



Revitalizing Academic Assessment: Navigating the Tensions between Accreditation Compliance and Faculty- Driven Learning Improvement

Advocacy for a shift in higher education assessment, from compliance to improvement, enhancing student learning.

Dr. Will Miller

AVP for Continuous Improvement and Institutional Performance
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

The Disconnect in Higher Education Assessment

Program-Level Focus

Accrediting bodies demand program-level reporting, leading to a heavy focus on this area.

Faculty-Level Focus

Faculty concentrate on individual class sections, where direct student learning occurs.

Advocating for a Shift in Practices

1 From Compliance to Improvement

Suggests moving from proving student learning to actively improving it.

2 Enhancing Student Experience

The shift aims to align assessment with intrinsic educational values.

A woman with long dark hair and a man in a light blue polo shirt are standing in a library, looking at a whiteboard. The whiteboard has a hand-drawn diagram of a heart with various parts labeled in blue and red ink. The labels include 'The Heart', 'Superior vena cava', 'Aorta', 'Left pulmonary arteries', and 'Left pulmonary veins'. The man is pointing at the diagram with his right hand. The woman is holding a green marker. The background shows bookshelves filled with books.

The Need to Advance from Compliance

1

Compliance Mindset

Current accreditation efforts focus on meeting external standards.

2

Culture of Improvement

There's a need to foster a culture that values continuous enhancement.

Contrasting Proving and Improving Learning

Proving Learning

Summative assessments at the end of courses or programs to evaluate achievement.

Improving Learning

Formative assessments throughout courses or programs to enhance learning.



Impact on Teaching and Learning

Proving Learning

May lead to narrow teaching methods focused on assessment outcomes.

Improving Learning

Encourages holistic teaching that fosters critical thinking and creativity.

Data and Feedback Utilization

1

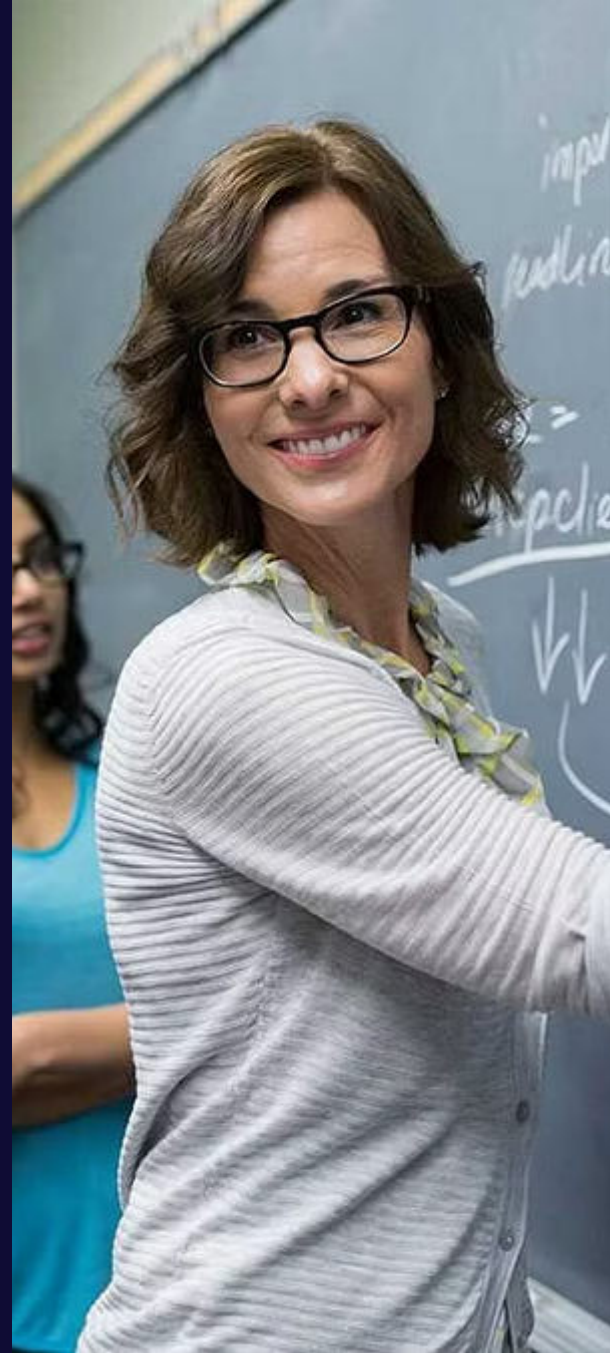
Proving Learning

Data used for external reporting and demonstrating compliance.

