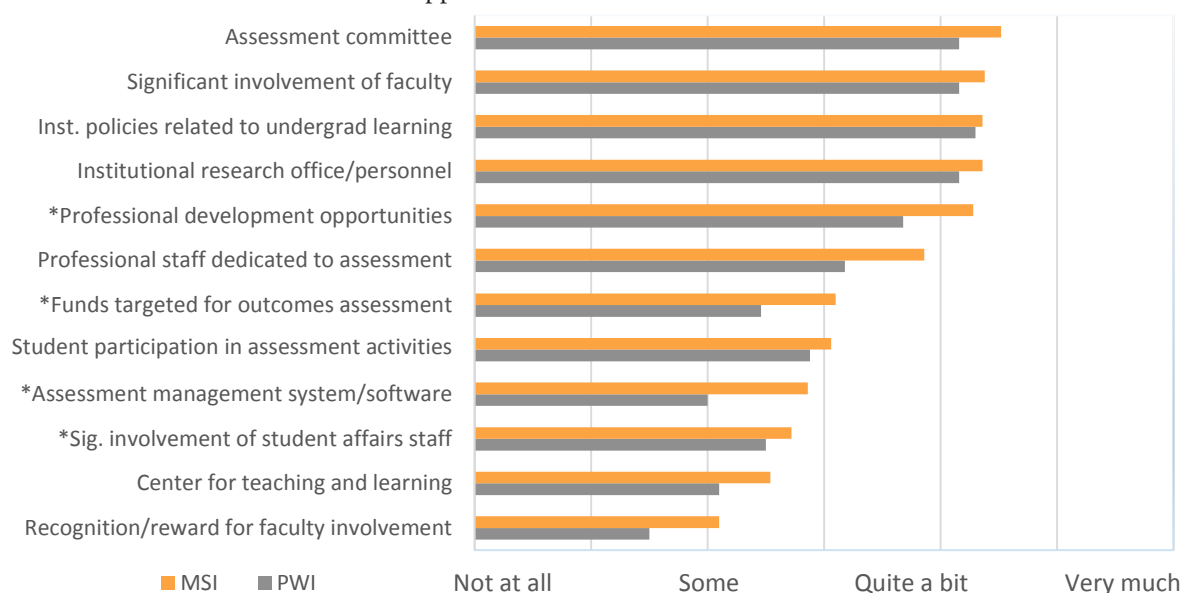


Figure 3. Extent to which institutional structures and conditions support assessment at Minority-Serving Institutions and Predominantly White Institutions.

External pressures drive the assessment work of MSIs, even though they are more likely to use assessment results for internal improvement.

While accreditation is a strong driver of assessment for all institutions, MSIs indicate a slightly greater interest on the part of faculty regarding assessment work along with an institutional commitment to improve. However, MSIs are more likely than PWIs to undertake assessment in response to a statewide governing/coordinating board mandate, participation in a consortium/ multi-institutional collaboration, external funding, national calls for accountability and transparency, concerns about effectiveness/value of education, and institutional membership initiatives (Figure 4).

That external entities influence assessment work at MSIs is not surprising, given that these institutions often have to contend with dubious perceptions of their quality. For example, although MSIs educate approximately 40% of all underrepresented students (IHEP, 2014), questions abound in the media regarding their academic rigor. This may stimulate MSIs to communicate assessment results to demonstrate their worth to prospective students, their families, higher education professionals, alumni, accreditors, and so forth. For instance, MSI respondents indicated that results of assessment are regularly shared with alumni, with survey respondents indicating “quite a bit” of information shared versus the response of “some” results shared by PWIs.

In addition, MSI respondents expressed similar needs as that of PWIs to advance their assessment of undergraduate student learning. MSIs were less likely (42%) than PWIs (54%) to indicate that additional financial or staff resources are needed to advance assessment work. As with other types of institutions the top needs expressed by provosts included more professional development for faculty and staff, and more faculty involved in and using assessment. In the open-ended responses to the provost survey, MSI respondents indicated that they would like to know the best practices for assessment within their institutions as well as more information on how to create a culture of assessment that is owned and led by the faculty.

MSIs are more likely than PWIs to undertake assessment in response to statewide or governing board mandate, external funding, consortia, concerns about effectiveness, and national calls for accountability and transparency.

