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Creating a Culture of Assessment to Elevate Students' Voices

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Creating a Culture of Assessment to Elevate Students' Voices

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April 27, 2021

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the University of San Diego's department of Student Activities and Involvement (SAI) could strengthen its assessment practices and execute consistent data-driven decision making. The following question guided my research: How can I promote a culture of assessment so that SAI's programs and advising are directly informed by a more thorough data collection process that elevates students' voices? Building on the work of assessment scholars, this study serves as a model for assessing student affairs assessment. By critically evaluating SAI's existing assessment culture, administering assessments to understand departmental needs, and offering training in best practices for assessment, I enhanced collaboration between SAI's student affairs professionals and produced recommendations to promote ongoing improvement. Ultimately, this study led to the creation of new assessment tools, training, and resources to sustain an equity-minded culture of assessment that elevates students' voices and responds to students' needs.

Creating a Culture of Assessment to Elevate Students' Voices

Introduction

The purpose of my action research is to elevate students' voices by promoting a culture of assessment in the department of Student Activities and Involvement (SAI) at the University of San Diego (USD). A culture of assessment enables student affairs professionals to collect robust qualitative and quantitative data, share a vivid story of student learning, and ensure students' voices inform data-driven improvements to programming. Students possess valuable insight into the efficacy of co-curricular programs, and student affairs professionals have much to gain by tapping into that insight. When best practices are applied, assessment elevates students' voices by opening dialogues about their experiences and needs. Inspired by the potential impact of a strong assessment culture, I dedicated myself to independently studying assessment and taking on assessment leadership roles. As a culmination of my learning, this project focuses on the transference of this knowledge through the creation of new resources and procedures that will benefit students and SAI alike. I hope to inspire others to view assessment as a tool to empower students, rather than as a task in a job description. I also hope that, through this action research, SAI will be equipped to model a strong culture of assessment to other USD student affairs units.

To achieve these goals, I established the following question to guide my research: How can I promote a culture of assessment in my department so that our programs and advising are directly informed by a more thorough process of data collection that elevates students' voices? By exploring this question, I not only equipped SAI to strengthen its culture of assessment but also engaged in significant experiential learning to enhance my organizational leadership skills.

Literature Review

The concept of a culture of assessment provides a framework for higher education institutions to structure their systems of assessment. The phrase *culture of assessment* was popularized in the 1990s by Trudy Banta, a scholar who has published several guidebooks on assessment (Fuller, 2011; Banta & Palomba, 2014). After this concept's popularization, the literature on assessment has increasingly focused on the creation of assessment cultures (Fuller & Lane, 2017). Scholars define a culture of assessment as an institution's ongoing practice of assessment, underpinned by institutional values that recognize the importance of data-driven decision making (Banta & Palomba, 2016; Fuller & Lane, 2017, p. 19; Schuh, 2013). Scholars who advocate for assessment cultures cite the benefits gained by institutions that develop strong cultures of assessment, such as the enhancement of both student learning and inclusivity from seeking student feedback (Fuller, 2011, p. 3–4; Schuh, 2013). Scholars also emphasize that a strong assessment culture neatly aligns with responsibilities of student affairs professionals to demonstrate accountability and respond to students' needs (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Schuh, 2013). Henning and Roberts (2016) strengthen the case for establishing an assessment culture by outlining how a culture of assessment can better equip student affairs professionals to provide services, promote learning, set goals, and use various resources more efficiently and effectively.

Despite these presumed benefits of assessment cultures and the growing popularity of the assessment movement, differing views on the value of higher education assessment culture have sparked "some of the most wide-ranging and heated discussions the academy has experienced in quite some time" (Baas et al., 2016, p. 1). Applying a Q-methodological inquiry, which is used to categorize data on varying perceptions of an issue, Baas et al. (2016) reveal "dueling narratives" that have polarized conversations on assessment culture. On one side of this debate, advocates

for assessment argue that institutions and individuals must hold themselves accountable, make evidence-based decisions, and prove student learning takes place by practicing widespread and effective assessment (Baas et al., 2016, p. 9–11). Conversely, a group comprised of individuals who, in this study, identify as faculty perceive assessment as “having been forced upon them by entities outside of academia” and are wary of the scant evidence that a culture of assessment creates “any meaningful, positive changes” (Baas et al., 2016, p. 6). Even scholars dedicated to student affairs assessment express concerns that higher education has not successfully leveraged assessment to improve the undergraduate experience or student learning (Henning and Roberts, 2016). With assessment serving dual roles as a requirement for external accountability and a tool for internal improvement, tension surrounding the purpose and value of assessment can obstruct attempts to create a culture of assessment (Henning and Roberts, 2016). Baas et al. (2016) insist creating an assessment culture is worth overcoming this polarization, and they recommend that both sides recognize the other side’s concerns, express their views, and collaborate on assessment plans that mutually benefit internal and external stakeholders.

Discovering this debate shed new light on my research by increasing my awareness of potential resistance. Supporting the notion of Baas et al. (2016) that resistance to assessment is a main obstacle in the creation of assessment culture, Holzweiss et al. (2016) present evidence from their *Survey of Assessment Culture* that “fear-driven cultures” as well as “resignation and obligation” are often cited as main motivators characterizing assessment at many institutions (pp. 15–17). Holzweiss et al. (2016) encourage institutions to unpack assumptions about assessment and clarify the “language of assessment,” moving toward a culture motivated by improvement rather than obligation (pp. 18–19). With an awareness of the resistance to assessment cultures, I prepared myself to hold dialogues about assessment, based on scholarly recommendations about

overcoming this expected tension. Holding a space for conversations and sharing evidence of assessment's value is a critical step in creating a strong assessment culture (Banta & Palomba, 2016; Schuh, 2013). In the wake of COVID-19 and massive disruptions to campus life, Hong and Moloney (2020) suggest student affairs professionals take this unique moment to question underlying assumptions about assessment to create a more equitable assessment culture. In this framework of equity-minded assessment, I included these critical conversations with colleagues about our underlying assumptions during my research cycles. Insisting on a new approach in the face of systemic racial injustice and the impact of the pandemic, Hong and Moloney (2020) encourage student affairs professionals to identify their assumptions about assessment, expose existing inequities in our assessment practices, and build new solutions that dismantle these inequities. Applying suggestions for new solutions from Hong and Moloney (2020), I included equity-minded approaches in my recommendations and personal assessment practice.

To promote a culture of assessment, I needed to possess expertise on assessment practices to know which assessment tools are the most appropriate and effective to evaluate learning in a given situation. In their assessment guidebook, Banta & Palomba (2014) examine the advantages and disadvantages of various assessment tools while delineating guidelines to conduct effective surveys, focus groups, and personal interviews. Many scholars support the use of focus groups with college students because group discussions can “benefit from the discovery process” and reveal “layers of perceptions and feelings” that do not surface in traditional surveys or interviews (Billups, 2012, p. 2; Kramer, 1992, p. 38). However, the scholarly consensus is that a culture of assessment acknowledges the limitations of assessment tools used in isolation and employs an array of methods to gather robust quantitative and qualitative data that fully capture the student experience (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Fuller, 2011; Henning and Robert, 2016; Mandernach,

2015; Schuh, 2013). Mandernach (2015), in an article on assessing student engagement, explains a careful approach to assessment is necessary because validity issues arise when evaluating nebulous concepts such as student engagement and development (p. 11). Radwin (2009) echoes this sentiment and explains even presumed indications of validity in assessment, such as high survey response rates, are not always accurate measurements of validity (pp. 2–3). Exploring the literature on benefits and limitations of various assessment methods instilled a sense of caution and consideration into my personal practice. I discovered a culture of assessment is characterized by a genuine concern for practicing effective, robust assessment by using appropriate assessment tools, and reading these critical resources enhanced this concern and knowledge within me.

Based on the exploration of student affairs assessment cultures presented by Henning and Robert (2016) and the 12 characteristics of assessment culture delineated by Schuh (2013), I sought to identify dimensions of assessment culture that would best strengthen SAI's culture in my research. Henning and Roberts (2016) emphasize assessment must be ingrained as part of the daily behaviors and actions in organizations that possess a culture of assessment. As such, in a strong assessment culture, the work of assessment is distributed among the members of an organization, assessment efforts “evolve to incorporate multiple methods of data collection,” and improvements are made based on the data to “close the loop” of each assessment cycle (Henning and Roberts, 2016, p. 264). Schuh (2013) emphasizes that assessment cultures are characterized by a commitment to continuous improvement, the application of multiple assessment methods, the prioritization of data-driven decision making, and the collaborative contributions of student affairs professionals. These features of assessment culture and the standards for equity-minded assessment promoted by Hong and Moloney (2020) grounded my work in creating a culture of assessment through my personal assessment practice and organizational leadership within SAI.

Context

My action research project took place at USD, a private university with an undergraduate population of just under 6,000 students. Within the division of student affairs, I served as a graduate assistant for the SAI department. SAI consists of three units that serve undergraduates involved in the Associated Student Government (ASG), the student programming board known as the Torero Programming Board (TPB), and student organizations. Although I primarily served as the graduate assistant for ASG, I interacted often with student organizations and TPB, as SAI's units collaborate closely in all aspects of our work. In March 2020, USD transitioned its operations to a remote environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the SAI staff worked in a mostly remote environment in the 2020–2021 academic year. During this unique period, I served in my role entirely from home, an unexpected change that inevitably altered my action research course. As I strove to promote cultural change in an organization through virtual modes of engagement, the remote environment influenced my leadership and assessment strategies.

As a primary point of contact for assessment, I coordinated assessment projects for my department and sought to create a collaborative space to lead assessment efforts alongside fellow graduate assistants, assistant directors, and the director of my department. My ultimate intention for this project was to strengthen departmental assessment practices, empower the SAI team to practice more effective assessment, and create structures to sustain SAI's assessment culture department beyond my time in this role. To achieve my purpose of elevating students' voices through robust data collection and data-driven decisions, I focused my interventions on offering assessment training while improving SAI's approach to assessing its programs and advising practices. In the summer of 2020, SAI collaboratively established annual learning outcomes and created a plan for assessing its co-curricular programs and advising. My action research goals

were embedded into this plan, and my interventions to improve SAI's assessment culture took place throughout the 2020–2021 academic year.

My action research project required me to conduct assessment while simultaneously studying SAI's culture of assessment to provide recommendations for ongoing improvement. Therefore, I focused not only on ensuring that SAI's 2020–2021 assessment followed best practices from the literature but also on co-creating new collaborative operating procedures for assessment that would sustain successful assessment cycles moving forward. Because cultures are created through the transmission of knowledge, my interventions focused heavily on developing assessment training resources for my colleagues while serving as a resource myself, to ensure that my knowledge was shared with others, establishing a naturally recurring system of training in assessment. Assessment is an essential skill for student affairs practitioners, and I was immensely grateful for this opportunity to improve my assessment and leadership skills, while also contributing to a growing culture of assessment that will empower USD's students and staff.

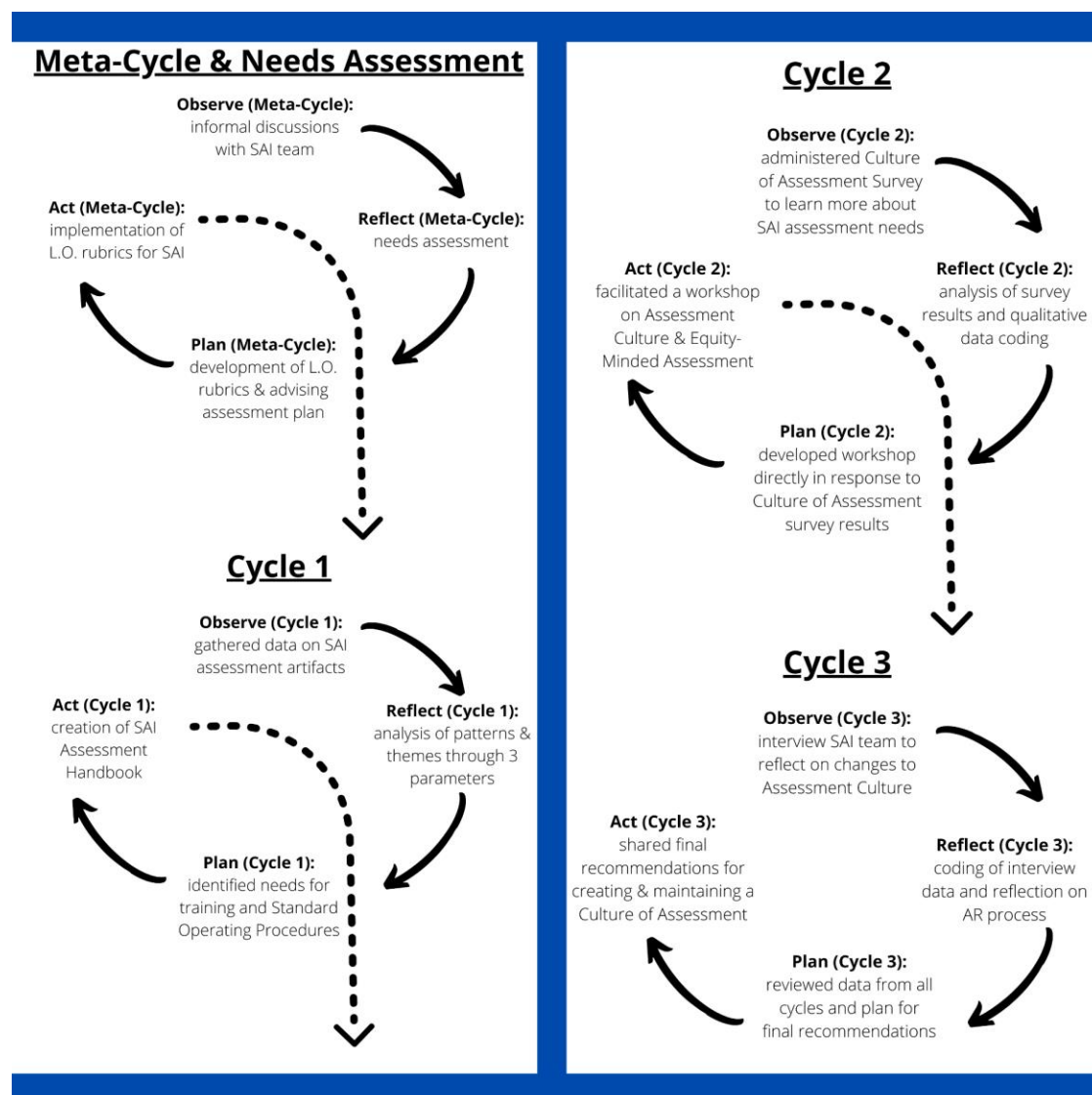
Methodology I

To promote growth through a cyclical and recurring system, I selected O'Leary's (2004) cycles of action research as my methodological model. O'Leary's (2004) model of spiral cycles built on each other enabled me to begin each cycle with data collection and reflect on these data while planning interventions. Koshy (2005) described this model as "a cyclic process which takes shape as knowledge emerges," a structure that aligns well with the assessment cycle (p. 5). The four cycles of observation, reflection, planning, and action create a sound structure for actions to be developed based on critical analysis of data (see Figure 1). I also divided each cycle's action stage into two parts—implementation and interpretation—to compensate for the absence of built-in post-implementation reflection in O'Leary's model. This methodology is

well-suited for research on assessment practices in student affairs, as each cycle's spiral of observation, reflection, planning, and action mirrors the process of an assessment cycle.

