



# **Learning About How Students Learn**

*Norena Norton Badway, Ph.D.*

University of the Pacific

**October 14, 2005**

**Mesa College**

# 20 Years of Accountability

- Public concern over value received for public dollars spent.

# What We've Had...

## Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (VTEA)

- Transfer for 4 year institutions
- Completion of associate degrees
- Completion of occupational certificates
- Employed or enter the military
- Enter non-traditional employment

# What We've Had...

## Partnership for Excellence

- Transfers/ preparedness for 4 year institutions
- Completion of associate degrees and certificates
- Successful course completions
- Workforce development
- Basic skills improvement

# What We've Had...

## State Report Card (Performance Based Accountability)

- Entered and/or retained employment
- Earnings change
- Change in status from tax receiver to tax payer
- Advancement to public, post-secondary education

# What We've Had...

## Workforce Investment Act

- Entered and/or retained employment
- Earnings change
- Change in unemployment status

# What's Wrong??

- Policy maker priorities
- Don't consider our students' preparation
- Don't consider our students' lives
- Don't consider our students' goals
- ***Don't measure what really matters!***

# Finally...

An accountability system that let's us decide

- what matters
- how to measure what matters
- how to improve what matters

# The Assessment Initiative

An assessment program that is structured, systematic and ongoing in which faculty sets expectations for student achievement, collects and examines assessment data, and uses that data to document and improve student learning.

# The Assessment Initiative

The Assessment Initiative asks:

While students were completing degrees or certificates or preparing for transfer,

- what did they learn? how do you know?
- did faculty agree on expected outcomes?
- did faculty agree on assessment(s)?
- did faculty agree on evidence of learning?
- did faculty agree about improvements?

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## 1. **DIALOGUE:**

The Assessment Initiative begins with *purposeful dialogue* about expectations of what students should learn and what constitutes acceptable evidence of that learning.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## **2. FACULTY-DRIVEN:**

The Assessment Initiative values faculty expertise. *Faculty* establish expected student learning outcomes, assessment methods, criteria, and strategies to improve student learning.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## **3. *FLEXIBILITY:***

The Assessment Initiative protects local *flexibility* so that community colleges can respond to local needs and constraints.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## ***4. INCREMENTAL:***

The Assessment Initiative advocates an *incremental approach*, so that colleges begin with a few courses or programs, complete a full assessment cycle, reflect on results and implement improvement strategies, and continue the cycle.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## ***5. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:***

The Assessment Initiative *reshapes* the *role of professional development* to focus on enhancing the pedagogical, curriculum design, and assessment capacity of faculty.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## **6. *LEARNING CENTERED:***

The Assessment Initiative places highest priority on teaching and learning.

Non-teaching time is redirected towards *what* and *how students learn*, what works for different groups of students, and sharing teaching and assessment strategies.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## ***7. COLLEGIAL:***

The Assessment Initiative is collegial; expectations for student learning and assessment are *collaboratively authored* and *collectively accepted*.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## ***8. INCLUSIVE OF ALL STAFF:***

The Assessment Initiative asks that *all staff, including adjunct faculty and student support personnel*, be involved in assessment and improvement of student learning outcomes.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## ***9. FOCUSES INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES:***

The Assessment Initiative focuses *all institutional resources* on improving teaching and learning.

# Why I'm Grateful for the Assessment Initiative

## ***10. SPEAKS TRUTH TO POWER:***

The Assessment Initiative leads to *more collaborative arrangements* with the agencies that hold colleges accountable.

- Colleges will have real information about the costs and benefits of assessment.