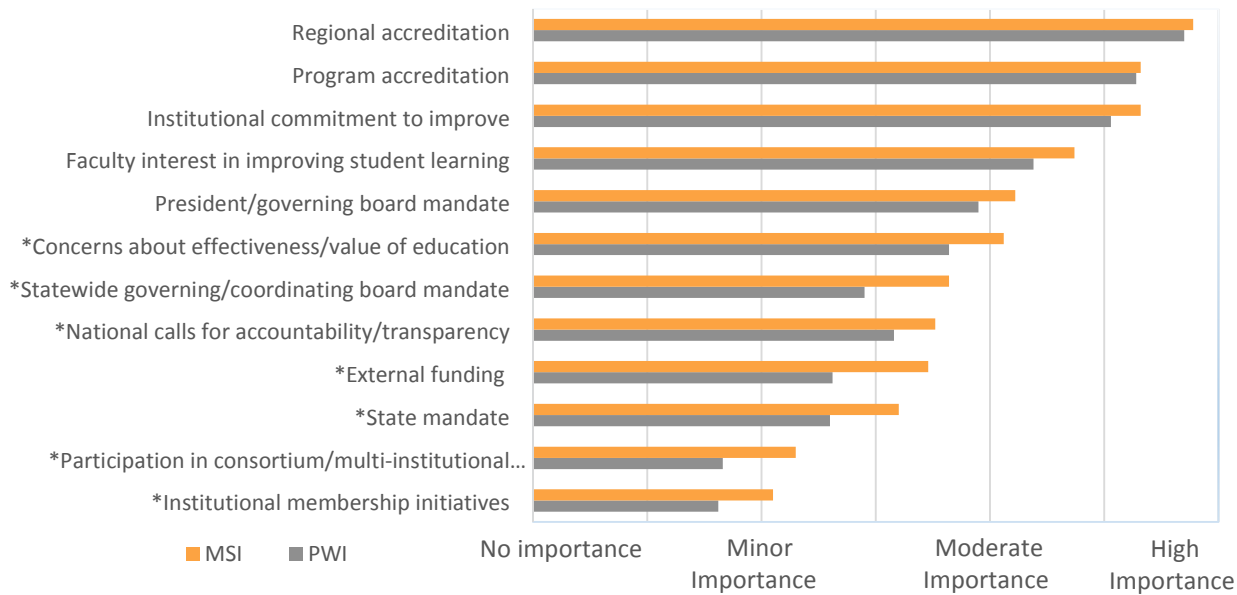


Figure 4. Importance of factors or forces that prompt student learning outcomes assessment by Minority-Serving and Predominantly White Institutions.

Assessment and Categories of MSIs

As noted earlier, within the MSI universe are institutions with differing missions and student populations. Two institutional types of MSIs were omitted from this analysis – ANNH and NASNTI - because too few schools of each type were included in the data set to yield reliable results. The findings presented below are based upon examining the different assessment approaches of MSIs within their various classification types.

While driven by the same external factors, and using results in similar fashion, sub-categories of MSIs employ different approaches to assess student learning.

Adopting student learning outcomes for all undergraduate students regardless of majors ranged from an 88% high for PBIs and ANNAPISIs, to the low of 75% at HSIs. Of greater interest, perhaps, is that different types of MSIs employed different approaches to measure student learning (Figure 5), even though they used the results in very similar ways.



- TCUs were the most likely to use locally developed surveys and locally developed knowledge and skills measures. In addition, TCUs engage heavily in the use of classroom-based performance assessment, more so than any other category.
- HBCUs were the most likely to use general knowledge and skills measures with their students with TCUs least likely to do so.
- PBIs were more likely to use portfolios, alumni surveys, employer surveys, and rubrics.
- HSIs at 67% and HBCUs at 58% of respondents were the least likely to use incoming student placement exams.

