Why Assessment?

“Assessment is essential not only to guide the development of individual students but also to monitor and continuously improve the quality of programs, inform prospective students and their parents, and provide evidence of accountability to those who pay our way.”

“Educational assessment seeks to determine how well students are learning and is an integral part of the quest for improved education. It provides feedback to students, educators, parents, policy makers, and the public about the effectiveness of educational services.”
-- Knowing what students know: the science and design of educational assessment Committee on the Foundations of Assessment, Center for Education, Division on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council; James Pellegrino, Naomi Chudowsky, and Robert Glaser, editors, p. 1

Assessment Is Needed for Learning

Assessment and feedback are crucial for helping people learn. Assessment should mirror good instruction; happen continuously as part of instruction; and provide information about the levels of understanding that students are reaching. In order for learners to gain insight into their learning and their understanding, frequent feedback is critical: students need to monitor their learning and actively evaluate their strategies and their current levels of understanding.
(How People Learn by Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 1999)

Individuals acquire a skill much more rapidly if they receive feedback about the correctness of what they have done. One of the most important roles for assessment is the provision of timely and informative feedback to students during instruction and learning so that their practice of a skill and its subsequent acquisition will be effective and efficient.
(Knowing What Students Know: The science and design of educational assessment by Pellegrino, Chudowsky, and Glaser 2001)
Assessment Is Needed for Effective Teaching

Two important conclusions about the best college teachers:

- How do they prepare to teach? They begin with questions about student learning objectives rather than about what the teacher will do.
- How do they check their progress and evaluate their efforts? They have some systematic program to assess their own efforts and to make appropriate changes. They assess their students based on the primary learning objectives rather than on arbitrary standards.

(What the Best College Teachers Do by Bain 2004)

“People tend to learn most effectively (in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on the way they think, act, or feel) when

- they are trying to solve problems (intellectual, physical, artistic, practical, abstract, etc.) or create something new that they find intriguing, beautiful, and/or important;
- they are able to do so in a challenging yet supportive environment in which they can feel a sense of control over their own education;
- they can work collaboratively with other learners to grapple with the problems;
- they believe that their work will be considered fairly and honestly; and
- they can try, fail, and receive feedback from expert learners in advance of and separate from any summative judgment of their efforts.” – Ken Bain 2004

Assessment Is Needed for a Quality Learning Environment

Quality learning environments are

- “Learner-centered” – paying careful attention to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that learners bring to the educational setting.
- “Knowledge-centered” – taking seriously the need to help students become knowledgeable by learning in ways that lead to understanding.
- “Assessment-centered” – providing opportunities for feedback and revision and what is assessed is congruent with the students’ learning goals. Formative assessment involves the use of assessments as sources of feedback to improve teaching and learning. Summative assessment measures what students have learned at the end of some set of learning activities.
- “Community-centered” – referring to several aspects of community, including the classroom as community, the school as a community, and the degree to which students, teachers, and administrators feel connected to the larger community of homes, business, states, the nation, and even the world.

(How People Learn by Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 1999)
Assessment Drives the Learning Paradigm College

A paradigm shift is underway: from the “instructional paradigm”, one in which

- the mission of colleges and universities is to provide instruction, to offer classes – the successful college is the one that fills classes with students and thus grows in enrollment
- teaching has a focus on
  - what the student is: learning is a function of the individual differences between students – a “blame the student” theory of teaching, based on student deficit, where when students don’t learn it is due to something the students are lacking
  - what the teacher does: learning is a function of teaching – a theory of teaching, based on transmission of concepts and understandings not just information, where the responsibility for effective transmission is placed on the teacher, rather than the student, thereby making it based on teacher deficit

to that of a “learning paradigm” in which the college

- emphasizes results or outcomes, rather than formal processes (curriculum, calendar, gpa)
- sees the whole, the whole experience of students, as prior to the parts, the formal instructional processes
- has a mission to produce student learning using a model of the teaching-learning process that focuses on the learner learning
- has a view of teaching in which the focus is on what the student does: getting students to understand at the level required is a matter of getting them to undertake the appropriate learning activities

- requires frequent, continual, connected, and authentic student performances
- provides consistent, continual, interactive feedback to students
- aligns all of its activities around the mission of producing student learning

(The Learning Paradigm College by Tagg 2003)

A key ingredient in learner-centered teaching is allowing students to make mistakes and learn from them. In learner-centered environments then, we seek to understand not only what students know, but also how they know it. Learner-centered professors coach and facilitate, intertwining teaching and assessing. In a learner-centered environment teaching and assessing are not separate, episodic events, but rather, they are ongoing, interrelated activities focused on providing guidance for improvement. (Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses by Huba and Freed 2000)