# **Implementing the Assessment Initiative — *aka* Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Cycle**

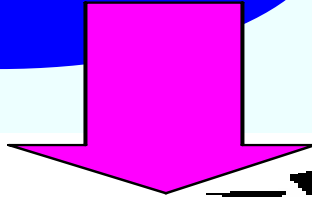
**Norena Norton Badway, Ph.D.**

*University of the Pacific*

**October 14, 2005**

**Mesa College (SDCCD)**

**CHOOSE  
IMPROVEMENT**



**Take  
Stock**

**Build  
Institutional  
Capacity**

**Norm  
Student  
Learning  
Outcomes**

**Cycle of  
Assessment  
and  
Improvement**

**Make  
Improvements  
and  
Evaluate**

**Norm  
Assessments**

**Identify  
Improvement  
Strategies**

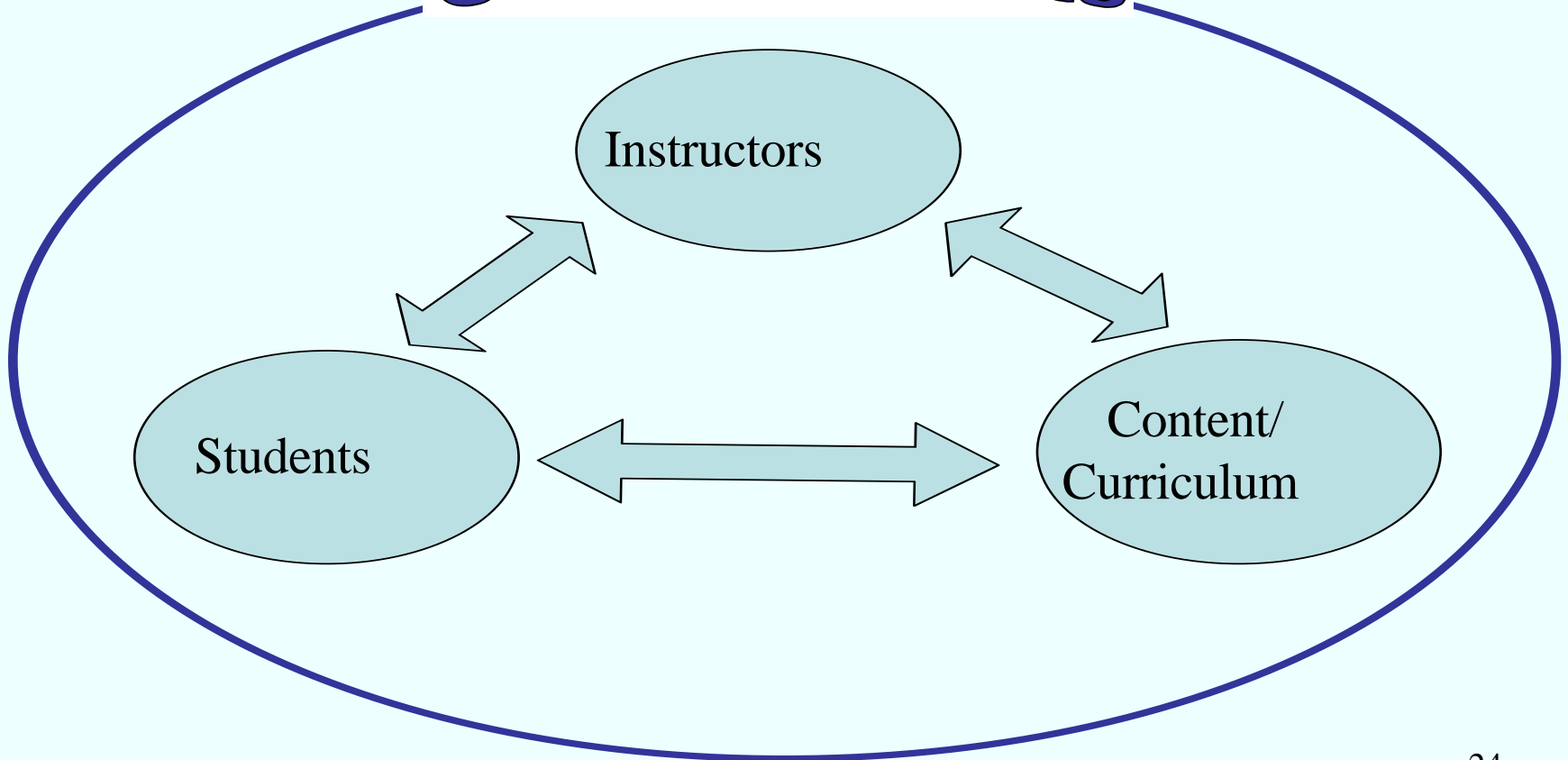
# 1. *Purposeful Dialogue*

Regular meetings focus on changing needs of students, how course outlines differ from syllabi, what are *shared* expectations for students, what assessment methods are now in place, when “norming” now occurs.