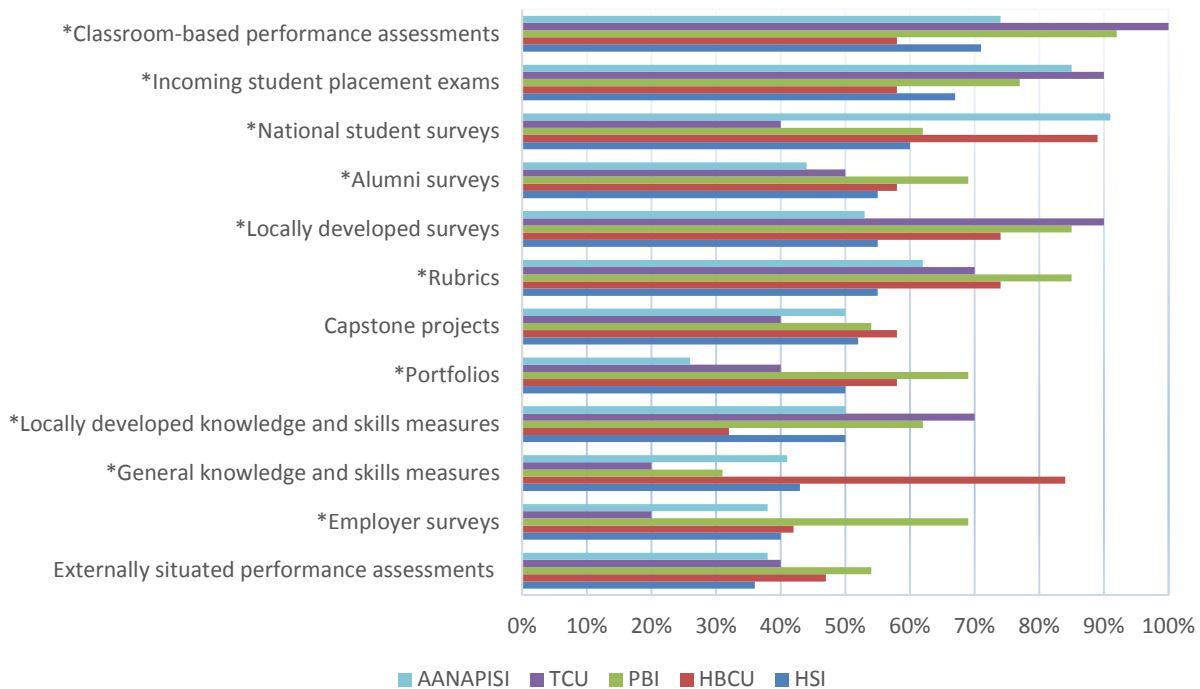


Figure 5. Percentage of Minority-Serving subcategories employing different assessment approaches at the institution-level to represent undergraduate student learning.

No differences were found as to how different categories of MSIs used results. When examining where changes were made within the institutions in terms of policies or practices at the curricular, department, school, or institution level, the

majority of activity occurred at the course or curricular level for all categories of MSIs. Only at HSIs was use limited at additional institutional levels with HSIs reporting “some” use at various levels in comparison to other types reporting “quite a bit” on a reporting scale of “N/A, Not at all, Some, Quite a bit, Very much.”

In addition, similar factors or forces prompted MSIs in different categories to assess student learning. One difference was that TCUs which place “high importance” on faculty interest in improving student learning as a driving force; other types of MSIs reported “minor” to “moderate importance.” Finally, HCBUs indicated their main driving force to do assessment to be program accreditation, while others indicated “moderate importance”; a finding consistent with other research (Fester, Gasman, & Nguyen, 2012).

While driven by similar ends, subcategories of MSIs use assessment to address different institutional needs and interests.

Despite various levels of funding and differing institutional missions, this report shows that MSIs have taken seriously the challenge of collecting evidence of student learning. Whether driven by faculty or mandated by external agencies, MSIs recognize the importance of assessment and are focused on using the results to ensure that all students succeed.

-Belle Wheelan, president, Southern Association of Schools and Colleges

When asked about the top five areas needed to advance student learning, provosts from different MSI categories indicated various needs (Figure 6).

- TCUs and HSIs wanted greater institutional assessment staff capacity, more student affairs staff involved, additional resources, and external funding.