2

Improving Learning

Data used proactively to inform teaching and enhance student learning.



Stakeholder Engagement

1

Proving Learning

Faculty and students are subjects in the assessment process.

2

Improving Learning

Collaborative environment with active involvement in assessment.



	Proving Student Learning	Improving Student Learning
Objective	The primary goal is to demonstrate that learning has occurred against predefined benchmarks or standards. External requirements, such as accreditation standards, regulatory bodies, and accountability measures often drive this approach. It's about showing evidence that students have met learning outcomes by the end of a course or program.	The aim is to continuously enhance the learning process and outcomes for students. This perspective views assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning, focusing on feedback loops that inform teaching practices, curriculum design, and student support services to foster deeper learning.
Method	Proving learning typically involves summative assessments, standardized tests, final exams, and other forms of evaluation that can be quantified and compared against a standard. These assessments are designed to be objective, comparable across different contexts, and easily reported.	Improvement-focused assessment relies more on formative assessments, feedback mechanisms, reflective practices, and adaptive learning strategies. These methods are designed to identify learning gaps and opportunities for enhancement in real-time, allowing for adjustments in teaching methods, course content, and student support.
Focus	The emphasis is on assessment as a means of validation and accountability. It leans towards a backward-looking perspective where the primary question is, "Have students learned what they were supposed to learn?"	The emphasis is on growth, development, and the enhancement of learning experiences. It's forward-looking, concentrating on questions like, "How can we enhance learning for our students?" and "What changes can improve student outcomes?"
Challenges	While necessary for certain regulatory and quality assurance purposes, this approach can sometimes prioritize measurement over meaningful learning. It may also lead to teaching to the test, where instruction is narrowly focused on ensuring students can pass assessments rather than on broader educational objectives.	This approach requires a more significant investment of time and resources, including faculty development, data analysis capabilities, and systems for integrating feedback into practice. It also demands a cultural shift towards valuing continuous improvement and recognizing the complexity of learning processes.



Rational Choice in Faculty Decisions

1

Prioritizing Responsibility

Faculty balance teaching, research, and service based on personal and professional goals.

2

Resource Allocation

Faculty allocate limited resources to maximize the impact of their work.

Rational Choice and Higher Education Assessment

1

Institutional Priorities

Faculty align with metrics for tenure and promotion.

2

Time Constraints

Standardized assessments are time-efficient.



The Student Impact

Narrowed Curriculum

Focus on measurable outcomes can limit exposure to diverse topics.

Engagement

"Teaching to the test" can reduce intrinsic motivation and engagement.

Assessment with Varied Faculty Commitment

Time-Strapped Skeptic	Low time, low willingness. Prefers efficient tools.
Willing Explorer	Low time, high willingness. Benefits from modular training.
Cautious Contemplator	High time, low willingness. Needs confidence-building.
Assessment Advocate	High time, high willingness. Ideal for leading change.

Time/Willingness	Low Time	High Time
Low Willingness	The Time-Strapped Skeptic	The Cautious Contemplator
High Willingness	The Willing Explorer	The Assessment Advocate

Institutional Efforts for Realignment

1

Culture of Improvement

Institutions should foster a dynamic teaching environment.

2

Professional Development

Offer training in innovative teaching and assessment methods.



Enhancing Faculty Access to Data

1 Performance Data

Easy access to data helps faculty adjust teaching methods.

2 Assessment Tools

Training in tools and technologies supports continuous improvement.