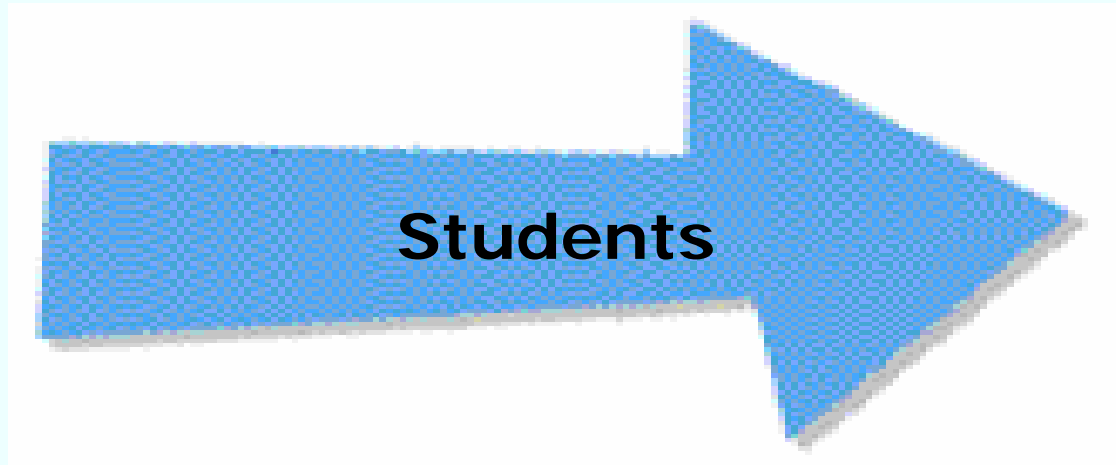
Record this dialogue as PART of the process.

# TAKING STOCK

## *College Effects*



# TAKING STOCK: STUDENTS



- **What do you know about your students' attitudes and beliefs about learning?**

**Faculty usually know a great deal about students and their lives, and we try to be sympathetic to the “busied-up” conditions caused (often) by the need to work and maintain family responsibilities.**

**We may know much less about how students think about the purpose of college and the nature of learning.**

# TAKING STOCK: STUDENTS

- ***Credentialist* students want credit/ credentials but not necessarily the learning the credential signifies (grades matter more than content).**
- ***Vocationalist* students use college as a route to employment (relevancy matters more than intellectualism; students continuously make cost-benefit calculations).**

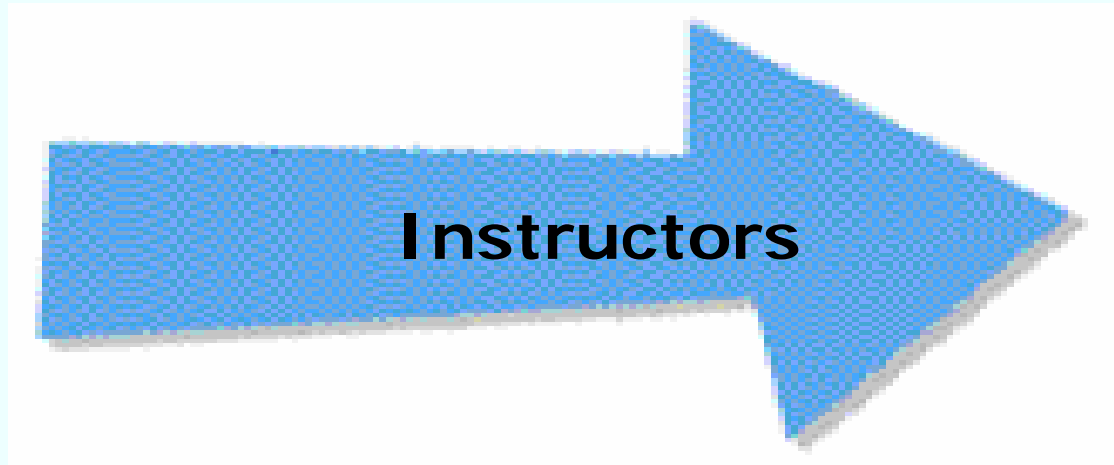
# TAKING STOCK: STUDENTS

- **Some students *manage their fear in unproductive ways* by keeping quiet in class, by avoiding hard classes, by scaling down their ambitions, by failing to submit work even when it's completed, or by dropping or stopping out.**