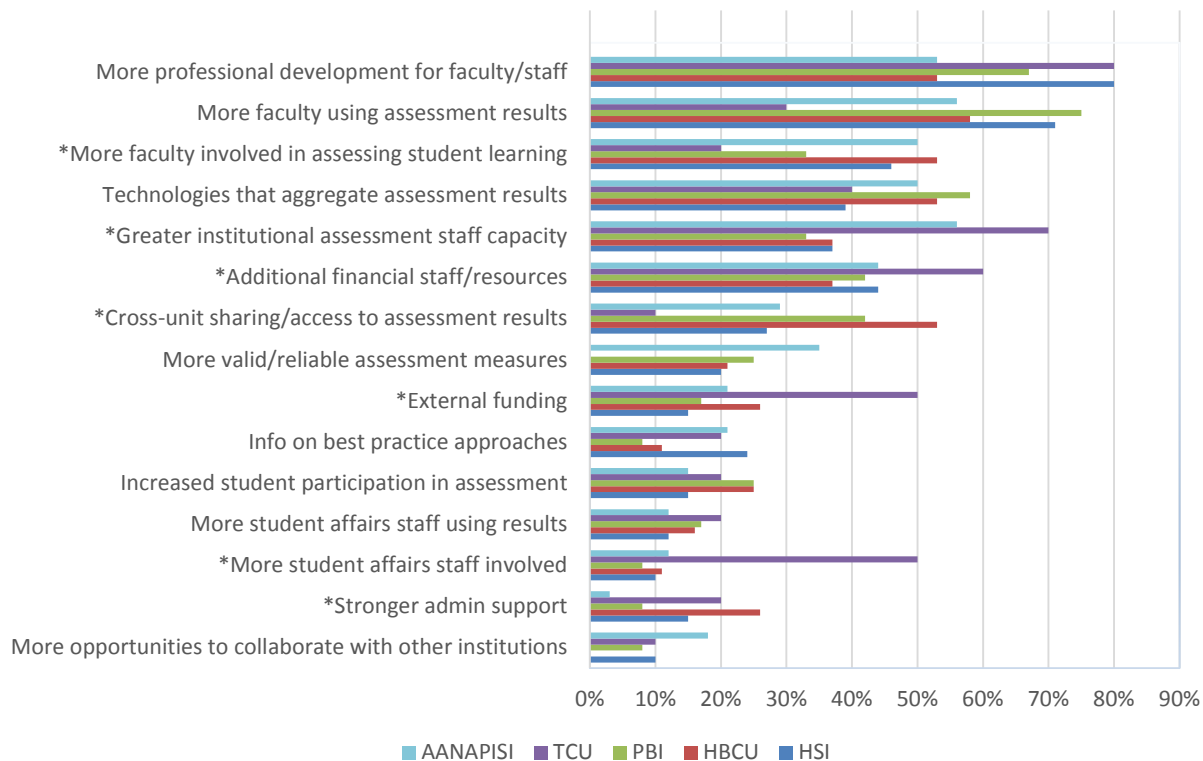


Figure 6. Percentage of institutions indicating priority needs for advancing assessment work by Minority-Serving Institution type.

- HBCUs indicated it would be helpful for more faculty to be involved in assessment, along with stronger administrative support, and more sharing across units of results.
- No HBCU put more opportunities for collaboration within their top 5 areas of need; no TCU respondent indicated that more valid or reliable measures of student learning would be useful.

When asked about the extent to which institutional structures and resources support assessment, having an assessment committee, significant involvement of faculty, institutional policies related to undergraduate learning, institutional research office/personnel, and professional development opportunities were among the top five influences. However, at HBCUs, assessment management systems or software were viewed as more important than at other types of MSIs. Also, both PBIs and TCUs were least likely to note the relevance of a center for teaching and learning in terms of supporting assessment. When provosts indicated how well the organization and governance structure supports assessment, HSIs' structure was deemed the least supportive, while HBCUs was the most supportive.

Conclusions and Implications

Our analysis of assessment practices at MSIs point to two conclusions.

First, *the reasons MSIs engage in assessment and how they use the results vary.*

For HBCUs, the strongest driver for assessment is accreditation, and HBCUs have had to respond to questions from accreditors about institutional viability and academic quality (Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Gasman, 2008; Gasman, Baez, Denzer, Sedgwick, & Tudico, 2007). It turns out that these institutions also have governance and organizational structures that are more supportive of assessment work compared to other types of MSIs. It would be instructive to find out why their campus structures are viewed this way. PBIs appear to make the most use of assessment results to make changes to policies, programs, and practices in all levels of the institution – a task many institutions are trying to achieve. Learning more about the institutional policies, practices, and reward systems at PBIs might provide some guidance to other institutions in this regard.