Encouraging Collaborative Assessment

Interdisciplinary Work

Collaboration across disciplines can lead to innovative assessment methods.

Student Participation

Engaging students in assessment enhances their learning journey.

Technology in Support of Assessment

1

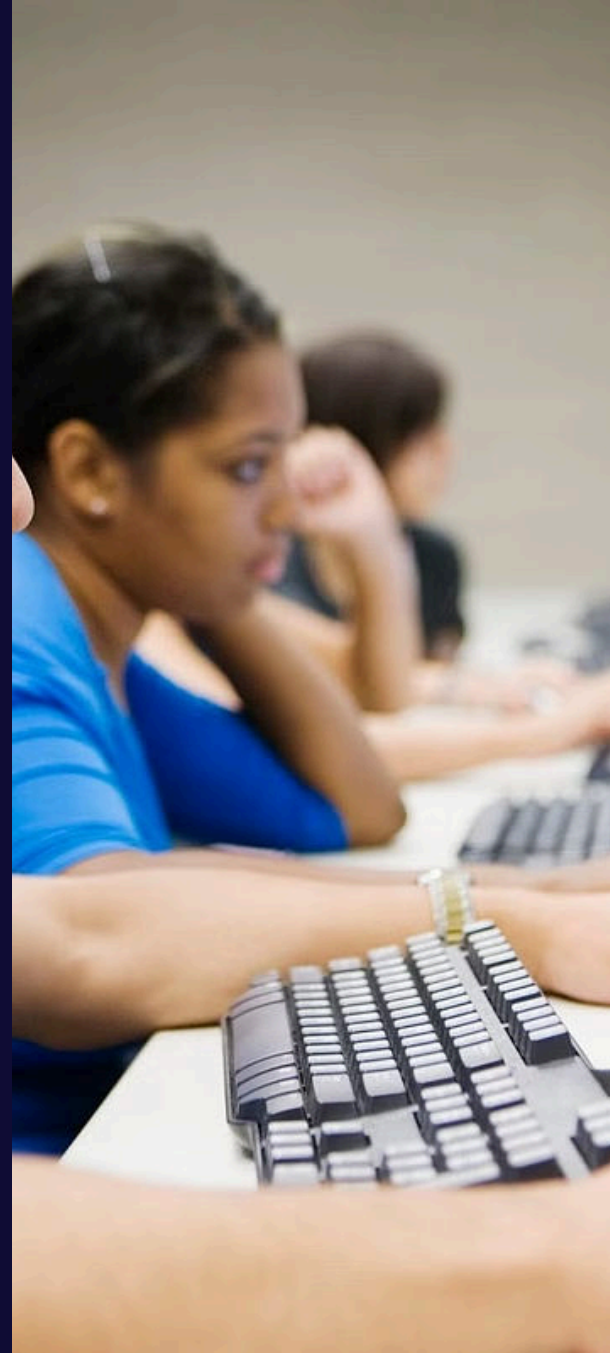
Learning Management Systems

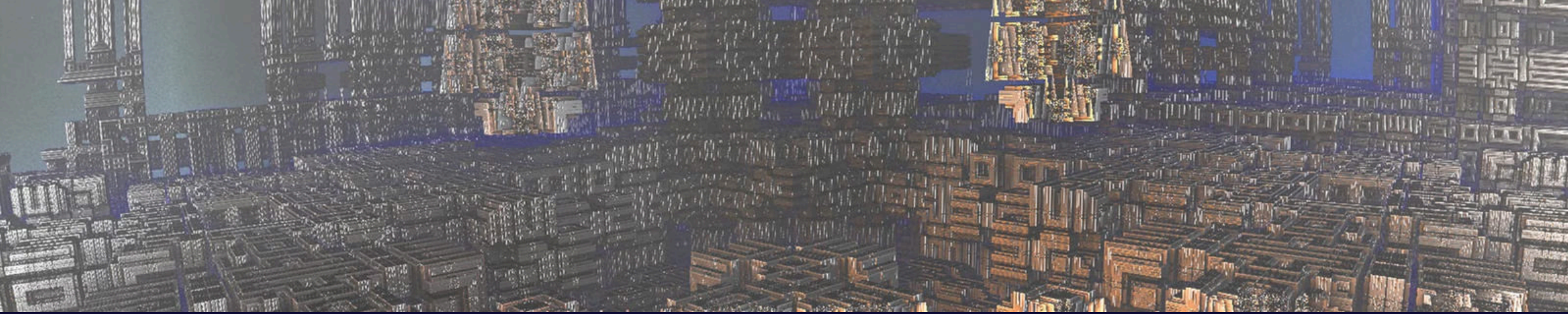
Facilitate ongoing feedback and collaborative learning.