Figure 1

O'Leary's Model of Action Research Mapped to My Action Research



Like O'Leary's cycles (2004), the assessment cycle involves observing experiences through data collection, critically analyzing that data to identify needed changes, using this analysis to plan and implement changes, and repeating the process of data collection to begin the next cycle. In this way, assessment and O'Leary's model (2004) both consist of cycles that

“converge toward better situation understanding and improved action implementation” (Koshy, 2005, p. 5). This parallel process helped me visualize how to study assessment practices while actively practicing assessment myself. The transformational nature of O’Leary’s action research cycles (2004) is a strength of this model that is designed to “hopefully [create] sustainable change that will outlive a traditional research project” (p. 140). By allowing researchers to “refine their methods” in response to emerging understanding, this method lent the adaptability required to respond to data in my first cycles. One limitation of O’Leary’s model (2004) is its presentation of reflection as one stage of each cycle rather than an ongoing process throughout each cycle (Elliot, 1991, p. 70). I addressed this limitation by treating each cycle’s reflection stage as one of many opportunities for reflection, and I created space for reflection at the end of each action stage. Through this model, I planned each action after critically reflecting on my observations, an iterative process that enabled me to respond effectively to departmental needs.

Methodology II: Adaptations to Proposal and Overview of Cycles

O’Leary’s (2004) methodological model also gave me the flexibility needed to adapt my action research cycles to the uncertain, challenging conditions of the 2020-2021 academic year. In my research proposal, I had planned to conduct ten cycles divided into three phases aligned with semesterly assessment cycles. However, through conversations with students and the SAI team in 2020, I reconsidered the complexity of my research approach and simplified my cycles so participation in my project would not exacerbate feelings of screen fatigue. By reflecting on the purpose of each proposed cycle and my desired outcomes, I eliminated a student survey on assessment methods and selected only the SAI team as my direct participants. As the remote environment continued into the fall, I realized my proposed plan to host multiple workshops over Zoom was counterproductive to generating support for assessment. Considering the time my

participants spent online each day and health risks associated with prolonged screen exposure (Wong et al., 2021), I pivoted my plan from hosting live workshops to creating a collection of asynchronous resources. This reevaluation of my approach prompted extensive reflection on the purpose of this project, through which I identified my primary goal: providing access to the resources SAI would need to sustain and improve its assessment culture over time. This goal did not necessitate 10 cycles. I ultimately conducted three cycles to contextualize and strengthen SAI's culture of assessment, in addition to a yearlong meta-cycle project to develop assessment tools for measuring unit learning outcomes. I collected data by reviewing existing assessment artifacts, administering a survey to the SAI team, and individually interviewing SAI's full-time staff members. Each cycle involved four steps: observation, reflection, planning, and action. For a detailed overview of my cycles mapped to O'Leary's methodological model, see Table 1.

In my needs assessment and meta-cycle, I discovered a departmental need for a structured approach to evaluating SAI's four learning outcomes in its annual assessment plan. In response, I planned my first intervention: the development of rubrics and assessment tools that could serve as a foundation for evaluating SAI's learning outcomes. The meta-cycle project took 7 months to complete: the assessment tools were finalized in March and I gathered feedback on the outcomes of this project in my final cycle. As this meta-cycle project took place, I also conducted three cycles focused on contextualizing and strengthening SAI's assessment culture. In my first cycle, I analyzed existing artifacts of SAI's assessment from 2015–2019, including surveys, tools for assessing the ASG advising program, and assessment reports. By analyzing these existing data, I identified five core dimensions of assessment culture that became a focus of my subsequent cycles. In my second cycle, I administered a survey to collect additional context and first-hand feedback from SAI on their perspectives and the prevalence of these five dimensions. The results

of this survey further refined the focus of two concurrent interventions: a digital handbook on assessment practices and a workshop on sustaining an assessment culture. I produced the digital handbook at the conclusion of my third cycle so that survey and interview feedback could inform the development of this handbook. I facilitated the workshop in February, and I conducted interviews with SAI's full-time staff in March to collect their cumulative feedback on the impact of the interventions and their final recommendations regarding SAI's assessment culture.

Table 1

Overview of Research Cycles

	Observe (data collection)	Reflect (data analysis)	Plan and act (implementation)
Meta-Cycle	<i>May - June 2020</i> Identified a need for a tool to assess advising programs, during discussions with the SAI team; researched best practices to assess advising	<i>July 2020</i> Collaborated with SAI team to address advising assessment needs; proposed the use of rubrics to evaluate advising practices & learning outcomes	<i>August 2020 - March 2021</i> Created four rubrics, two assessment tools, and a structured plan to assess SAI's four learning outcomes for the 2020-2021 academic year
Cycle 1	<i>September - November 2020</i> Gathered and reviewed existing SAI assessment artifacts (surveys, reports, program learning outcomes, etc.) from 2015–2020	<i>November 2020</i> Analyzed qualitative data from artifacts to understand SAI's assessment needs and identified five dimensions to strengthen assessment culture	<i>November 2020 - February 2021</i> Created digital "Assessment Handbook" to collect assessment artifacts, examples, resources, and training materials in response to observed needs
Cycle 2	<i>November 2020</i> Administered "Culture of Assessment" survey to gain first-hand perspectives on SAI assessment culture and evaluate five assessment culture dimensions in SAI	<i>November 2020 - January 2021</i> Analyzed survey results to contextualize SAI's current assessment practices and relationship to five dimensions of assessment culture; recorded themes from qualitative data	<i>February 2021</i> Facilitated "Culture of Assessment" workshop to open a collaborative discussion on equity-minded assessment and practices to move forward with culture of assessment progress
Cycle 3	<i>March 2021</i> Interviewed full-time staff of SAI to gather cumulative feedback on the impact of my AR and development of a stronger assessment culture from 2019–2021	<i>March 2021</i> Coded qualitative data from staff interviews and reflected on findings from each cycle to develop final recommendations and resources for SAI to sustain its assessment progress	<i>March 2021</i> Produced final recommendations for SAI, produced final digital Assessment Handbook resources, based on interview feedback, sent concluding outreach to the SAI to wrap up cycles

The research cycles described capture only a glimpse into the iterative process of creating an assessment culture: my research primarily sought to shed light on how student affairs practitioners can assess their own assessment cultures and develop targeted interventions to build a stronger assessment culture over time. Although my research does not extensively highlight the routine assessment efforts I coordinated in my department—such as creating effective surveys, cleaning data, and writing reports—it is important to note that without expending energy into these routine, daily steps of the assessment cycle, an assessment culture cannot be sustained.

Needs Assessment and Meta-Cycle Project

Stage 1: Observe

In Spring 2020, USD's student affairs units were asked to submit annual unit assessment plans for the next academic year. As a key contributor to SAI's assessment efforts, I joined SAI's full-time staff to discuss our assessment plan. During these discussions, the SAI team worked collaboratively to review its signature programming and identify themes of learning outcomes to assess. In these discussions and my one-on-one assessment check-in meetings with the associate director of SAI, I learned SAI had faced challenges in finding an effective tool to evaluate its advising program. The associate director of SAI shared that much of our students' learning takes place in advising sessions, but SAI lacked a tool to measure the learning and development experienced by advisees. Although my initial research proposal did not involve the assessment of advising, these discussions motivated me to explore SAI's need for an advising assessment tool.

As I explored SAI's previous approach to assessing learning that takes place in advising sessions, I discovered a handful of self-evaluation exit surveys used to assess students' learning and development. One tool, the Student Leader and Development Rubric, asked students to respond to a series of roughly 40 statements by ranking their own personal development on a

scale from 1–9. This self-evaluation approach to understanding student development presented a paradoxical challenge: students with critical perceptions of their own abilities may be further along in their development than students who seem to possess a less nuanced and more inflated sense of self-worth. Additionally, the self-evaluation tool itself contained a handful of issues that could reduce its accuracy and validity: out of 40 learning outcomes statements, only 30% aligned with best practices by providing a single-barreled statement with a concrete, measurable verb (Kern, 2017). Compounding this validity issue, many learning outcomes statements required students to possess strong self-awareness about their behaviors and treatment of others. The validity and accuracy of this tool limited the value of data collected, and my colleagues agreed a new approach was needed to measure SAI's learning outcomes and advising practices.

Stage 2: Reflect

With the encouragement of my colleagues, I reflected on the need for a new approach to assess ASG advising in June 2020, as SAI prepared its annual assessment plan. In this process, I guided the SAI team in the identification of four learning outcomes by mapping curriculum from SAI's programming to a new set of learning outcomes that better captured SAI's complex work (see Appendix A for SAI curriculum mapping and learning outcome development document).

After discussing and revising the learning outcomes proposed, the SAI team decided on assessing the following four learning outcomes for the 2020–2021 academic year:

- As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG, student organization leaders, and SAI student employees, students will create SMART goals and identify university resources to achieve these goals.

- As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG, student organization leaders, and SAI student employees, students will be able to articulate how their personal values, identities, and strengths influence their leadership style.
- As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG and student organization leaders, students will be able to promote positive social change by advocating for themselves and others.
- As a result of engaging with ASG, students will be able to examine systemic barriers to inclusiveness and equity and contribute to dismantling these systems in their community.

Having established these four learning outcomes on goal setting, identity and leadership development, advocacy, and ethical responsibility, the SAI team faced the monumental task of developing a new assessment system to evaluate our students' attainment of these four learning outcomes. Driven by my interest in elevating students' voices through the assessment process, I explored assessment strategies that would allow students to reflect on their learning through discussions with advisors, rather than through a self-assessment survey at the end of the academic year. With the guidance of USD's director of student affairs assessment, I planned to create learning outcomes rubrics in response to SAI's need for an ASG advising assessment tool.

Stage 3: Plan

I began the development of SAI's new learning outcomes rubrics in the summer of 2020, after researching best practices for creating learning outcomes rubrics and benchmarking other universities' learning outcomes rubrics. During this process, I discovered a tool that served as both a model for the rubrics on goal setting and leadership development and as the foundation for the rubrics on advocacy and ethical responsibility. To ensure SAI's rubrics on the complex topics of advocacy and ethical responsibility were founded on a verified measurement tool, I modified and cited two of the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE)

rubrics from The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) on Civic Engagement and Ethical Reasoning (Rhodes, 2010). I selected the VALUE rubrics as a model because they are a verified and nationally recognized tool for assessing student learning at the undergraduate level. With this trusted rubric model as a foundation, I developed a deeper understanding of how to format learning outcomes rubrics and establish the focused criteria required to measure student learning without relying on a self-assessment or survey.

While planning SAI's learning outcomes rubrics, I connected regularly with SAI's associate director and USD's director of student affairs assessment to plan for the next steps in this complex, yearlong assessment project. After brainstorming approaches to collect data on our students' goal-setting skills, I created a survey in the fall semester for SAI advisors to use in advising sessions to collect students' goals. The planning process also involved discussions on effective data-collection tools that met advisors' needs and aligned with their advising style. In Fall 2020, I facilitated a series of discussions and workshops for SAI on the implementation of this new assessment strategy, fielding questions and seeking ongoing feedback to ensure this new system would be sustained beyond my time in this role. These workshops included an overview of learning outcomes rubrics, an introduction to the four rubrics I had developed and a two-part team meeting in October and March to calibrate the language of the rubrics through the scoring and discussion of case studies. During the planning process, I also facilitated the collaborative development of an interview script to be used as the main tool for gathering data on our students' attainment of SAI's second, third, and fourth learning outcome. After developing the rubrics and data collection tools, I created hypothetical case studies in which fictional students set goals and responded to the interview questions. I distributed the case studies to SAI in preparation for each calibration meeting, and the SAI team scored the studies with the four rubrics. Finally, I analyzed

discrepancies between scores and facilitated discussions about rubric ambiguity to seek feedback and consensus, before finalizing the rubrics in March 2021 (see Appendix B for all rubrics).

Stage 4: Act

Part I: Implementation

Having reached a consensus on the language in the rubrics, SAI assessed its advisees in April 2021. Due to the required timing of my research publication, data from this assessment were not available to be included in this report. Nevertheless, the implementation of this new approach to assessing advising marked a significant change to SAI's culture of assessment. Even though I led the development of the rubrics and coordination of their implementation, I strongly emphasized co-creation and collaboration in this meta-cycle project. The use of rubrics requires buy-in from all stakeholders involved in scoring students' learning with these tools, so I insisted that SAI joined in the development and brainstorming process. Instead of creating an interview tool alone, I facilitated a meeting with the SAI team to refine this tool. Understanding that my time in this role would soon end, I wanted to ensure that SAI's professional staff co-created tools that were meaningful to them so that these assessment tools could be used for years to come.

Part II: Interpretation

Considering my objective of leveraging assessment as a tool to elevate students' voices, I believe that the creation of these learning outcomes rubrics will continue to offer SAI's advisees a reflective opportunity to communicate their learning. As students prepare for job interviews and other verbal opportunities for reflection, it is critical for them to practice expressing their learning and reflecting on their development. Rather than simply asking students to quantify their learning on a numerical scale, SAI is equipped to engage students in more productive discussions on their goals, leadership and identity development, advocacy skills, and ethical responsibility

while also collecting measurable data on their growth, thanks to the existence of the rubric tools. This mixed-methods approach not only satisfied a long-standing need for assessing advising but also created a new opportunity to tell a richer story of students' learning. In Cycle 3 of my action research, the SAI team shared their final reflections on the benefits of this new approach and the positive impact this meta-cycle project had in establishing a sustainable assessment culture.

Cycle 1: Evaluation of SAI's Existing Assessment Artifacts

In September 2020, I began my first cycle with the objective of acquiring a baseline understanding of SAI's assessment culture by collecting and evaluating assessment artifacts. In this cycle, I define an assessment artifact as any relevant planning documents used to prepare for an assessment cycle, any tool for conducting assessment—such as surveys or interview scripts—and any report or results generated from those tools. To contextualize SAI's assessment culture, I sought to collect and review as many digital assessment artifacts as I could find from the last five years. With my colleagues' guidance, I located 22 artifacts produced between 2015 and 2020. By reviewing these artifacts and evaluating their alignment with best practices for student affairs assessment, I narrowed the focus of my research and proposed a set of five dimensions that, if strengthened, would contribute to a sustainable culture of assessment. These five dimensions are also based on the work of Schuh (2013), who proposed 12 elements of student affairs assessment culture, and six standards of equity-minded assessment proposed by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (Hong and Moloney, 2020; Montenegro and Jankowski, 2020).