# **DISCUSSION: STUDENTS**

- **We have a systematic way of gathering information about student beliefs and values about learning.**
- **We have a systematic way to identify the changing needs of our student populationS.**

# TAKING STOCK: INSTRUCTORS



- What do you know about instructors' attitudes, beliefs and knowledge about teaching and learning?
- Is teaching "community property"?

*Higher education is unique in that  
it generally denies employment  
to those schooled in its craft:  
teaching and learning.*

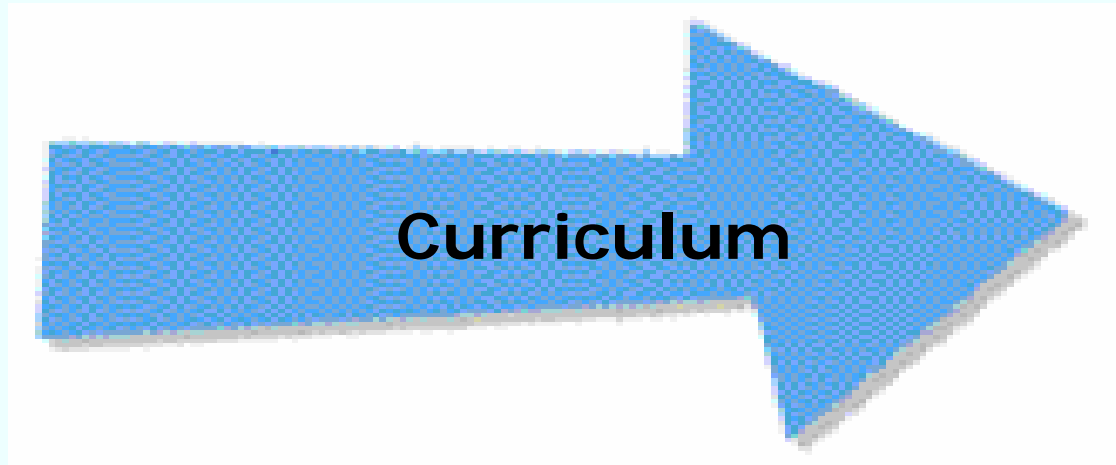
*Faculty autonomy, academic freedom, and professional  
discretion weigh against shared (normed) expectations,  
assessments and criteria.*

*The issue of inter-rater reliability rarely is raised in higher  
education.*

# DISCUSSION: FACULTY

- **What are faculty attitudes and knowledge about learning, teaching, assessment, “teaching as community property”, and continuous improvement?**
- **Is there a forum for discussing examples and reasons for student success or lack of success, teaching ideas, and academic planning? How often are these the topics of discussion among faculty?**

# TAKING STOCK: CURRICULUM



- **What is the consistency of curriculum?**

# Norming<sup>1</sup>

- “Nested” discussions, decisions and actions
- *Collaboratively* authored and *collectively* accepted expectations for student learning and assessment
- *Norming does NOT mean identical learning activities, emphases, pedagogy — it means C&C*

<sup>1</sup>Maki, P.L. (2004). *Assessing for Learning*. American Association for Higher Education, Sterling, VA: Stylus.

# TAKING STOCK: INSTITUTIONAL



- How do local practices and policies impact student learning outcomes and assessment?