TCUs, by far, place the highest importance on faculty and staff involvement in assessment, in faculty/staff use of results, and stated that faculty's interest in improving student learning was the most important driver for engaging in assessment. Further, they were the most likely to indicate the need to involve student affairs in the work of assessment, and respondents indicated 100% involvement in classroom-based assessments for assessing student learning at an institutional level. HSIs comprise the largest single group of MSIs, but were the least likely to use assessment results and have learning outcomes statements common to all undergraduates. The good news is that when such learning outcomes were adopted, they tended to be aligned across programs. Another hindrance to HSI use of assessment results is that their governance and organizational structures were reported as less supportive of learning outcomes assessment. Given the large number of underrepresented students enrolled at these institutions, more attention to the use of assessment results has the potential to improve the educational outcomes of a substantial proportion of historically underserved students.

AANAPISIs were the only MSI category to heavily use results for alumni relations, and use assessment results the most for prospective students. How beneficial is the involvement of alumni in the process for AANAPISIs and what might others learn from this involvement? But equally salient, what might the field of assessment learn from in depth examination of assessment practices across MSIs?

What might the field of assessment learn from in depth examination of assessment practices across MSIs?

Second, *MSIs were more likely than PWIs to select locally developed assessment approaches and to use assessment results for internal uses such as resource allocation, benchmarks, and planning ahead.*

MSIs employed different approaches to assess student learning from PWIs. For instance, while PWIs turned to national student surveys, MSIs gravitated toward varied approaches that aligned with their student needs. As noted in a case study of Texas A&M International University (TAMIU), an assessment tool may be considered best practice in the field of assessment, but it may need to be adapted or changed when applied to the 93% Hispanic/Latino population the institution serves (Baker, 2012). Yet, not only did MSIs utilize locally developed measures more frequently than PWIs, they also employed different approaches to assessment within their sub-categories – meaning that within MSIs assessment practices differed from each other. If, as stated in the TAMIU case study, MSIs are selecting assessment practices and approaches based on the students that they serve, then it would not be surprising that practices would differ between the various sub-categories of MSIs – it would be expected.

Much as student development literature supports the concept that students learn and develop in different ways by providing frameworks for understanding diverse student populations' development (Jones & Abes, 2013; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010) assessing diverse student populations' learning may need to take various forms. If MSIs are adapting their assessment approaches to meet the needs of the students they serve, it follows that the information gathered from those assessments would be more likely to be used internally since the original choice of assessment tools or approaches focused on internal needs and concerns. If MSIs are selecting assessment tools to better understand the learning of their unique student populations, how might other institutions modify their assessment practices if the students served drove the selection of tools?

One way to advance assessment within MSIs is to create more opportunities for collaboration with other institutions. MSIs regard belonging to a consortium/multi-institutional collaboration and to institutional membership initiatives as important drivers to conduct assessment at their institutions. This multi-institutional collaboration can take shape by MSIs working with one another (either with other institutions that serve similar student populations, by accreditation regions, cross-institutional type, etc.), and pooling resources with the objective that institutions learn from each other. An excellent example for such collaboration is the BEAMS project (Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008) where administrators, faculty, and staff from various MSIs joined together in order to develop a culture of evidence at their institutions and aid one another throughout the process.

Final Words

MSIs differ from PWIs in the types of assessment approaches they employ and how they use assessment results. In part, this may be because nearly half of MSIs are community colleges. Yet, this does not fully explain the differences. The sample of MSIs was similar in breakdown to the overall national profile in 2013. Perhaps a better explanation is the student populations served. Buttressing this interpretation is the variability between the MSI categories themselves. If the choice in assessment measures depended on MSIs and the characteristics that have come to be associated with these institutions, such as lack of ample resources that limit their ability to collect and analyze assessment data (Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008), then the use of national surveys and other measures would be similar across MSI categories. This is not the case.

If MSIs are selecting assessment tools to better understand the learning of their unique student populations, how might other institutions modify their assessment practices if the students served drove the selection of tools?

Assessment experts agree that multiple sources of evidence should be used to adequately demonstrate what students have learned and whether they can transfer their learning to different settings (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Conrad, Gasman & Associates, 2013; Suskie, 2009). If colleges and universities are using different measures of assessment due to their relevance for the students they serve, then the warrant for these measures should be explained when undergoing accreditation reviews and to ensure eligibility for performance and other forms of funding.