Stage 1: Observe

At the start of my graduate assistantship in July 2019, I learned that coordinating and conducting assessment were traditionally considered responsibilities of the graduate assistant in my role. As a new graduate assistant, when I created my first surveys, I lacked a comprehensive

knowledge of assessment best practices and the skills required to successfully analyze data in each assessment cycle. Developing skills I needed to succeed required me to independently study assessment and seek examples of successful assessment efforts from my predecessors. Through this process of searching for examples to strengthen my work, my curiosity surrounding SAI's assessment practices grew. I contemplated how my predecessors developed the skills to administer surveys and analyze data, and more importantly, I wondered if past assessment efforts were characterized by the same challenges I had faced. This curiosity inspired me to study the culture of assessment in SAI in Spring 2019, and I realized my research would require me to have a stronger understanding of the assessment culture context within which my work took place. Thus, I concluded it would be critical to understand not only my own needs as a practitioner but also the existing needs of my department to improve its assessment culture.

To contextualize SAI's assessment culture, I contacted my supervisor and the associate director of SAI to obtain permission to access assessment artifacts for this cycle. My intentions for collecting these data were two-fold: I wanted to develop a list of assessment needs based on existing data beyond my own graduate assistantship experience, and I also hoped to organize this data into a digital collection so that the SAI staff could access these examples easily. Through conversations with my supervisor and SAI's associate director, I located 22 assessment artifacts from 2015 to 2020. I acknowledge this collection of artifacts does not represent every assessment project that took place in this period, especially as some artifacts—such as post-program surveys administered on paper or informal interviews—could not be accessed in the remote environment. The table below outlines the number and type of assessment artifacts collected for each academic year that I reviewed in this cycle, including the first year that I served as a graduate assistant.

Table 2*Overview of Assessment Artifacts Collected*

Academic year	Total number of artifacts collected	Total number of survey artifacts collected	Total number of other assessment artifacts and tools (annual plans, attendance sheets, rubrics, etc.)	Total number of accessible assessment results/reports	Percentage of assessment tools with a corresponding report/set of results
2015–2016	5	2	4	1	50%
2016–2017	2	1	0	2	100%
2017–2018	6	3	2	1	33%
2018–2019	6	2	0	4	100%
2019–2020	16	7	1	8	100%

Stage 2: Reflect***Methodology***

To analyze this data set and evaluate the assessment artifacts, I reviewed each assessment artifact twice with the goal of gathering initial observations and subsequently identifying patterns of assessment needs. Before analyzing the data, I identified three essential practices of a strong assessment culture to serve as parameters for my analysis, based on the work of Fuller (2011) and Schuh (2013). First, a strong assessment culture is structured to collect robust quantitative and qualitative data by employing a variety of valid assessment strategies. Second, an assessment culture is committed to data-driven decision making and ongoing improvement. Finally, a strong assessment culture is characterized by collaboration and effective communication of assessment results to promote improvement (Fuller, 2011; Schuh, 2013). These three parameters guided my analysis, as I reflected on SAI's alignment with the best practices of robust, valid data collection, data-driven decision making, and collaboration. My methodology required me to identify which

artifacts would translate to my guiding parameters; for example, the presence of a formal report with data-driven recommendations would correspond to the parameters of data-driven decision making and effective communication. The variety of assessment methods, or lack thereof, in the data set would indicate the extent to which SAI met the parameter of gathering robust data.

Parameter 1: Robust, Valid Data Collection

To analyze SAI's collection of robust qualitative and quantitative data from 2015–2019, I carefully reviewed the artifacts and uncovered a strong preference for digital surveys over other qualitative assessment methods, such as interviews. From 2015–2019, I collected eight surveys out of 14 total assessment tools, five of which gathered quantitative data on a biannual program offered by SAI, the Student Organization Conference (SOC). The 2015 and 2018 editions of this survey were nearly identical, with six to eight Likert scale questions on students' satisfaction and attainment of stated learning outcomes. In 2018, SAI conducted another primarily quantitative post-program survey to assess student satisfaction with its biannual involvement fair, the Alcalá Bazaar, and only two open-ended questions gave an opportunity for students to share qualitative feedback. The final survey in this data set from 2015–2019 served as an exit evaluation for ASG and TPB: this survey demonstrated growth in SAI's collection of qualitative data, with 70% of questions offering an open-ended format to gather feedback on students' experiences. Seven of the eight surveys were administered directly by SAI to assess its programs, and one survey was conducted through the Division of Student Affairs to assess the Student Leader and Development Training Program. I was unable to find artifacts with a qualitative focus from 2015–2019, such as focus group scripts, which may indicate that any qualitative assessments were done informally or were not digitally available. The preponderance of surveys and Likert scale questions to evaluate learning outcomes reveals challenges in the first parameter of an assessment culture, the

robust collection of qualitative and quantitative data. From this analysis, I identified one of SAI's needs: the creation of training and systems to promote a greater variety of assessment strategies.

Furthermore, it is essential that student affairs practitioners not only gather robust data but also employ valid, effective strategies for gathering data based on industry best practices. In my analysis of SAI's artifacts, I noticed a misalignment between some of SAI's past learning outcomes and best practices for writing student learning outcomes. According to Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, educators can evaluate students' learning by utilizing clear and measurable language to assess successive levels of content mastery. Bloom's taxonomy offers sample verbs to include in learning outcomes—such as *recall* or *describe*—to avoid ambiguous phrasing. Kern (2017) reiterates that learning outcomes must be both observable and single-barreled to produce valid, effective results. For instance, the verbs *understand* or *become aware of* are not observable and should not be found in student learning outcomes (Kern, 2017). My analysis of SAI's learning outcomes and surveys from 2015–2019 revealed that SAI's Likert scale questions often asked students to attest to their understanding or awareness, a practice that contributes to validity issues in the assessment of student learning. Moreover, many of SAI's learning outcomes would be considered double-barreled, as students were asked to evaluate their attainment of two goals in the same learning outcome statement (e.g., “I have a greater understanding of the benefits of partnerships and how to effectively collaborate”). Having observed this misalignment between SAI's learning outcomes and best practices, I identified a second assessment need—training and resources on learning outcomes assessment—that could strengthen SAI's assessment culture.

Parameter 2: Commitment to Data-Driven Decision Making

To evaluate SAI's commitment to data-driven decision making, I conducted a statistical analysis of accessible assessment reports and results from 2015–2019, searching for the presence

of recommendations and evidence of the implementation of these recommendations. From 2015 to 2016, only 50% of surveys corresponded to a report or results document that were accessible when I gathered my data. The accessible report from the 2015 student leader training survey did not include a recommendations section, and since the Student Leader Training itself was not facilitated through SAI, I could not determine if any recommendations were implemented based on the data from the survey. From 2016–2017, I was able to access the Fall 2016 SOC survey, but I could not find a corresponding report. Interestingly, I found a report from the Spring 2016 SOC survey, even though I could not directly locate the corresponding survey from that spring.

In 2016, SAI produced reports on the SOC program in the form of an Excel spreadsheet, containing tables and graphs to visually represent quantitative data alongside the raw qualitative data from open-ended questions. The process of data coding seemed to take place on the report itself, with notes and thematic observations listed alongside raw data on the spreadsheet. These reports seem to reflect the process of data analysis, but they lack substantive recommendations on how to interpret the data or improve the program in response to students' feedback. Given the strong resemblance of the 2015 and 2018 versions of the SOC survey and the lack of concrete recommendations in the reporting process, the 2015–2019 SOC assessment cycles do not present significant evidence of data-driven recommendations for change. The SOC assessment projects account for over 60% of SAI's accessible assessment efforts during the period studied. This analysis led me to conclude that SAI could benefit from a stronger focus on reporting strategies.

From 2018–2019, the year before I was hired, SAI made significant progress in producing evidence of its commitment to data-driven decision making, a change that inspired my dedication to data-driven decision making and offered helpful examples of effective reporting. During the 2018–2019 academic year, 100% of SAI's assessment projects corresponded to a

report, and the reports increasingly moved toward more formal methods of sharing assessment results. The 2019 reports on the Alcalá Bazaar and AS/TPB Exit Evaluation both included recommendations for program improvement, students' suggestions, and summaries of significant findings. These reports were presented in a PowerPoint presentation, rather than an Excel sheet, which indicates the findings were formally shared and reviewed. With these strong examples, SAI took a step forward in demonstrating its commitment to data-driven decision making. From my analysis of this second parameter, I concluded that efforts to create a culture of assessment must follow my predecessor's example by producing recommendations for change, as well as creating a recurring system through which these recommendations are consistently implemented.

Parameter 3: Collaboration and Communication

In evaluating the levels of collaboration on assessment efforts from 2015–2019, I looked for evidence of cross-departmental interactions in the creation of surveys, analysis of data, and development of reports. One assessment artifact particularly stood out to me and contextualized some of the collaboration challenges that I initially observed in my role as a graduate assistant. A document shared via email in 2015, titled “Program Evaluation Request,” served as a tool for the graduate assistant in my role to seek requests for the development of post-program surveys. This form, distributed by my predecessors, asked SAI staff members to submit a brief description of a program, intended program outcomes, alignment with USD's co-curricular learning outcomes, and additional items to be assessed (such as feedback on marketing or reasons for participation). Through conversations with my colleagues, I learned this form had been filled out and returned to the graduate assistant via email, who would then use the information to develop an assessment of that program. The document states the form should be submitted at least 10 days prior to the program taking place, a requirement that indicates a disconnect between the assessment cycle

and program development. Ideally, program development should be intrinsically connected to assessment, with recommendations directly informing program design and learning outcomes.

Through the program evaluation request system, the development of programs was severed from the assessment cycle, and the creator of the assessment did not seem to consistently serve as a key stakeholder in conversations about program improvement. The form also includes a drop-down checkbox list of “additional information” to be assessed, and “suggestions for improvement” is an option on this list. If the intention of conducting assessment is to produce suggestions for continuous improvement, then this element would be present in every assessment effort, instead of existing as an optional question to include only on some surveys. This artifact, coupled with the lack of concrete recommendations in reporting from 2015–2018, contextualized the lack of consistent collaboration on assessment efforts that I had observed in the first year of my role. SAI’s culture of assessment from 2015–2019 could be characterized as transactional rather than collaborative, with responsibilities of the assessment cycle assigned to one or two individuals. Understanding the historically transactional context of SAI’s assessment culture, I resolved to focus significant energy on promoting greater collaboration on all assessment efforts and creating collaborative standards to strengthen SAI’s assessment culture moving forward.

Stage 3: Plan

After analyzing SAI’s assessment artifacts and identifying several of SAI’s assessment needs, I planned to communicate these needs to SAI in a digestible set of five assessment culture dimensions. These dimensions are inspired by Schuh’s (2013) 12 dimensions of assessment culture and the six standards of equity-minded assessment practice proposed by Montenegro and Jankowski (2020). The six standards of equity-minded assessment are exceptionally important in ensuring that assessment efforts can elevate the voices of students. Montenegro and Jankowski

(2020), on behalf of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), stress the importance of including student perspectives, practicing transparency, and implementing data-driven changes that are culturally responsive to students' needs. With these standards and the observed assessment needs of SAI in mind, I proposed the following five dimensions of assessment culture that could strengthen and sustain SAI's existing assessment culture:

- 1) Employ a variety of assessment methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data.
- 2) Select valid, effective assessment methods to fit the needs of each assessment project.
- 3) Promote collaboration between relevant stakeholders in all assessment efforts.
- 4) Consistently use assessment data to inform changes to programs and advising.
- 5) Report assessment data to tell a story of the student experience and student learning.

To contribute to the attainment of these objectives, I also planned to focus my personal assessment practice on the creation of training resources and standard operating procedures that would normalize collaboration between stakeholders on every assessment effort. Understanding that SAI would benefit from the existence of effective examples that represented best practices within each step of the assessment cycle, I dedicated myself to ensuring every assessment project in the 2020–2021 academic year culminated in a formal report with recommendations for actionable change. I also planned to create a digital assessment handbook to collect examples of assessment, relevant articles, resources, and training materials in response to observed needs.

Stage 4: Act

Part I: Implementation

Throughout the 2020–2021 academic year, I implemented my plans from this cycle and brought to life the parameters of robust, valid data collection, data-driven decision making, and collaboration through my personal assessment practice. In each assessment project, I invited in

relevant stakeholders to assist in the processes of survey design, data disaggregation, and report writing. This approach normalized the practice of collaboration and revealed the benefits of collaborative assessment. Rather than submitting a form with assessment requests, stakeholders were invited to develop surveys and interview scripts during program development. These new collaborative assessment practices were included as standard operating procedures in the digital assessment handbook I developed as a result of this cycle. In addition to informal training and changes to daily assessment operating procedures throughout 2020–2021, my first cycle mainly culminated in the creation of the digital handbook that includes resources, articles on assessment, short videos on assessment skills, workshops that I led during the year, new standard operating procedures for assessment, and the collection of artifacts gathered in this cycle.

Part II: Reflection

Through yearlong informal training and sharing assessment best practices, SAI created stronger learning outcomes and a well-balanced assessment plan that utilized quantitative and qualitative methods. Ultimately, these efforts to increase collaboration inherently promoted more buy-in to the assessment process, closing the gap between program design and assessment that once existed. With stakeholders more fully invested in the assessment process, SAI strengthened its resolve for data-driven decision making and demonstrated a new excitement for implementing recommendations discovered through assessment, as seen in the results of Cycle 3. Furthermore, collaboration and the engagement of relevant stakeholders naturally strengthened SAI's data collection process: inviting key stakeholders into all assessment conversations not only produced more robust quantitative and qualitative data but also guaranteed the right questions were asked to gather data that mattered most to key stakeholders. Finally, the creation of the assessment handbook ensured that the skills and knowledge I gained during my graduate assistantship would

not be lost upon my graduation. With new assessment structures and resources readily available, SAI is better equipped than ever to continue this momentum and sustain its assessment culture.

Cycle 2: Survey on SAI's Culture of Assessment & Team Workshop

After reviewing the findings from the analysis of SAI's existing assessment artifacts, I administered a survey in November 2020 to gather data from the SAI staff on their perceptions of assessment in general and SAI's culture of assessment specifically. Through this survey, I discovered a need for further training and resources on critical assessment skills, a finding that reinforced my intervention of creating an assessment handbook. The survey also uncovered some negative perceptions of assessment that served as potential obstacles in building buy-in among the SAI team. Most importantly, findings of this survey broadened my limited perspective of SAI's assessment culture by providing further context on assessment practices before my time in this role. After analyzing the results of this survey, I created a *Culture of Assessment Workshop* in response to the themes identified in this cycle. I designed this workshop with the intention of promoting transparency surrounding my research and the assessment process while also providing training on strategies to sustain an equity-minded, strong culture of assessment. I hoped to strengthen SAI's belief in the value of assessment culture while also creating a space for an open dialogue about the strategies required to sustain SAI's assessment culture next year.