# DISCUSSION: CURRICULUM

- **What is the consistency in expectations across sections of a course?**
- **When/ where do instructors norm content and assessment?**
- **Do instructors collaborate on and/or do peer review of learning outcomes for critical courses?**

# DISCUSSION: INSTITUTION

- **How much faculty time is devoted to meetings unrelated (or only peripherally related) to assessing and improving student learning?**
- **Does professional development at your institution focus on assessing and improving student learning outcomes?**
- **Do hiring, promotion and use of adjunct faculty focus on assessing and improving student learning?**

# DISCUSSION: INSTITUTION

- **How do counseling/ student support staff set goals and measure contribution to student learning versus “body counts”**

# Planning, Assessment, Review, Improvement Template

<b>[A]</b>	<b>[B]</b>	<b>[C]</b>	<b>[D]</b>	<b>[E]</b>	<b>[F]</b>	<b>[G]</b>	<b>[H]</b>
<b>Student Learning Outcome Objective</b>	<b>Assessment Method</b>	<b>Criteria for a C</b>	<b>What % of students met criteria? Is this % satisfactory?</b>	<b>What were trends in learning gaps?</b>	<b>What pedagogy, content, or structure strategies might improve outcomes?</b>	<b>Will you change assessment method? Will you change criteria?</b>	<b>Did learning outcomes improve?</b>

## *2. Set Year 1 Priorities*

As part of regular meeting or as part of planning session/ retreat, faculty set priorities for Year 1 Assessment Plan.

- Faculty *collaboratively* identify **ONE** learning objective from existing Course Outline of Record as Year 1 Priority.

*(COLUMN A)*

### ***3. Set Year 1 Assessment(s)***

As part of regular meeting or as part of planning session/ retreat, faculty agree upon what ***evidence of learning*** to accept: what assessment(s) is/are acceptable to program faculty. (***COLUMN B***)

- Faculty set acceptable criteria for “average” [C]: What does an average outcome look like?

How do you know it when you see it? (***COLUMN C***)

# Planning, Assessment, Review, Improvement Template

<b>[A]</b>	<b>[B]</b>	<b>[C]</b>	<b>[D]</b>	<b>[E]</b>	<b>[F]</b>	<b>[G]</b>	<b>[H]</b>
<b>Student Learning Outcome Objective</b>	<b>Assessment Method</b>	<b>Criteria for a C</b>	<b>What % of students met criteria? Is this % satisfactory?</b>	<b>What were trends in learning gaps?</b>	<b>What pedagogy, content, or structure strategies might improve outcomes?</b>	<b>Will you change assessment method? Will you change criteria?</b>	<b>Did learning outcomes improve?</b>

## ***4. Implement Year 1 Assessment***

During first semester of Year 1, faculty teach course and implement assessment.

All faculty teaching the Year 1 Priority Course gather assessment evidence at the end of the semester and store it in an agreed upon location.

# Planning, Assessment, Review, Improvement Template

<b>[A]</b>	<b>[B]</b>	<b>[C]</b>	<b>[D]</b>	<b>[E]</b>	<b>[F]</b>	<b>[G]</b>	<b>[H]</b>
<b>Student Learning Outcome Objective</b>	<b>Assessment Method</b>	<b>Criteria for a C</b>	<b>What % of students met criteria? Is this % satisfactory?</b>	<b>What were trends in learning gaps?</b>	<b>What pedagogy, content, or structure strategies might improve outcomes?</b>	<b>Will you change assessment method? Will you change criteria?</b>	<b>Did learning outcomes improve?</b>

## ***6. Set Improvement Strategies***

Based on a shared understanding of which students learned what, faculty collaboratively identify strategies to improve student learning outcomes.

***(COLUMN F; COLUMN G)***

## ***5. Reflect on Progress***

As a group, full time and adjunct faculty discuss if this rate of progress for students is realistically sufficient:

- Is there a great deal of variation within samples of each scoring/ grade?
- What are the trends in learning gaps?

***(COLUMN D; COLUMN E)***

## ***8. Teach, Assess ...***

During Spring semester, faculty implement improvement strategies, or develop plans for improvement strategies to be implemented in the next Fall semester.

At the end of that semester, faculty again assesses student learning outcomes, to determine if progress is sufficient or requires further improvement strategies.

***(COLUMN H)***

# Institutional

## Program

1

2

3

4

5

6

# *Getting Started*

***WHERE*** is not nearly as important as ***STARTING*** because this is continuous professional learning to improve student learning.

***Ready, Fire, Aim*** as you gain experience.

# *Norena Norton Badway, Ph.D.*

University of the Pacific

[nbadway@pacific.edu](mailto:nbadway@pacific.edu)

209-946-2168 or 209-601-7121

*Higher Education Evaluation and Research Group*