If widely used tools do not adequately measure student learning outcomes at institutions with large numbers of historically underrepresented students, then how should this situation be remedied? Is it a matter of choosing different tools or negotiating reduced costs to participate in national surveys? Or can a persuasive argument be made that assessment approaches should be more sensitive to the needs and characteristics of the students they serve? Do we have an accurate portrayal of student learning nationally, if larger portions of MSI students are not part of national surveys? Are MSIs affected negatively in terms of competitiveness, ability to comply with accreditors, and/or ability to communicate their worth to the public by relying on alternative assessment methods (e.g. locally developed surveys as opposed to national surveys)? MSIs are not part of the national picture when they employ locally developed surveys as opposed to nationally benchmarked surveys. Is it then the case that MSIs should utilize instruments which do not accurately capture the learning, activities, or engagement of the students they serve; or should the national instruments be modified to become more inclusive?

A potential means to advance student learning across institutions is to become more familiar with the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP). The DQP helps institutions identify the knowledge and skills students should be equipped with by the time they graduate (Lumina Foundation, 2014). Of the institutions surveyed, 69% of MSIs and 73% of PWIs stated that they were familiar with the DQP. Overall, 14% of MSIs and 17% of PWIs indicated on the survey that they were currently utilizing the DQP. MSIs working with the DQP used it for purposes of program development and review, strategic planning, and assessment of student learning. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) in partnership with Lumina Foundation, engaged 21 HBCUs in a project to work with the DQP. Participating HBCUs stated that the DQP helped them align departmental intended learning outcomes with those of the institution, was useful in the program review process, increased the quality of the education offered, and led to strengthening students' core competency skills (SACSCOC, 2013). Given these positive outcomes the DQP has the potential to help the assessment process and increase the use of assessment results to improve student learning.

MSIs seem to make more use of assessment results for various purposes. While it would be beneficial to know the “why” – what animates this greater emphasis on use – it is impressive that learning outcomes assessment at Minority-Serving institutions is taking place at high rates, and the results are being widely used. If such use can become consequential (Kuh, Ikenberry, Jankowski et al., 2015) – meaning that it is driven by the needs, questions and interests of the students, faculty and institution as opposed to compliance oriented approaches to assessment focused on meeting needs of external drivers – such use has the potential to improve the quality of teaching and learning for the groups of students these institutions serve.

If it is demonstrated that widely used tools do not adequately measure student learning outcomes at institutions with large numbers of historically underrepresented students, then how should this situation be remedied?

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Appendix A

A1. Institutional Category: 2013 Participating Institutions Compared with National Percentages

Category	Sample	National Percentage
PWI	84%	77%
MSI	16%	23%
HSI	45%	51%
HBCU	14%	16%
PBI	11%	9%
TCU	7%	5%
AANAPISI	28%	18%

*14 AANAPISIs also qualified as HSIs and vice versa which makes the total for MSIs greater than 100%

**National Percentages were attained using the total of 2,781 regionally accredited undergraduate-degree granting institutions listed in the Higher Education Directory published by Higher Education Publications. There are approximately 4,500 higher education institutions in 2013 but not all were accredited. Using this figure would yield approximately 86% PWI and 14% MSI.

A2. Institutional Control of Participating Institutions

Control	MSI Sample	National Percentage
Public	75%	56%
Private	25%	40%
For-Profit	0%	4%

A3. Highest Degree Granted at Participating Institutions

Category	MSI Sample	National Percentage
Doctoral	9%	10%
Master's	27%	23%
Baccalaureate	12%	23%
Associate	44%	38%
Other	9%	6%

There are, of course, certain limitations to this study. First, there were 14 institutions that qualified as both HSI and AANAPISI. Controlling for this did not yield any significantly different results. Thus, these institutions were left to qualify as both, and the potential for them to sway the results should be noted. Similarly, the sample sizes for some of the institutions were not necessarily proportionate to the breakdown of MSIs. While the differences were within 2% points for most MSI categories, HSIs were underrepresented by 6% and AANAPISIs were overrepresented by 10%. This could have an effect on the generalizability of these results. Third, the methods of comparison and data analysis may not have allowed for an identification of every significant trend. This is true, both for the MSI categories and MSI/PWI comparisons. Fourth, the study relied on provost responses, representing one perspective of assessment activities within the institution. Fifth, the majority of MSIs were community colleges. While the percentage is only 5.5% higher for community colleges in the sample and the breakdown of institutional types is similar to the national numbers, this could have swayed the results. However, controlling for type still found differences between MSI community colleges and PWI community colleges. The findings of this study remain strong, and advocate for further research to be devoted to learning outcomes assessment with a focus on Minority-Serving Institutions.