Stage 1: Observe

In November, I administered a 12-question mixed-methods survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data on SAI's culture of assessment from the six student affairs staff members on the SAI team. Four respondents serve as full-time professional staff, and two respondents serve as part-time graduate assistants. Both graduate assistants had spent fewer than 6 months in their roles at the time the survey was administered, and questions that required context prior to 2019

included a “Not Available” option. The goal of this assessment was to evaluate the SAI team’s perceptions of assessment to uncover attitudes and needs that could have been missed in my analysis of assessment artifacts. This survey included six open-ended questions to gather qualitative data on the SAI team’s successes, challenges, and motivations related to assessment practices. The survey also included two multiple choice questions on preferred assessment methods, two Likert scale matrix tables to clarify beliefs about assessment culture, and one sliding scale to collect quantitative data on individuals’ levels of confidence in assessment skills (see Appendix C for survey). The survey received a 100% response rate from the SAI staff.

Stage 2: Reflect

Quantitative Results

The first two survey questions asked respondents to select every assessment method they had used in the last 5 years to collect data for SAI from a drop-down list and then select which method they used most frequently during that time. For these questions, all six respondents selected “Digital Survey,” a finding that supports my initial evaluation of SAI’s assessment practices as survey-heavy, as corroborated by artifacts from Cycle 1. However, three of SAI’s full-time staff members also identified “Individual Interviews” as another method that had been used in the last 5 years, bolstering my finding that SAI’s assessment culture has demonstrated growth in the informal use of qualitative methods over time. To better understand the relationship between confidence in one’s assessment skills and one’s preferences for certain assessment methods, I followed these two multiple choice questions with a sliding scale question that asked respondents to rank their current confidence levels surrounding nine assessment skills.

These skills included writing learning outcomes, creating a digital survey on Qualtrics, distributing a digital survey on Qualtrics, conducting a focus group, coding qualitative data,

analyzing quantitative data, evaluating student learning using a rubric, writing interview questions, and producing assessment reports. Across all nine categories, the SAI team reported similar levels of confidence that tended to fall in the mid-range of the sliding scale from 1 to 10. These results indicate the SAI team expresses some confidence in their assessment skills, but they do not feel extremely confident in their ability to successfully practice the variety of skills involved in successful assessment work. The data also reveal a slight variation between reported confidence levels of professional staff members and graduate assistants. For the skills of coding qualitative data and writing learning outcomes, graduate assistants' reported levels of confidence were lower than professional staff members' reported levels of confidence. This finding indicates a need for ongoing support for new graduate assistants in assessment, especially as the tasks of coding qualitative data and writing some programmatic learning outcomes are often delegated to the graduate assistants in SAI. Overall, the lowest level of reported confidence surrounded skills that contribute to the successful completion of an assessment cycle, such as analyzing data and producing reports, with the confidence levels of the team ranging from a 2 to an 8 in these skills.

These data reveal several important trends that have informed the development of the assessment handbook and the *Culture of Assessment Workshop* (see Appendix D for workshop slides). As expected, confidence levels surrounding digital survey distribution exceed confidence levels in survey creation skills, including the skill of writing learning outcomes. This trend may correlate to SAI's historical assessment practices, which delegated survey creation to one or two individuals, who sent created surveys to other stakeholders for distribution. Despite the frequent use of surveys, not all staff members report full confidence in the process of writing learning outcomes and creating survey questions. Interestingly, the data reveal confidence levels in qualitative methods are relatively high, a trend that could be leveraged to increase the use of

qualitative methods in SAI. A concerning trend that emerged from this sliding scale question surrounds the lack of confidence in analysis and reporting. For data-driven decisions to be made, data must be analyzed and meaningfully disaggregated to offer actionable recommendations for change. In response to these data, the assessment handbook and *Culture of Assessment Workshop* focused heavily on the importance of effective reporting to promote a healthier assessment cycle. Overall, these self-assessments of confidence averaged a “C” level grade at the highest, a finding that reinforced my belief that training was critical in promoting a stronger assessment culture.

To unveil staff members’ attitudes toward assessment that may stand in the way of effective training, I included a Likert scale matrix table with seven belief statements about assessment. The results reveal that, although some negative beliefs about assessment are held, staff members generally agree that assessment is a helpful tool to measure learning and deserves attention in our department. Notably, five out of six members of the SAI team agreed that assessment should be a collaborative effort, a finding that illustrated significant staff buy-in surrounding the changes that I sought to promote in SAI’s assessment culture. However, half of the SAI team did not fully agree with the statement that data gathered from assessments should directly inform decision making. With an awareness of these perspectives, I considered potential strategies to increase the staff’s understanding of assessment’s importance in my workshop.

The final quantitative question asked the SAI staff to reflect on the department’s culture of assessment prior to my arrival in 2019 by rating their level of agreement with five statements related to practices that underpin the dimensions of assessment culture proposed in Cycle 1. The results of this question corroborated earlier findings. For every statement about SAI’s alignment with each dimension, the highest level of agreement expressed was “somewhat agree.” Only half of the professional staff selected “somewhat agreed” that assessment was collaborative, while the

other half disagreed with this statement. All members of the professional staff disagreed with the notion that SAI consistently considered best methodologies when practicing assessment prior to 2019. Three staff members disagreed or expressed ambivalence when asked if assessment results were reviewed consistently by the entire team: although one staff member “somewhat agreed” that assessment results were reviewed consistently, this result demonstrates a clear opportunity for improvement in reporting practices. Furthermore, half of the SAI professional staff selected “neither agree nor disagree” when asked if the reporting of assessment told a story of students’ experience, and only one staff member somewhat agreed with this statement. These data clarified issues related to SAI’s assessment reporting and helped me to pinpoint practices to strengthen SAI’s annual assessment cycle. When asked about SAI’s use of equity-minded assessment practices, half of the professional staff disagreed that these practices had been used, and one staff member selected “I don’t know,” a result that revealed a need for further training on this topic.

Qualitative Results

The open-ended questions on this survey uncovered interesting themes surrounding SAI’s perceptions of assessment in general, as well as views on departmental successes and challenges. When prompted to share any initial thoughts or observations about assessment in student affairs, the data surfaced three primary themes: assessment is boring, intimidating, and rarely practiced in a productive manner. The following quote captures several of these themes: “[Assessment] definitely feels like the least fun part of my job. I think it is often talked about as so important, but we almost never actually use the data.” Other responses echoed this sentiment, depicting assessment as “not the most exciting part of our job” and something that frequently feels like an “afterthought” or a “box that needs to be checked off.” In addition to feelings of boredom that assessment can provoke, feelings of intimidation and a lack of confidence appeared across the

qualitative data. This theme further confirmed the sliding scale confidence ratings earlier in the survey. Most importantly, many respondents shared assessment rarely seems to be conducted effectively, with several comments on assessment's place as an "afterthought" or a "lofty goal" appearing across the qualitative data. By reviewing the qualitative data, I concluded that sharing effective examples of assessment cycles with the SAI team and discussing barriers that prevent effective assessment from taking place would be critical components of my interventions.

On the topic of SAI's assessment successes, the theme of SAI's intentionality in recent years emerged in most responses. In these responses, the staff exhibit an appreciation for clear timelines, structures, and intentional planning that makes assessment efforts successful. On the topic of areas of improvement, a historical lack of intentionality emerged as a prominent theme. One response highlighted some of the patterns I also observed in Cycle 1: "The assessment that we distributed was primarily the same thing that was used year after year without a lot of intention. There was not a focus on certain areas, and each year we asked questions to just ask them." From these qualitative results, I gained a clearer understanding of what the SAI team wanted to see in its assessment culture. The team desires an intentional and structured approach to assessment that empowers them to produce actionable recommendations that can lead to changes in advising and programming. This approach not only aligned perfectly with the intention of creating a culture of assessment but also would mitigate the inevitable feelings of frustration and boredom that emerge when assessment is a purposeless box to be checked off.

Stage 3: Plan

To respond to SAI's perceptions of assessment and the needs uncovered in this survey, I planned a *Culture of Assessment Workshop* to be hosted in February 2021. While planning this workshop, I outlined several goals that corresponded to my findings from the survey. First, I

intended to increase buy-in for the creation of an assessment culture by defining this concept and sharing results from my first two research cycles. Secondly, I planned to unpack the feelings of frustration and boredom that emerge when student affairs practitioners are stuck in an ineffective assessment cycle, which lacks strong analysis and reporting. By clarifying how an “afterthought” mindset and lack of intentionality can reduce the impact of assessment, I hoped to emphasize the importance of strategic planning and reporting. I also planned to communicate my challenges in developing assessment skills, thereby calling attention to the necessity of ongoing professional development to create a sustainable assessment culture. Finally, I planned to reframe assessment as a tool for achieving equity by reviewing NILOA’s equity-minded assessment practices and urging SAI to view assessment as a tool to elevate all students’ voices and respond to their needs.

Stage 4: Act

Part I: Implementation

In February 2021, I hosted the *Culture of Assessment Workshop* with the entire SAI team in attendance. In this 1-hour workshop, I shared findings from my first two cycles, outlined the five dimensions of assessment culture, compared effective and ineffective assessment cycles, and explored the shallow learning curve as well as other barriers to effective assessment. In this workshop, the SAI team also discussed strategies for improving SAI’s assessment culture in upcoming years, and I shared some initial recommendations that had emerged through my research thus far. At the end of the presentation, I facilitated a question-and-answer session about the workshop’s content. The SAI team expressed gratitude and enthusiasm for the workshop’s topics, and several staff members made meaningful connections between the workshop and the learning outcomes rubrics meta-cycle project that had been developed during the year.

Part II: Reflection

Overall, the workshop successfully met the outcomes that I had intended to achieve, as demonstrated by post-workshop reflections from the SAI staff on their learning. Even during the session, when asked to share what a culture of assessment should look like, many staff members expressed a desire to escape the “assessment is an afterthought” mindset and build a stronger environment where SAI can tell a more vivid story of its important work with students. In addition to meeting my outcomes of sharing critical content and creating a collaborative space to discuss assessment, this workshop generated palpable excitement and appreciation that speaks to significant growth in SAI’s assessment culture. Meaningful connections made during the final discussion underscored a new curiosity and desire to sustain SAI’s assessment culture moving forward. In the Zoom chat box and in post-workshop correspondence, some SAI staff members shared appreciation for the content and the experience of participating in the workshop. One staff member commented “it is incredible what you have offered us through your AR and your passion.” In Cycle 3, staff members shared additional reflections on the value of this workshop, further verifying that the action research process positively influenced SAI’s assessment culture.

Cycle 3: Individual Interviews with SAI Professional Staff Members

Stage 1: Observe

After hosting the *Culture of Assessment Workshop* and finishing the calibration process required for the learning outcomes rubrics meta-cycle project, I scheduled and conducted four one-on-one interviews with each member of the SAI professional staff in March. The purpose was to collect final reflections and feedback on cumulative changes to SAI’s culture of assessment in the last two years. These interviews ranged from 20–30 minutes, and participants were asked to reflect on five questions. Participants received a copy of the interview questions in

advance so they could prepare for the interview (see Appendix E for interview script). The first two questions asked participants to reflect on the five dimensions of assessment culture and select which dimension has changed the most and the least during 2020–2021. The third question required participants to reflect on improvements to SAI’s assessment culture and describe a time when assessment had gone particularly well in the last year. To garner insight on assessment challenges, I also asked participants to reflect on difficulties in assessment and share an example from the last 2 years when assessment has been particularly challenging. The final question asked for participants’ recommendations on promoting a sustainable assessment culture for the future and offered a final opportunity for participants to share specific recommendations for resources to include in the assessment handbook. During these interviews, the SAI staff discussed their overarching reflections on changes to the department’s assessment culture and offered final recommendations that directly informed my recommendations from this research.

Stage 2: Reflect

The interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed using the automatic closed captioning feature in this software. After conducting the four interviews, I cleaned each transcription by re-watching the interviews and editing any automatic transcription errors. Once the transcriptions had been cleaned, I proceeded to code the qualitative data using an inductive approach to coding by identifying patterns as they emerged without focusing on substantiating any themes. Through this coding process, I identified patterns for each question that emerged across all participants’ responses. I also took note of unique responses not shared by other participants, as these unique responses reflect the varying perspectives and positionality each interviewee holds from their specific role and context within the department.

For the first two questions wherein participants identified the most and least improved dimensions of assessment culture, each participant communicated a desire to select more than one dimension that had improved. Some interviewees intentionally chose multiple dimensions that had improved, and others prefaced their single selection with a statement about how every dimension had improved drastically. Nevertheless, 100% of participants agreed dimension three (promoting collaboration between relevant stakeholders) represented one of the greatest improvements to SAI's assessment culture this year. In these responses, participants shared that the intentionality and leadership behind this collaboration contributed significantly to SAI's success: in particular, participants reflected on how their own understanding of the importance of collaboration had deepened through the experience of collaborating on assessment this year. Two participants also selected the first and second dimension of assessment culture (collecting robust data and selecting valid methods to fit each assessment project) as other significantly improved practices this year. These two participants echoed findings from earlier cycles, regarding SAI's tendency to "default to Google Forms or Qualtrics surveys" rather than intentionally choosing a method to best fit our purposes. Interviewees shared that the intentional, ongoing conversations surrounding assessment made it possible for the department to improve in all five dimensions.

When asked to reflect on the dimension that had improved the least in the last year and the reason why this dimension had not improved as significantly, most participants shared their belief that, although each dimension had improved, dimensions further along in the assessment cycle had shown the least tangible improvement. Two participants chose dimension five surrounding assessment reporting and one participant selected dimension four, the consistent use of data to inform improvements to programs and advising. These three interviewees expressed that their responses mainly resulted from SAI's status in the 2020–2021 assessment cycle: when

the interviews were conducted in March, SAI had concluded most of its data collection processes for the year but had just begun the process of producing formal reports. All four responses to this question also unveiled a theme of “building a strong assessment foundation” during 2020–2021. Because SAI spent much of its assessment energy on developing new tools (such as rubrics) for collecting data, the most significant and noticeable changes involved data collection processes rather than the application of data to improve programs. The interviewees shared that by building these stronger foundations and more effective methods, SAI will be able to use data collected this year to inform changes in the upcoming academic year, a process they are excited for.

When reflecting on overall improvements to SAI’s assessment culture, two key themes emerged in all four interviews. The first was that the SAI team developed a deeper understanding of assessment through the staff’s experience of learning as participants in my action research. The second theme surrounded the ongoing intentionality and prioritization of assessment that far exceeded what SAI experienced in the past. The following quote captures both of these themes:

The biggest thing that has improved has been learning about assessment in a way that makes sense—in increments—and by working as a collective group to get on the same page about what we’re hoping to learn...and what’s our purpose...[assessment] gives us a stronger foundation of who we are as a department...and not to be cheesy, but it has shifted the culture of our office to understand and to prioritize why it is so important.

Each staff member reflected on their own learning over the last 2 years, sharing that their understanding of assessment had deepened significantly through this action research and the informal training I had offered throughout the year. On the theme of intentionality, every participant also cited the annual assessment plan template implemented by USD’s director of student affairs assessment as a critical tool that naturally elevated SAI’s assessment culture. The

SAI staff agreed that this annual plan provided an essential framework that frontloaded often overlooked assessment tasks and ultimately empowered the department to meet its goals, focus on strategic planning, and reap the rewards of an effective assessment cycle.