2

Digital Portfolios

Support reflective practices and showcase student work.





A Reimagined Academic Assessment Process

Accrediting Bodies

Adopt standards that prioritize improvement and innovation.

Educational Institutions

Create environments that support faculty in innovative practices.

Faculty Role

Move towards dynamic, integrated teaching and assessment.

Aligning Assessment with Faculty Priorities

1

Resource Provision

Offer faculty the tools and time needed for innovative assessment.

2

Rewarding Engagement

Modify reward systems to acknowledge efforts in improving learning.



Faculty Types and Assessment Strategies

Time-Strapped Skeptic	Efficient tools, minimal setup.
Willing Explorer	Modular training, significant insights.
Cautious Contemplator	Confidence-building, evidence-based success.
Assessment Advocate	Leadership roles, sharing expertise.

Type	Characteristics	Strategies for Success
Time-Strapped Skeptic	Low time availability and low willingness to engage. These faculty members are often overwhelmed with their current responsibilities and skeptical about the benefits of investing in assessment practices.	Assessment professionals should offer streamlined, low-effort tools and strategies that can be easily integrated into existing workflows. Focus on demonstrating the immediate, tangible benefits of assessment for student learning and efficiency in teaching. Quick guides, templates, and automated assessment tools that require minimal setup time can be particularly effective.
Willing Explorer	Low time availability but high willingness to engage. These faculty members are interested in the potential of assessment to enhance learning but are constrained by their schedules.	Leverage enthusiasm by providing bite-sized training sessions, such as lunch-and-learns or short online modules, which fit into their busy schedules. Introduce them to time-efficient assessment practices that yield significant insights into student learning and pair them with mentors who can guide their development in a time-effective manner.
Cautious Contemplator	High-time availability but low willingness to engage. These faculty might have more flexible schedules but remain cautious or uncertain about the value of deeper engagement with assessment practices.	Focus on building confidence and showing the value of assessment through evidence and examples. Offer workshops that highlight successful assessment interventions and their impact on student outcomes. Encourage participation in observation programs where they can see effective assessment practices in action, fostering a gradual increase in willingness to engage.
Assessment Advocate	High time availability and high willingness to engage. These faculty members are both able and eager to delve into comprehensive assessment practices to enhance student learning.	Provide them access to cutting-edge resources, research opportunities, and leadership roles in assessment committees or initiatives. Facilitate their involvement in developing institution-wide assessment strategies or mentoring their peers, allowing them to share their passion and expertise with the broader academic community.



Creating a Supportive Teaching Environment

1 Dynamic Teaching

Encourage faculty to adopt evolving teaching methods.

2 Risk-Taking

Create a culture where faculty can innovate without fear.

Supporting Faculty with Technology

Real-Time Feedback

Advanced technology can provide immediate insights into student learning.

Collaborative Platforms

Online tools facilitate faculty and student collaboration.

Rewarding Teaching Innovation

1

Teaching Awards

Incentivize faculty with recognition for innovative teaching.

2

Educational Research Grants

Provide funding for research into teaching and learning.



Facilitating Faculty Development

1

Workshops and Seminars

Offer training in formative assessment and active learning.

2

Communities of Practice

Enable faculty to exchange strategies and support each other.

Thank you!

Dr. Will Miller

AVP for Continuous Improvement and Institutional Performance

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

will.miller@erau.edu