Appendix B

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)

HSIs are the largest category of MSIs in the U.S., with 311 institutions identified (Gasman & Conrad, 2013), enrolling approximately 42% of the total Latino(a) college student population (Harmon, 2012). In order to be an HSI, the full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate enrollment needs to be comprised of at least 25% Latino(a) students, no less than 50% of all undergraduate students should be eligible for need-based aid (or eligible for the Pell Grant), and there should be a “substantial percentage” of enrolled students receiving Pell Grants in the second year after the HSI classification was applied (Higher Education Act of 1965). HSIs grant the majority of associate and bachelor degrees to Latino(a) students compared to all other higher education institutions (Medina & Posadas, 2012). While HSIs focus on serving Latino(a) students, their missions often do not reflect this focus. Given how the classification is contingent on the population of Latino(a) students enrolled, these institutions are not typically founded with the mission to educate Latino(a) students. Also, it means this designation can change from year to year depending on student population and enrollment patterns.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

HBCUs were founded with the specific mission to educate African Americans, and serve the Black community (Provasnik & Snyder, 2004). Approximately 105 HBCUs exist in the U.S. higher education system. In order to be an HBCU, institutions need to have been established prior to 1964 with the mission to educate African Americans, and must be accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency, typically a regional accreditor, or make strides towards such accreditation (Higher Education Act of 1965). HBCUs enroll approximately 16% of all African American undergraduate students even though these institutions only comprise 3% of all colleges and universities (Harmon, 2012).

Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs)

PBIs need to maintain an undergraduate class comprised of at least 1,000 students, 50% of which are eligible for the Pell Grant, enroll at least 40% African American students, at least 50% of students are low-income or first-generation, at least 50% of students enroll in a program which leads to associate’s or bachelor’s attainment, the institution itself cannot be classified as an HBCU, and it must have a lower average expenditure compared to other institutions. There are approximately 30 PBIs. Similar to HSIs, PBIs designation as an MSI can change from year to year, and the core institutional mission does not often reflect the focus of educating the specified student population. Instead, the classification often comes about due to geographical circumstances and regional population trends (Hubbard & Stage, 2009).

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

TCUs are unique in higher education in the sense that they are the only institution fully funded by the federal government, and they aim to provide cultural, emotional, and financial support for Native American students while simultaneously supporting the overall community (Fann, 2002). In order to be a TCU, institutions need to qualify for funding under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978 (Higher Education Act of 1965). There are currently 35 TCUs, with the vast majority being associate’s institutions and focusing on curricula which reflect the cultures of the various founding tribes (Fann, 2002).

Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs)

AANAPISIs must have at least 10% enrollment of undergraduate students of Asian American, Native American, and/or Pacific Islander descent (Higher Education Act of 1965). There are 116 AANAPISIs in the U.S. (Gasman & Conrad, 2013), over half of which are community colleges, and these institutions are amongst the most diverse; often qualifying to be HSIs, as well (Teranishi, 2012).

Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian (ANNHs)

ANNHs must have an undergraduate enrollment of at least 20% Alaskan Native students, or at least 10% Native Hawaiian students (Higher Education Act of 1965). There are approximately 16 of these institutions, with their designation and eligibility criteria changing yearly (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Native American Serving Nontribal Institutions (NASNTIs)

NASNTIs must enroll at least 10% Native American students as part of their undergraduate program, and must also not qualify to be a Tribal College and University (TCU) (Higher Education Act of 1965). There are approximately 13 NASNTI without any new institutions qualifying for the designation since 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The purpose of this designation is to improve the institution’s ability to serve Native American and low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

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NILOA Mission

NILOA's primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

Comments and questions about this paper should be sent to njankow2@illinois.edu.

About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/>
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.
- One of the co-principal NILOA investigators, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001.

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