When reflecting on assessment challenges from 2020–2021, the SAI staff focused mainly on logistical challenges that resulted from taking on ambitious assessment goals—especially in the remote environment—and on tensions that arise when assessing co-curricular skills, such as leadership development. One participant shared that “If we want to do assessment right, it does require time and energy,” and others felt similarly that our ambitious assessment plans turned out to be “a lot bigger of a task than we initially anticipated.” These reflections attest to the learning that had taken place in the last year: as the SAI staff engaged in assessment on a deeper level than ever before, they discovered the logistical challenges and tensions that can complicate the assessment process. Participants also reflected on the challenges of assessing student leadership in the remote environment during a difficult and unprecedented academic year. Not only did participants express their challenges in meeting ambitious learning outcomes in the new remote environment, but they also contemplated the tension of engaging student leaders in meaningful, individualized co-curricular learning to meet students’ various needs and stages of development.

Responding to the final interview question, each staff member demonstrated a sense of curiosity, excitement, and personal responsibility for the sustainment of SAI’s assessment culture in upcoming years. Although some participants chose to share specific resources they want to see in the assessment handbook, such as timelines for the assessment cycle, recommendations for strategic planning, student-facing assessment resources, and guides on implementing newly created assessment tools, others simply expressed enthusiasm and gratitude for the creation of this assessment handbook. Several staff members also shared their concerns about transference

of knowledge and encouraged me to continue capturing as much of my learning as possible in the handbook so this tool can be used for years to come. In each interview, participants expressed a sincere willingness and excitement to capitalize on the progress that SAI made so far because, as one participant shared, “in our office, we’re doers and we like to get things accomplished.”

Another participant affirmed the culture of assessment will be carried on, remarking that:

I want to be the stabilizing force that continues on the torch for assessment and maintains it at our forefront, as a primary focus for what we do because ... since working with you and seeing the deeper level of [assessment] ...the recommendations we can make moving forward are so much more rich and beneficial... so I'm really excited for that.

These one-on-one interviews not only offered final reflections to inform my recommendations but also affirmed that SAI has the commitment and excitement to sustain its assessment culture.

Stage 3: Plan

After completing the one-on-one interview process and reviewing all data collected from my action research cycles, I brainstormed a final list of recommendations I would propose to the SAI team. I collected all recommendations from the one-on-one interviews, reviewed data from the Cycle 2 survey that revealed existing departmental needs, and contemplated pertinent pieces of my literature review to highlight in my final recommendations. This final planning process produced seven key themes I planned to highlight in my recommendations: the celebration of assessment culture, the continuation of professional development, collaboration and strategic planning, the importance of actionable assessment, the normalization of meta-assessment, the demystification of assessment, and the reconceptualization of assessment as an equity-minded practice to elevate students’ voices. To model the transparency that I recommend surrounding

assessment, I planned to produce an outreach video to be distributed to the SAI team before the publication of my research to share these seven primary themes with my participants.

Stage 4: Act

Part I: Implementation

In April, I sent the SAI team a gratitude email that included a 5-minute video on the recommendations I proposed as a result of my action research. This email intended to conclude my research cycles and express my profound appreciation for my research participants, without whom this work would not have been possible. Despite this conclusion to my three cycles, the meta-cycle project of assessing SAI's unit learning outcomes using rubrics carried on through the spring semester. SAI's assessment cycles for the 2020–2021 concluded in May, with the production of the department's annual assessment reports for the academic year.

Part II: Reflection

The one-on-one interview process instilled optimism in me for SAI's capacity to sustain its culture of assessment and continue making significant progress in its assessment efforts after my time in this role. The SAI team's expressions of gratitude and thoughtful reflections on their personal learning addressed two of the primary factors that promote a culture of assessment: an enthusiastic prioritization of assessment and a capacity to practice effective assessment. Through informal training and ongoing collaborative practice with assessment this year, the SAI staff is better equipped to carry forward this momentum and capitalize on the progress they have made. The SAI team and I agree that the foundation laid from 2019–2021 will serve SAI well in its ongoing efforts to make data-driven decisions that improve its programming and advising.

Limitations

My research offers student affairs practitioners one model of gaining insight into the assessment cultures they are actively engaged in. Through the parallel process of assessing both its programs and assessment system, SAI was not only able to strengthen its assessment practices in a challenging year, but also establish a proactive plan for continual improvement. However, my research is limited by three primary factors: the willingness of one's staff to support the development of an assessment culture, the context of this project having been conducted in the remote environment, and the broader context of institutional culture that can promote or hinder an assessment culture. As mentioned by one participant in my research, SAI demonstrates a great willingness and eagerness to take on challenges to promote student learning. From the start of my research, I had significant buy-in and support from my entire department, a factor that limits the generalizability of my research model. If I had not received assistance in gathering artifacts, support in launching assessment tools, and permission to create new systems from the graduate assistant level, I would have faced significant challenges in creating an assessment culture. Other student affairs practitioners may face more resistance in creating a culture of assessment due to not having a captive, receptive, and supportive audience, as I did with my participants. I also led my research in a small six-person department, and with such a small sample size, I recognize that my research does lack generalizability in larger and more complex student affairs departments.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that the hiring of a director of student affairs assessment, which coincided with my arrival at USD, significantly strengthened my capacity to succeed in this work. Without the mentorship and guidance of the director of student affairs assessment, I would have likely faced challenges in establishing buy-in for the development of an assessment culture, and I would have lacked structures (such as the annual assessment template) that served

SAI well in creating an assessment culture. Applying my research model to other institutional cultures that do not support student affairs assessment would present a variety of challenges I did not face. The final limitation of my research is that it took place entirely in the remote learning environment: the time and effort that staff members could expend outside of our traditional office setting may have exceeded our in-person capacities. Although the ability to apply virtual tools, like Zoom's recording feature, streamlined training and communication, the remote environment also created a uniquely challenging environment for collaboration. As the field of student affairs returns to an in-person setting, those who seek to create assessment cultures may consider applying some virtual tools while acknowledging that cultivating an organizational culture, in general, is likely more conducive to a face-to-face and in-person environment.

Recommendations

As a result of my three research cycles and learning about assessment cultures in student affairs, I have produced seven recommendations that can be implemented to continue the success that SAI experienced in 2020–2021 while also strengthening its assessment culture in the future. These recommendations are listed in no particular order, as all recommendations are intended to be concurrent and considered equally important in establishing a strong culture of assessment. I maintain that the implementation of these assessment practices would empower not only SAI but also other student affairs units to build cultures of assessment that elevate students' voices.

Prioritize Professional Development

For effective assessment to be consistently practiced by student affairs professionals, a set of assessment skills must be possessed by all practitioners who conduct assessment. These skills include writing effective learning outcomes, creating valid assessment tools, leading interviews and focus groups, meaningfully disaggregating data, and writing comprehensive

reports. The job responsibilities of student affairs practitioners are multilayered and complex, and I realized in my personal experience and my action research that professional development in assessment skills is the often-overlooked key to promoting healthier assessment cycles. For the department of SAI, I recommend that the graduate assistant in my role is routinely hired and onboarded with assessment in mind. The digital assessment handbook I have created should be treated as a required piece of the summer onboarding process for not only this graduate assistant, but for all SAI graduate assistants who inevitably play a role in conducting assessment for SAI. Furthermore, I strongly encourage the SAI professional staff members and all student affairs staff members at USD to regularly take part in professional development opportunities related to assessment. The SAI team should continue to attend workshops offered by the director of student affairs assessment. Based on my research, SAI should generally focus professional development initiatives for assessment on the effective analysis of data and best practices for reporting to strengthen these critical assessment practices that produce tangible changes to programs.

Incentivize and Celebrate Assessment

Because a culture of assessment at its core requires the prioritization of assessment and the belief in assessment's value, I recommend SAI and other student affairs units standardize practices that reflect assessment's role as a priority. In alignment with the notion that budgets are moral documents, I specifically suggest departmental funding is allocated to incentives that can increase student participation in assessment efforts. In the 2020–2021 academic year, SAI administered two post-program surveys to over 100 students: participation in one of these surveys was incentivized with a raffle, and the other survey did not offer any incentives. While the incentivized survey received over 200 responses, the non-incentivized survey received under 20 responses. To encourage a healthy response rate for surveys, which in turn generates a more

robust and representative set of data, SAI should consider the practice of incentivizing all post-program surveys that are distributed to the wider student population, such as for Weeks of Welcome or the Student Organization Conference. In addition to offering incentives for students, SAI should also standardize new practices that incentivize and celebrate effective assessment efforts that the team engages in throughout the year. Schuh (2013) suggests formal events are hosted to celebrate assessment efforts, and SAI could also implement this suggestion by dedicating at least one staff meeting each year to the celebration and recognition of assessment efforts. This celebration could offer an opportunity for the staff to review pertinent data, discuss recommendations, and acknowledge collaborative efforts taken to elevate students' voices.

Standardize Consistent Collaboration

A primary finding that resulted from my research surrounded the correlation between consistent collaboration and a strengthened culture of assessment. By normalizing consistent collaboration between all relevant stakeholders in every assessment effort, the SAI team not only increased their buy-in to the assessment process but also developed assessment practices that better served the department. Schuh (2013), Henning and Roberts (2016) and many other assessment scholars maintain that collaborative assessment is the key to unlocking truly effective cultures of assessment in student affairs, because ultimately, a culture is the collective values, beliefs, and priorities of a group. I suggest that SAI and other student affairs units prioritize collaboration in all assessment efforts by consistently inviting relevant stakeholders into the development of assessment tools, disaggregation of data, and dissemination of information through reporting. When SAI collaborated on its assessment efforts over the last 2 years, the data gathered from surveys became more focused and relevant to the department than in the past because key stakeholders in program development had greater ownership over the questions

posed and the analysis of data received. I encourage SAI to standardize these collaborative practices and permanently transition out of a transactional assessment model. SAI purposefully collaborates in all its work with students, and assessment should not be an exception to this rule. One research participant noted when assessment is placed primarily in the hands of one graduate assistant, that new professional is essentially asked to “sink or swim” in their efforts to lead assessment projects. Unfortunately, this individualized approach is not well suited to the shallow learning curve that characterizes assessment, and as such, student affairs departments should intentionally share assessment work in a manner that makes sense to the entire staff and leverages the strengths, knowledge, and skills of all staff members.

I recommend that SAI follow the precedent set in the 2020–2021 academic year by continuing its new collaborative approach to assessment projects. The graduate assistant who steps into the ASG-focused role in SAI should continue to meet with the associate director on a biweekly basis for regular assessment check-in meetings to ensure that assessment is not treated as an afterthought only discussed at the end of the semester. To ensure discussions on assessment are not isolated and sporadic, the SAI team should add standing items regarding assessment to monthly meeting agendas. Not only should SAI include stakeholders and graduate assistants from the department in each step of every assessment project, SAI can also benefit from ongoing support of divisional resources, such as the director of student affairs assessment. By making assessment a collaborative effort, student affairs professionals can hold each other accountable for assessment, and as a result, hold ourselves more accountable to the students whom we support by consistently making data-driven decisions in response to their feedback.

Emphasize Actionable Assessment and Strategic Planning

In addition to emphasizing collaboration, SAI should focus its energy on the process of strategic planning, through which actionable assessment can be achieved. As I learned through this research, when assessment is treated as an afterthought to be considered only at the end of a program, often the assessment methods developed lack the validity and intentionality to promote tangible changes to programming. As the SAI team noted in the Culture of Assessment survey, successful assessment is characterized by actionable data that informs important changes to our programming, rather than simply being placed on a shelf or locked away in a digital folder. In the 2020–2021 academic year, thanks to the guidance of the director of student affairs assessment, SAI learned that strategic planning simplifies and improves the annual assessment cycle. I recommend that SAI remembers this lesson as the department moves forward with its assessment processes: the more time and energy that is spent developing an effective assessment plan over the summer, the more effective and easier it becomes to execute assessment projects.

When expending this time and energy on strategic planning, I recommend that SAI use the five dimensions of assessment culture I have proposed as a framework for the creation of its annual strategic plans. SAI should continue to utilize valid, effective assessment methods that fit the needs of each assessment project to collect robust quantitative and qualitative data. As mentioned previously, SAI should also emphasize collaboration between relevant stakeholders, especially in important discussions about how to best use data to inform changes to advising and programming, as these changes inevitably impact the entire department. In the development of all assessment tools, I encourage the SAI team to focus on actionable change and ask questions that the department intends to act on when feedback is received. Focusing on actionable assessment not only simplifies the assessment process but also prevents assessment from being

perceived as purposeless, a perception that ultimately produces feelings of frustration that can weaken a culture of assessment. Above all, I urge the SAI team to remember that time and energy are required to sustain a culture of assessment. Proactive planning and an awareness of assessment timelines are critical components in leading successful assessment efforts.

Demystify Student Affairs Assessment

The feeling of intimidation and perception that assessment is an incredibly daunting task are two findings from the Culture of Assessment Survey that particularly resonated with me as a new student affairs professional. While hosting my *Culture of Assessment* workshop, I quipped that most student affairs professionals do not enter this profession because we are passionate about survey methods and excited to pore over spreadsheets. In general, those in student affairs are drawn to this profession because we enjoy supporting students in their educational journeys, guiding them throughout their leadership and identity development, and advocating on their behalf. However, without collecting students' feedback on the programs offered by student affairs professionals and using this feedback to inform ongoing improvements to these programs, we cannot fully understand our students' development or advocate on behalf of their needs.

Although assessment does require certain skills and responsibilities that are not the most exciting part of our jobs, it remains one of our most impactful tools for measuring our students' learning and ensuring that we do everything in our power to enhance their education experience. For this reason, I believe student affairs professionals should strive to demystify assessment by reframing assessment as a tool for advocacy and learning. At its core, assessment is simply the evaluation of something's quality through the collection of information: asking a student in an advising session for their thoughts on a recent leadership workshop is a form of assessment. By building assessment competencies, sharing the work of assessment on our teams, and creating

structures that result in naturally recurring assessment practices, student affairs professionals can make assessment feel more approachable and less overwhelming. At the same time, I suggest SAI continue its practices of informal assessment by sharing some key findings in simple emails or word documents, rather than restricting all assessment-related practices to the formal assessment cycle. Although formal reports are valuable, recognizing that assessment does not always need to feel excessively formal is a helpful mindset to possess in an assessment culture.

Reframe Assessment as a Tool for Achieving Equity

As the SAI team strives to reframe assessment and overcome barriers that can hinder the sustainment of a strong assessment culture, I recommend SAI centers equity-minded assessment practices in its strategic planning and daily assessment work. To achieve this goal of reframing assessment as a tool to achieve greater equity in our campus communities, I encourage student affairs professionals to engage in this topic by reading relevant literature, specifically the two NILOA articles published by Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) and Hong and Moloney (2020) that outline standards for equity-minded assessment practices. During the complex, challenging 2020–2021 academic year, the SAI team made significant progress in practicing equity-minded assessment through its deeper consideration of culturally responsive assessment methods, but more work and learning can always be done to ensure that our assessment culture is equitable.

This year in response to the often-inequitable environment brought about by remote learning, the SAI team adapted its assessment methods to address challenges that our students faced in this new virtual culture. For example, acknowledging the impact of screen fatigue and accessibility concerns faced by our student population, the SAI team pivoted its assessment plan and opted for live in-program survey methods, instead of its original plan for ASG post-program interviews. SAI also strove to disaggregate data more meaningfully through a demographic lens

and implemented new guidelines for designing gender inclusive forms across its communications and surveys, developed by the associate director for gender identity resources at USD. As SAI moves forward, I recommend further discussions surrounding the implementation of NILOA's equity-minded assessment practices take place so that these standards can guide all assessment efforts. By inviting students into the assessment process through sharing unit learning outcomes, modelling transparency in data collection and reporting practices, and, perhaps most importantly, consistently making evidence-driven changes that directly respond to inequity, student affairs professionals can use assessment as a powerful tool to improve the educational experience for all students. Collecting data is a primary means of listening to our students' voices, and it is critical to ensure the voices of students from marginalized communities are uplifted through assessment.

Normalize Meta-Assessment Efforts

Finally, I suggest further research be conducted on USD's institutional assessment culture so that other divisions and departments can discover strategies to strengthen their unique cultures of assessment. In addition to promoting further research on assessment culture, I recommend meta-assessment efforts are normalized as a regular practice for SAI and other student affairs departments. Fulcher and Good (2013) define meta-assessment as the "evaluation of assessment practices" and highlight how this exercise can help a higher education institution understand "the quality of its assessment practices and whether student learning is improving" (p. 1). The practice of meta-assessment, although time-consuming and challenging, is a worthwhile endeavor for institutions and departments that value ongoing improvement and accountability. Through my action research project, which essentially functioned as a meta-assessment of SAI's assessment culture, I was able to uncover specific assessment needs and better understand how SAI could strengthen its assessment practices. Through the review of assessment artifacts, the

administration of a survey, and the process of one-on-one interviews, I not only increased my own capacity for successful assessment but also contributed to the learning of staff members. Engaging in meta-assessment initiatives also aligns with equity-minded assessment, particularly the practice of checking biases through continual reflection on assessment systems. If the goal of assessment is to promote learning, then it naturally follows that practitioners who conduct assessment should be interested in evaluating assessment to ensure these goals are met.

For SAI specifically, I recommend the department dedicates time on an annual basis to review and discuss its assessment practices. In these discussions, the team can identify successes, challenges, and potential areas of improvement; in turn, this process would streamline the annual assessment planning process by proactively addressing assessment needs. Furthermore, I would encourage SAI to regularly review the standard operating procedures included in the assessment handbook, treating these procedures as living documents that should be updated often to reflect changing conditions. In years that involve the onboarding of a graduate assistant into the ASG-focused role, I suggest SAI simplify its annual assessment plan to meet departmental needs while accommodating the learning curve of assessment as the graduate assistant is trained. In each update to annual assessment plans, I encourage SAI to remember quality is more important than quantity in assessment: rather than striving to assess everything, SAI should focus on conducting a quality assessment to ensure that a vivid story of students' learning and experience is captured. Assessment should be an iterative process involving collaboration, creativity, and consistency at each stage in the assessment cycle, and I believe that SAI is prepared to succeed in this process.

Conclusion

The SAI staff expressed sincere gratitude for the impact of my action research on their learning and development throughout the last 2 years, and I cannot overstate how much I have

learned about assessment and leadership through this process. When I entered my graduate assistant role, I had never seen the word assessment used in the context of student affairs, I had never heard of a co-curricular learning outcome, and I had never created a survey. With plentiful guidance from my colleagues, I climbed assessment's shallow learning curve slowly but steadily, developing skills I needed to conduct assessment and also teach assessment to others. I learned how to craft thoughtful learning outcomes, create strategic plans, manage sets of data, navigate unfamiliar software to make meaning of data, and facilitate professional development training.

Perhaps more importantly, I explored my own leadership style and discovered how I can leverage my inherent passions for topics that others might find mundane to generate energy and garner support from a team. Through this research, I came to recognize myself as a competent and passionate leader who can inspire others by modelling the actions that I seek to promote. By navigating my own positionality as a graduate assistant and new higher education professional who wished to create organizational change, I cultivated a stronger understanding of the many intricacies underpinning change management while also developing greater self-awareness of my strengths. My core values of learning and growth have guided me in this process, and whenever I faced difficulties along the way in this complex change management process, I reminded myself that growth is only worthwhile because it is difficult. Through this quest to elevate the voices of my students, I discovered how to elevate my own voice as well. This project empowered me to boldly confront personal and professional challenges that I had never imagined so that I could utilize my organizational skills, passion for learning, and yearning to uplift others to ultimately achieve success in promoting a stronger culture of assessment. I am confident that SAI is well equipped to continue strengthening its culture of assessment in the years to come, and I am also confident in my own capacity to continue creating impactful change throughout my career.

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Appendix A

SAI Curriculum Mapping and Learning Outcomes Development Document

Programmatic Learning & Operational Outcomes Table (Curriculum Mapping):

SAI Program	Programmatic Learning Outcomes	Operational Outcomes
Welcome Week	N/A	Engagement/attendance (Salesforce)
Alcala Bazaar Fall & Spring	N/A	Perhaps a measurement on Torero Org membership (baseline before Alcala Bazaar) Increase org membership by X%
Student Org Conference Fall & Spring	Learning Outcome(s) from Fall: Club members will learn about the resources available to their clubs and how to utilize these resources. Club members will learn strategies to recruit and retain club members. Student organization leaders will learn how to plan a student organization event. Student organization leaders will learn the process for obtaining funds from ASBC. Students will work with how our sense of who we are is influenced by our inner and outer life and how culture(s) impacts your leadership style and your sense of self. Students will begin the journey of exploring and understanding their leadership style. Students will explore strengths, challenges and tips to develop as leaders.,	Having a certain percentage of clubs complete their club registration process, perhaps measure what percentage of orgs return from the previous year (this can help us support orgs that need additional assistance)
ASG Senate Training Fall & Spring	To be able to learn about and utilize Robert's Rules of Order and ASG Senate procedures. To be able to create and establish goals that are aligned with their role as an ASG senator. To be able to develop a stronger understanding of how to create and	Increasing voter turnout in elections

	implement an ASG initiative	
ASG Exec Board Training, Fall 2020	Demonstrate an understanding of advocacy and learn strategies to advocate for the constituents that ASG serves. To be able to develop a stronger understanding and knowledge of USD's and ASG's mission, values, and organizational structure. To be able to learn about and be able to utilize leadership strengths and how to use them both personally and as a member of a team. To be able to create and establish goals that are aligned with the ASG Mission and Vision statements.	
SAI Student Employee Training Fall & Spring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn about job responsibilities, role in SAI 2. Professional Development (learn strategies for various interview questions) 	
SAI Advising for ASG	Learning outcomes are likely an extension of learning outcomes from training. Teaching students to set goals & accomplish goals; advocacy; leadership development.	

Current Learning Outcomes Listed on SAI Plan:

1. *Student Leaders will identify their personal values, identities, and strengths to enhance personal well-being and self-awareness.*
2. *Student Leaders will examine and explain their ethical responsibility to contribute to the larger community.*
3. *Student Leaders will be able to apply communication, critical thinking, and professional skills towards problem-solving.*
4. *Student Leaders will be able to participate thoughtfully and respectfully as members of an inclusive community.*
5. *Student Leaders will be able to integrate and apply knowledge gained across curricular and co-curricular experiences to advance academic, personal, and career growth.*
6. *Student Leaders will be able to identify the concept of leadership as a learned process that affects positive change for the betterment of others.*

Drawing Themes from Programmatic Learning Outcomes:

1. **Goal setting:** teaching students how to set effective goals for their leadership positions (ASG, Student Orgs, SAI Employees, etc.) + accessing resources to achieve goals.
2. **Leadership & professional development:** Student Leaders will identify their personal values, identities, and strengths to enhance personal well-being and self-awareness.
3. **Advocacy (ASG/Exec/Student Org leaders)**
 - a. Advocates for oneself and others through deep engagement and action in local and/or global communities.
 - b. Measuring advocacy through events, initiatives, and resolutions
 - c. Salesforce for student orgs to see who picks advocacy as a CCLO.
4. **Ethical responsibility/community engagement:** Student Leaders will examine and explain their ethical responsibility to contribute to the larger community.
 - a. Student Leaders will be able to participate thoughtfully and respectfully as members of an inclusive community.
 - b. Pre & Post focus group to see how students can articulate this responsibility.
 - c. Can we tie anti-racism work & positive social change (CCLO language) into this learning outcome? Working on the wording of the learning outcome as a team.
 - i. Engages with community partners [focusing on USD community] in a way that honors the positive social change the community desires.
 - ii. Approaches positive social change efforts from the perspective of “doing with” rather than “doing for.” Initiates and leads social change efforts.

Moving from Themes to Unit Learning Outcomes:

1. **Goal Setting**
 - a. As a result of engaging with SAI, students will be able to set SMART goals and identify university resources to achieve these goals.
2. **Leadership and Professional Development**
 - a. As a result of engaging with SAI, students will be able to articulate how their personal values, identities, and strengths influence their leadership style.
3. **Advocacy**
 - a. As a result of engaging with SAI, students will be able to promote positive social change by advocating for themselves and others.
 - i. Could be assessed using EvRs.
4. **Ethical Responsibility**
 - a. As a result of engaging with ASG, students will be able to examine systematic barriers to inclusiveness and equality and contribute to dismantling these systems in their own community.

- b. Student Leaders will examine and explain their ethical responsibility to contribute to the larger community.
- d. Student Leaders will be able to participate thoughtfully and respectfully as members of an inclusive community.

Finalized Learning Outcomes (Developed After Team Discussion and Revision):

SAI Unit Learning Outcomes (2020–2021):

1. Goal Setting

- a. As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG, student organization leaders, and SAI student employees, students will create SMART goals and identify university resources to achieve these goals.

2. Leadership and Professional Development

- a. As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG, student organization leaders, and SAI student employees, students will be able to articulate how their personal values, identities, and strengths influence their leadership style.

3. Advocacy

- a. As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG and student organization leaders, students will be able to promote positive social change by advocating for themselves and others.

4. Ethical Responsibility

- a. As a result of engaging with ASG, students will be able to examine systemic barriers to inclusiveness and equity and contribute to dismantling these systems in their own community.

Appendix B

SAI Learning Outcomes Rubrics

Rubric 1: SMART Goal Setting

“As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG, student organization leaders, and SAI student employees, students will create SMART goals and identify university resources to achieve these goals.”

	Accomplished	Developing	Emerging	Initial
	4	3	2	1
A. Specificity of Goals	<p>Stated goals are simple, straightforward, focused, and specific. Students clearly define both what they intend to achieve using an action verb (such as “coordinate” or “develop”) and how they intend to achieve it with specific details listed.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to collect feedback from my constituents every week by organizing a weekly virtual Zoom meeting for my constituency.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals are focused and simple, possessing a clear definition of either what they intend to achieve or how they intend to achieve it, but not both. Stated goals still lack some details in describing how the goal will be achieved.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to collect feedback from my constituents by talking to them regularly over Zoom.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals are coming into focus but may still contain ambiguous or vague language. Stated goals use an action verb but lack a focused description of how the student intends to achieve the goal.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to represent my constituents by connecting with them this semester.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals are very ambiguous, defined in vague and often uncertain terms. Stated goals at the initial stage might seem clichéd. Stated goals are too short/concise, lacking specific details of how and what a student will achieve.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to be successful as a senator this year.”</i></p>
B. Measurability of Goals	<p>Stated goals contain measurable and well-defined language, and the goal includes a means to track progress.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to track the likes on my Instagram posts every week on a spreadsheet to</i></p>	<p>Stated goals contain measurable and well-defined language, but the goal does not indicate an intention to measure their progress.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to</i></p>	<p>Stated goals can be measured in terms of progress, but goals also includes immeasurable or undefined terms (i.e. ‘social media presence’).</p>	<p>Stated goals cannot be measured and progress cannot be tangibly tracked. Goals include vague and immeasurable language (e.g., “strong” or “engaging”).</p>

	<i>observe which posts receive the most user engagement.”</i>	<i>post on Instagram every week and receive at least 200 likes on each post.”</i>	<i>“My goal is to have a strong social media presence by posting on Instagram every week.”</i>	<i>“My goal is to have a strong and engaging social media presence this year.”</i>
C. Attainability and Relevance of Goals	<p>Stated goals are relevant to the student and are attainable. Stated goals also must demonstrate accomplished levels of both specificity and measurability to promote attainment.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to meet with our philanthropic partner to learn what they need and coordinate 1 focused initiative that is mutually beneficial this semester.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals are both relevant and increasingly attainable but may lack the specific details and measurability needed to ensure attainment.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to determine a fundraising goal and plan at least five events to achieve that goal.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals are relevant to the student’s positional, professional, personal, or academic development, but are still unattainable or unrealistic to achieve.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to fundraise 1 million dollars for my student organization’s philanthropy this year.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals are irrelevant to the student’s positional, professional, personal, or academic development and are unattainable or unrealistic considering the student’s circumstances.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to get 500 new followers on my cat’s brand new TikTok account by the end of next week.”</i></p>
D. Timeliness of Goals	<p>Stated goals provide a clear, specific, realistic, and measurable timeline for attainment. Goals at this stage nearly reflect step-by-step plans.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to create a contact list this month, send an invitation email to at least 50 of my constituents next month, and schedule a virtual mixer in mid-November.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals provide both a realistic and measurable timeline for attainment but may still lack specificity in the plan for these timelines.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to contact at least 50 constituents via email by the end of November.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals begin to demonstrate elements of planning for an attainment timeline, but these stated timelines are vague or unrealistic.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to connect with my constituents regularly this semester.”</i></p>	<p>Stated goals lack any timelines or timeframes for the attainment of the goal.</p> <p><i>“My goal is to connect with my constituents.”</i></p>
E. Application of	The student can	The student can	The student can	The student is

Resources for Goal Attainment	explain what resources they intend to use and how they will access the resources. Resources must be appropriate for the goal.	identify resources that would aid them in achieving their goals but cannot explain how they intend to use them. Resources must be appropriate for the goal.	brainstorm resources that would aid them in achieving goals. At this level, the student shows uncertainty or selects inappropriate resources .	unable to brainstorm any resources that they could use to attain their stated goals.
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Rubric 2: Leadership and Identity Development

“As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG, student org leaders and SAI student employees, students will be able to articulate how their personal values, identities, and strengths influence their leadership style.”

	Accomplished	Developing	Emerging	Initial
	4	3	2	1
A. Values	<p>The student can identify and define their top values. The student can also relate these values meaningfully to their leadership style.</p> <p><i>“I value inclusion because I know it’s critical for leaders to listen to everyone’s thoughts on an issue. I focus on inclusivity to strengthen my own democratic leadership.”</i></p>	<p>The student can identify and define their values. The student begins to explore how these values connect to their leadership style and beliefs.</p> <p><i>“I definitely value inclusion, which to me means that everyone’s voice should be heard when I’m making decisions because everyone’s voice matters.”</i></p>	<p>The student can brainstorm values they possess and begins to reflect on how these values might show up in their life, without discussing leadership style.</p> <p><i>“I think I might value connection because I tend to include new people in my friend groups, and I’m always the one to invite people who are left out.”</i></p>	<p>The student cannot identify or define values they possess, unless provided with an example. Any values identified are discussed with uncertainty.</p> <p><i>“I don’t know if this counts as a value, but I like connecting with other people and making new friends.”</i></p>
B. Identities	The student can	The student can	The student can	The student

	<p>confidently name at least two elements of their identity and connect their identity meaningfully to their leadership style.</p> <p><i>“As a first-gen Latinx student, I’m driven to help other students with similar backgrounds succeed, which is why I took this role on ASG and sit on student success committees.”</i></p>	<p>name 1-2 elements of their own identity and begins to explore the influence of their identity on leadership through the interview process.</p> <p><i>“I’m realizing that being a first-gen student really motivates me academically, and I’m feeling proud to be the academic committee chair as a first-gen student.”</i></p>	<p>identify 1-2 elements of their identity, with hesitation, but cannot clearly explain how these elements influence their lives/leadership.</p> <p><i>“I come from a low-income background and I spent some of my life in Peru, but I don’t think it plays a major role for me. I guess some of my interests are influenced by my identity.”</i></p>	<p>cannot (or will not) identify elements of their identity. The student might reject the notion that identities influence leadership style.</p> <p><i>“I don’t know. I’m just a person/just a student/an individual. My leadership style has nothing to do with how I grew up or what my family background is like.”</i></p>
C. Strengths	<p>The student can accurately identify a variety of their strengths (≥3). The student can confidently explain how these strengths influence their leadership. A student in the accomplished stage can provide examples of their leadership strengths.</p> <p><i>“While I am organized and detail oriented, I also build strong relationships. As a leader, I make an</i></p>	<p>The student can identify at least 3 strengths that they possess. The student begins to explore how these strengths show up in their life through the interview process, and the student may begin to reflect on how these strengths show up in their leadership.</p> <p><i>“Well, I’m good at solving problems, and I’m organized &</i></p>	<p>The student can begin to identify 1-2 of their strengths. Students in the emerging stage may demonstrate hesitance or self-doubt when reflecting on strengths or connecting their strengths to their leadership style.</p> <p><i>“I suppose I’m good at being organized and staying on top of my assignments. But I’m not always this way,</i></p>	<p>The student cannot identify strengths or refuses to identify strengths. The student primarily focuses on weaknesses when asked to consider how their leadership style might be influenced by their strengths.</p> <p><i>“This is always such a hard question for me. I don’t know what my</i></p>

	<p><i>effort to connect with my team, and I want to be seen as the type of leader who is welcoming and detail oriented at the same time. I like to write down people's birthdays so that I can surprise them."</i></p>	<p><i>detail-oriented. I think this is why I like engineering. When I'm in charge of a project, others count on me for creative solutions. I'm the go-to person for that. I guess I can call myself a problem-solving leader."</i></p>	<p><i>especially when I'm stressed out or balancing a lot of responsibilities in my leadership role. I don't always feel organized when I'm in charge."</i></p>	<p><i>strengths are, but I know that in leadership roles I'm really weak at public speaking. I wish public speaking was one of my strengths."</i></p>
<p>D. Leadership style</p>	<p>The student can provide an accurate and confident description of their personal leadership style. An accomplished student must connect content from more than one dimension above to this leadership description.</p> <p><i>"With connection as a core value and relationship building as a main strength of mine, I possess a democratic leadership style."</i></p>	<p>The student can provide a description of their leadership style through a combination of adjectives and examples. The student reflects clearly on their leadership, connecting content to 1 dimension above.</p> <p><i>"I think I'm an inclusive and patient leader because I tend to focus my effort on ensuring that my team feels confident in their</i></p>	<p>The student begins to define their own leadership style using adjectives and examples from leadership experiences. The student may express self-doubt. At this level, leadership style is not connected to the dimensions above.</p> <p><i>"I don't know if it's true, but people have told me I'm a patient leader since I don't mind re-explaining</i></p>	<p>The student cannot clearly define their own leadership style. The student uses only examples or anecdotes about their leadership experiences in lieu of describing their leadership style.</p> <p><i>"Last year, I finished a lot of projects and did some public speaking events for my student organization."</i></p>

		<i>roles, since confidence is an important part of success.”</i>	<i>things.”</i>	
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Rubric 3: Advocacy and Positive Social Change

“As a result of participating in leadership development training offered to ASG and student organization leaders, students will be able to promote positive social change by advocating for themselves and others.”

	Accomplished	Developing	Emerging	Initial
	4	3	2	1
A. Identifying passions and acting in alignment with passions for social issues	<p>The student can identify their passion for one or more social issues, and they can describe how they have engaged with community partners in a way that honors the positive social change the community desires.</p> <p><i>“I am passionate about addressing food insecurity, so I not only volunteer at the food bank, but I also meet with food bank leaders who are teaching me how to bring this advocacy work to USD.”</i></p>	<p>The student can identify their passion for one or more social issues. The student can identify one tangible way that they have acted in alignment with this passion by getting involved with relevant social groups.</p> <p><i>“Fighting against food insecurity, especially childhood food insecurity matters a lot to me. I’m an active member of a student org that volunteers at the local food bank.”</i></p>	<p>The student can identify their passion for at least one social issue. The student does not name any plans to get involved with the issue but expresses interest in doing so.</p> <p><i>“Something that I care about is food insecurity because no one should go hungry. I wish I could do something to help with that at USD, but I don’t know how to get started.”</i></p>	<p>The student is unable to identify their passion for any social issues. The student may be aware of social issues but does not express an interest in getting involved.</p> <p><i>“Sure, I know that there is a lot going on in the world, but I just don’t have time to worry about all that. I prioritize school, and I don’t have time for much else.”</i></p>
B. Communication <i>(Adapted from</i>	To further civic action and amplify the voices of	The student effectively communicates in	The student communicates in the civic	The student communicates in the civic

<p>AAC&U VALUE rubrics, Civic Engagement: Communication)</p>	<p>others, the student tailors communication strategies to effectively express, listen, and adapt to others to establish relationships.</p> <p><i>The student listened to, expressed, and adapted an idea from constituents while forming a relationship with the constituents to transform the idea into action together.</i></p>	<p>the civic context, showing ability to do all of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.</p> <p><i>The student listened to a constituent's complaint and adapted the idea's tone appropriately to gain support from the Senate body or from their committee/team.</i></p>	<p>context, showing ability to do more than one of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.</p> <p><i>The student listened to a constituent's complaint and reported their idea verbatim in Senate.</i></p>	<p>context, showing ability to do one of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.</p> <p><i>The student only listens actively during Senate to the ideas of their peers, or only shares their ideas without active listening.</i></p>
<p>C. Solidarity with community</p>	<p>The student consistently engages in many positive social change efforts with the perspective of “doing with” a community, rather than “doing for” a community.</p> <p><i>“This fall I worked alongside commuter students to help sponsor an event that best served their needs. We all worked so hard on this, and the event meant a lot to us.”</i></p>	<p>The student regularly and directly engages in more than one positive social change effort with the perspective of “doing with” a community, rather than “doing for” others.</p> <p><i>“I realized that I needed to learn more about what commuter students actually need, and now I am collaborating with them on hosting a virtual mixer.”</i></p>	<p>The student engages indirectly in at least one positive social effort, and they typically approach efforts with a perspective of “doing for” others, not “doing with” others.</p> <p><i>“I want to make a positive impact on the lives of commuter students this semester, so I designed a</i></p>	<p>The student does not engage in positive social change efforts, and they speak of positive social change efforts through a “doing for” lens, only relating to social change efforts required of their role.</p> <p><i>“I just do not have enough time to put together an entire workshop for commuter</i></p>

			<i>workshop for them!”</i>	<i>students this semester.”</i>
<p>D. Civic Action and Reflection</p> <p><i>(Adapted from AAC&U VALUE rubrics, Civic Engagement: Civic Action and Reflection)</i></p>	<p>The student demonstrates independent experience and shows initiative in team leadership of complex or multiple civic engagement activities, accompanied by reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of actions.</p> <p><i>“I founded a new student org dedicated to climate change action so that I could have a driven team behind me as I coordinated more meetings, walkouts and sit-ins this year. We are aiming to be a strong voice for sustainability, and we are already seeing the needle move as our requests gain attention from administrators”</i></p>	<p>The student demonstrates independent experience and team leadership of civic action, with reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one’s actions.</p> <p><i>“After the climate change walkout, I decided to team up with friends to write an open letter to the university about sustainability. Our goal is for the university to take decisive actions to reduce our carbon footprint, and we’re meeting with some administrators soon.”</i></p>	<p>The student has clearly participated in civically focused actions and begins to reflect or describe how these actions may benefit individual(s) or communities (continued commitment).</p> <p><i>“I decided to attend the climate change walkout this year because I think that if more young people disrupted systems in response to climate change, people might start paying attention.”</i></p>	<p>The student has experimented with some civic activities but shows little internalized understanding of their aims or effects and little commitment to future action.</p> <p><i>“I went to a protest with my friends for the first time, and it was great to see everyone together! I might go to another one if they invite me since it was fun to do something other than study.”</i></p>

Civic Engagement is defined by AAC&U as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make the difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both

political and non-political processes.” *This rubric was created using the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>*

Rubric 4: Ethical Responsibility

“As a result of engaging with ASG, students will be able to examine systemic barriers to inclusiveness and equity and contribute to dismantling these systems in their own community.”

	Accomplished	Developing	Emerging	Initial
	4	3	2	1
<p>A. Civic Identity and Commitment</p> <p><i>(Adapted from AAC&U VALUE rubrics, Civic Engagement: Civic Identity and Commitment)</i></p>	<p>The student provides evidence of experience in civic engagement activities and describes what they have learned about themselves as it relates to a reinforced or clarified sense of civic identity and continued commitment to public action.</p> <p><i>“The anti-racism workshops I’ve been attending are really clarifying how my privilege has influenced my life and actions. I see it as my duty to continue unpacking my privilege and helping others do the same.”</i></p>	<p>The student provides evidence of experience in civic-engagement activities and describes what they have learned about themselves as it relates to a growing sense of civic identity and commitment to public action.</p> <p><i>“After I attended the anti-racism workshop last week, I’m starting to realize that I have a lot more to learn about anti-racism so that I can create change as in my ASG role this year.”</i></p>	<p>The student speaks of evidence that suggests involvement in civic-engagement activities is generated from course/job requirements or other expectations rather than from a sense of civic identity.</p> <p><i>“I’ve attended a few of the anti-racism workshops this year, because everyone else on ASG had signed up, and I went to a lecture on anti-racism to get extra credit in a sociology class.”</i></p>	<p>The student provides little evidence of their experience in civic engagement activities and does not connect experiences to their own civic identity.</p> <p><i>“I participated in a protest a while ago and I repost things on social media about issues that are happening, but I don’t consider myself an activist or anything like that.”</i></p>
B. Civic	The student	The student	The student	The student

<p>Contexts</p> <p><i>(Adapted from AAC&U VALUE rubrics, Civic Engagement: Civic Contexts)</i></p>	<p>demonstrates the ability and commitment to collaboratively work across and within community contexts and structures to achieve a civic aim, focused on dismantling systemic barriers.</p> <p><i>The student collaborates with a community and across USD to <u>achieve goals</u>. Student's work results in greater access, equity, or inclusion at USD.</i></p>	<p>demonstrates ability and commitment to work actively within community contexts and structures to achieve a civic aim, focused on dismantling systemic barriers.</p> <p><i>The student actively works within a community in a sustained way to <u>make progress on goals</u> related to access, equity, or inclusion.</i></p>	<p>demonstrates experience identifying intentional ways to participate in civic contexts and structures. The student begins to identify systemic barriers to dismantle.</p> <p><i>After a workshop, the student identifies barriers for students with disabilities and joins the Alliance for Disability Advocates.</i></p>	<p>experiments with civic contexts and structures, tries out a few to see what fits. The student's experimentation lacks a focus on systemic barriers to inclusion/equity.</p> <p><i>The student attends various events on social justice out of interest or to spend time with friends.</i></p>
<p>C. Diversity of Communities and Cultures</p> <p><i>(Adapted from AAC&U VALUE rubrics, Civic Engagement: Diversity of Communities & Cultures)</i></p>	<p>The student demonstrates evidence of adjustment in their own attitudes and beliefs because of working within and learning from diversity of communities and cultures. The student promotes others' engagement with diversity.</p> <p><i>"After hearing my peers share their perspectives and needs at the forum,</i></p>	<p>The student reflects on how their own attitudes and beliefs are different from those of other cultures and communities. The student exhibits curiosity about what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures.</p> <p><i>"I'm realizing how much my own view is</i></p>	<p>The student has an awareness that their attitudes and beliefs are different from those of other cultures and communities. The student is neutral or indifferent about what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures.</p> <p><i>"I understand that Black students have a</i></p>	<p>The student expresses attitudes and beliefs as an individual, from a one-sided view. They are resistant to what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures.</p> <p><i>"Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, so I don't see the purpose of attending guest lectures on that topic when I</i></p>

	<i>I'm re-evaluating my thoughts on our campus's inclusivity. I'm planning more forums so that we can benefit from hearing even more ideas"</i>	<i>shaped by my background, so I'm curious to learn about my peers' backgrounds, since they have their own ideas about what ASG should work on."</i>	<i>different experience here than I might, which is interesting, but it's not the main focus of my personal work on ASG."</i>	<i>know that I already disagree."</i>
<p>D. Civic Action and Reflection</p> <p><i>(Adapted from AAC&U VALUE rubrics, Civic Engagement: Civic Action and Reflection)</i></p> <p><i>This section is also found on Rubric 3: Advocacy.</i></p>	<p>The student demonstrates independent experience and shows initiative in team leadership of complex or multiple civic engagement activities, accompanied by reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of actions.</p> <p><i>"I founded a new student org dedicated to climate change action so that I could have a driven team behind me as I coordinated more meetings, walkouts and sit-ins this year. We are aiming to be a strong voice for sustainability, and we are already seeing the needle</i></p>	<p>The student demonstrates independent experience and team leadership of civic action, with reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one's actions.</p> <p><i>"After the climate change walkout, I decided to team up with friends to write an open letter to the university about sustainability. Our goal is for the university to take decisive actions to reduce our carbon footprint, and we're meeting with some administrators soon to talk</i></p>	<p>The student has clearly participated in civically focused actions and begins to reflect or describe how these actions may benefit individual(s) or communities.</p> <p><i>"I decided to attend the climate change walkout this year because I think that if more young people disrupted systems in response to climate change, people might start paying attention."</i></p>	<p>The student has experimented with some civic activities but shows little internalized understanding of their aims or effects and little commitment to future action.</p> <p><i>"I went to a protest with my friends for the first time, and it was great to see everyone together! I might go to another one if they invite me since it was fun to do something other than study or go to class."</i></p>

	<i>move as our requests gain attention from administrators.”</i>	<i>about our ideas.”</i>		
<p>E. Examination of systemic barriers</p> <p><i>(Adapted from AAC&U VALUE rubrics, Ethical Reasoning: Ethical Issue Recognition)</i></p>	<p>The student can recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context AND can recognize cross-relationships among the issues.</p> <p>OR The student can clearly articulate their responsibility for dismantling systemic barriers and demonstrates sustained effort to take on this responsibility through advocacy or civic engagement.</p> <p><i>“Exclusion on our campus is complex and impacts many groups, but students with intersecting identities seem to experience more pervasive exclusion. I am responsible for my part in this exclusion and for helping to dismantle barriers to inclusion, which</i></p>	<p>The student can recognize ethical issues when issues are presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context OR can grasp cross-relationships among the issues. The student can clearly articulate their responsibility for dismantling these barriers and takes initial steps in alignment with this responsibility.</p> <p><i>“I know that students of color and students in the LGBTQI+A community report similar feelings of exclusion on campus. As a member of the community, I realize that I need to take action and act as an ally, so I’m attending</i></p>	<p>The student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues and can grasp (incompletely) the complexities or interrelationships among the issues. The student can identify some systemic barriers to equity and inclusion and explores their responsibility for dismantling the barriers with curiosity.</p> <p><i>“I have heard on social media that physical spaces on campus and our campus culture contributes to some students feeling left out, and I definitely think it’s wrong for anyone to feel excluded on their campus. I wonder how I might contribute to these issues, or if I am part of these problems.”</i></p>	<p>The student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues but fails to grasp complexity or interrelationships . The student may recognize basic/obvious systemic barriers to equity and inclusion but fails to recognize OR rejects possessing any ethical responsibility for dismantling the barriers.</p> <p><i>“I see how not including gender pronouns as part of introductions could make students who use less traditional pronouns feel excluded, I guess. But because I use she/her pronouns, I don’t think it’s really my issue to get involved with.”</i></p>

	<i>is why I have taken X, Y, Z sustained efforts this year to address these issues.”</i>	<i>workshops and doing research to learn more about strong allyship.”</i>		
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Glossary of Key Terms:

Civic Engagement: “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make the difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”

Civic Identity: when one sees themselves as an active participant in society with a strong commitment and responsibility to work with others toward public purposes.

Civic Contexts: organizations, movements, campaigns, a place or locus where people and/or living creatures inhabit, which may be defined by a locality (i.e., school, town, etc.) or by shared identity (i.e., Californians, the Republican or Democratic Party, refugees, etc.)

This rubric was created using the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Civic Engagement and Ethical Thinking VALUE Rubrics. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>

Appendix C

SAI Culture of Assessment Survey (Fall 2020, Cycle 1)

Start of Block: Intro & Questions about Assessment Tools

Q1 Hello! Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey for my action research project.

The purpose of this survey is to collect information from members of the SAI team to contextualize our department's current assessment practices and evaluate its assessment needs. Your honest feedback is greatly appreciated, and all data collected from this survey will inform the development of assessment resources for SAI. Please allocate 10-15 minutes to complete this survey. All data will remain confidential and will be stored in a password protected folder. If you have any questions or concerns, please direct them to Amber Knight (amberknight@sandiego.edu).

Q2 By selecting "yes" to this question, you are affirming that you have read and understood the consent form that was sent to you via email

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If By selecting "yes" to this question, you are affirming that you have read and understood the cons... = No

Q3 Please select your position within Student Activities and Involvement:

Part-time Graduate Assistant (1)

Full-time Professional Staff Member (2)

Q4 Please select any assessment tools that you have personally used in the last 1-5 years to collect data about co-curricular experiences for Student Activities and Involvement (select all that apply):

Digital Survey (1)

Post-Program Written Survey (2)

- Focus Group (3)
 - Individual Interview (4)
 - Live Polling (5)
 - Journaling Activity (6)
 - Evaluation using a rubric (7)
 - Other (please be specific): (8)
-

Q5 Please select the assessment tool that you use most frequently to collect data about programs for SAI (select only one):

- Digital Survey (1)
- Post-Program Written Survey (2)
- Focus Group (3)
- Individual Interview (4)
- Live Polling (5)
- Journaling Activity (6)
- Evaluation using a rubric (7)

Other (please be specific): (8)

Q6 Please share some of your reasons for choosing certain methods of assessment when evaluating SAI's co-curricular experiences. Are there any limitations that prevent other methods from being used?

Q7 Please use the slider to indicate how confident you currently are in each of the following skills related to assessment:

[1 = I am extremely un-confident in my skills in this area, 10 = I am extremely confident in my skills in this area]

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Writing learning outcomes	
Creating a survey on Qualtrics	
Distributing a digital survey on Qualtrics	
Conducting a focus group	
Coding qualitative data	
Analyzing quantitative data	
Evaluating student learning using a rubric	

SAI created assessment plans that took into consideration the best methodology for assessing various programs

SAI focused on equity-minded assessment practices, such as minimizing survey fatigue

Assessment data was consistently reviewed by the entire team to inform changes to programming

Reporting of assessment results captured a vivid story of students' experiences

Q11 Please share any aspects of assessment within the department of Student Activities and Involvement that you believe are successful

Q12 Please share any aspects of assessment within the department of Student Activities and Involvement that you believe could be improved

Q13 Based on your experiences with assessment in SAI, please share any final observations on the topic of assessment that might be useful in contextualizing our department's current assessment practices.

Q14 Please share any final assessment resources, videos, or training materials that would be helpful to include in a digital assessment handbook that will be created for SAI in Spring 2021.

Appendix D

Culture of Assessment Workshop Slides



Creating a Culture of Assessment

Sustaining SAI's Assessment Culture and Proactively Planning for 2021 - 2022 & Beyond

Amber Knight, Action Research Workshop

Agenda for Today's Workshop

- Introduction to My Action Research Question
- What is a Culture of Assessment?
- Overview of AR Cycles to Create a Culture of Assessment
- The Dimensions of Assessment Culture
- The Assessment Cycle (Ideal Assessment vs. Not-So-Ideal Assessment)
- The Shallow Learning Curve & Other Barriers to Assessment Culture
- Exploring Strategies to Create a Culture of Assessment
 - ◆ Equity-Minded Assessment & Reframing Assessment
 - NILOA Standards for Equity-Minded Assessment
 - ◆ Additional Recommendations from Cycles 1 - 3
- Team Discussion: Where Do We Go From Here? Proactive Planning

My Action Research Question

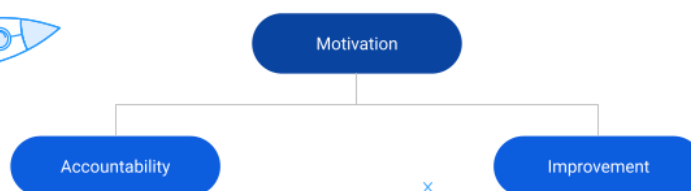
- × How can I promote a culture of assessment within my department so that our programs and advising are directly informed by a more thorough process of data collection that elevates students' voices?

In the chat-box (or out loud), please share what the phrase "culture of assessment" means to you. What does a culture of assessment look like, and more importantly, why should we care? What are the benefits of assessment culture, if any?

What is a Culture of Assessment?

"In a culture of assessment, staff members recognize that they must collect evidence systematically to demonstrate **accountability** to their stakeholders, and that they must use that evidence to **improve**. Fundamental to the concept is my back-of-the-envelope definition of culture that has as a central element the phrase "how we do things here."

—Schuh, 2013



Video on Assessment Culture from ACPA



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPyyHT-LII>

Creating a Culture of Assessment in SAI

	Observe (Data Collection)	Reflect (Data Analysis)	Plan and Act (Implementation)
Pre-Cycle	<p><i>May - June 2020</i></p> <p>Identified a need for a tool to assess advising programs, during discussions with the SAI team; researched best practices to assess advising</p>	<p><i>July 2020</i></p> <p>Collaborated with SAI team to address advising assessment needs; proposed the use of rubrics to evaluate advising practices & learning outcomes</p>	<p><i>August 2020 - March 2021</i></p> <p>Created four rubrics, two assessment tools, and a structured plan to assess SAI's four learning outcomes for the 2020-2021 academic year</p>
Cycle 1	<p><i>September - November 2020</i></p> <p>Gathered and reviewed existing SAI assessment artifacts (surveys, reports, program learning outcomes, etc.) from 2015 - 2020</p>	<p><i>November 2020</i></p> <p>Analyzed qualitative data from artifacts to determine SAI's assessment needs and identified five dimensions to strengthen SAI's assessment culture</p>	<p><i>November 2020 - March 2021</i></p> <p>Created digital "Assessment Handbook" to collect assessment artifacts, examples, resources, and training materials in response to observed needs</p>
Cycle 2	<p><i>November 2020</i></p> <p>Administered "Culture of Assessment" survey to gain first-hand perspectives on SAI assessment culture and evaluate five assessment culture dimensions in SAI</p>	<p><i>December 2020 - January 2021</i></p> <p>Analyzed survey results to contextualize SAI's current assessment practices and relationship to five dimensions of assessment culture; recorded themes from qualitative data</p>	<p><i>February 2021</i></p> <p>Facilitated "Culture of Assessment" workshop to open a collaborative discussion on equity-minded assessment and practices to move forward with culture of assessment progress</p>
Cycle 3	<p><i>March 2021</i></p> <p>Interviewed full-time staff of SAI to gather cumulative feedback on the development of a stronger assessment culture from 2019-2021</p>	<p><i>March 2021</i></p> <p>Coded qualitative data from staff interviews and reflected on findings from each cycle to develop final recommendations and resources for SAI</p>	<p><i>March 2021</i></p> <p>Produced final recommendations for SAI and created final set of resources to include in the digital Assessment Handbook, based on interview feedback & workshop</p>

Schuh's 12 Dimensions of Assessment Culture

According to Schuh (2013), a strong assessment culture...

1. Recognizes that assessment is a commitment of **accountability** and a commitment to **improvement**.
2. Commits to the student affairs practice known as **positive restlessness**
3. Is characterized as **self-critical**
4. Takes a **data-driven approach** to decision making
5. **Engages everyone** who plays a role in student learning
6. Uses **multiple forms of assessment** to meet situational needs
7. Identifies and measures **learning outcomes**
8. Involves the **collaboration of all** student affairs staff members
9. **Communicates and acts** upon results
10. Allocates **discretionary resources** to seed assessment projects
11. Assessment findings (results) are **rewarded with resources** to enact change
12. **Formal events are used to celebrate** and discuss assessment results

As you read through the list,
please drop in the chat box any
dimensions that you believe
are present in SAI's
Assessment Culture

Amber's 5 Dimensions of Assessment Culture

According to my research, SAI can sustain and strengthen its culture of assessment by...

1. Using an appropriate variety of assessment methods to gather quantitative & qualitative data
2. Selecting valid, effective assessment methods to fit the needs of each assessment project
3. Promoting collaboration between relevant stakeholders in all assessment efforts
4. Consistently using assessment data to inform changes to programs and advising
5. Reporting assessment data to tell a story of the student experience and student learning

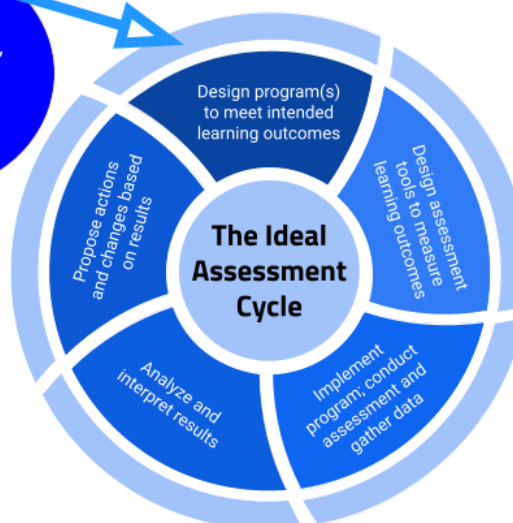
A primary goal of SAI should be to pivot our assessment culture from primarily reactive satisfaction surveys to a proactive, structured measurement of student learning outcomes

The Ideal Assessment Cycle

• Benefits of completing successful assessment cycle(s)

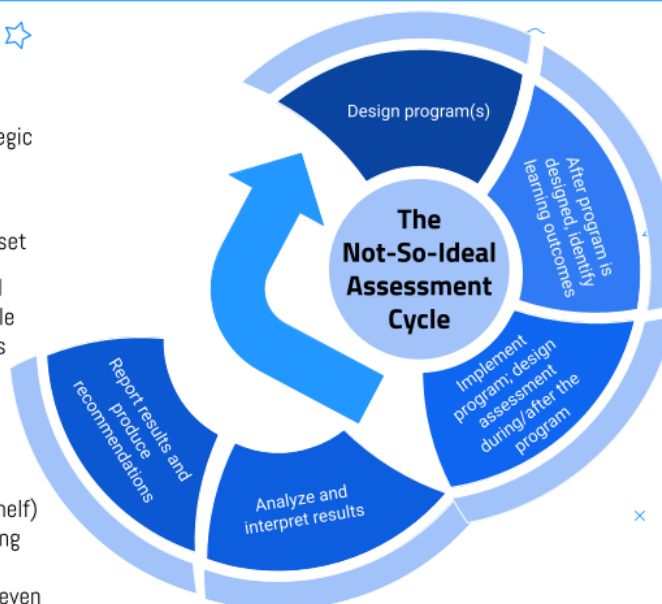
- Enhanced student learning
- Greater sense of inclusivity
- Deeper understanding of student experience
- Greater alignment with institutional mission
- Structured approach to promoting student learning
- Ability to measure student learning and make changes
- Opportunity to continuously improve programs/advising

Step 1. Define departmental mission, goals, and learning outcomes
(June 2019, Annual Plan)



The Not-So-Ideal Assessment Cycle

- In this common cycle, learning outcomes & strategic planning do not guide the creation of programs
- Assessments are created during/after program, prompting "assessment is an afterthought" mindset
- With assessment as an afterthought, two critical problems emerge in the analysis stage of the cycle
 - Lack of curiosity/interest behind questions
 - Questions don't produce fruitful analysis, complicate data cleaning process, and/or lead to unactionable data
- When the process of data analysis does not feel worthwhile, reports are not created (or sit on a shelf)
 - Without a useful report to guide the planning process, changes cannot be implemented.
 - Without changes being implemented, why even bother conducting assessment?



The Shallow Learning Curve: A Barrier to Successful Assessment

- We've all heard of "learning curves" (the more time you dedicate to learning a skill, the more proficient you become at that skill over time). A shallow curve requires significant time.
- Assessment requires a series of smaller skills & sets of knowledge
 - Knowledge of assessment lingo
 - Knowledge of best assessment practices
 - Writing effective learning outcomes
 - Mapping learning outcomes to curriculum/programs
 - Using software to create effective surveys/analyze data
 - Writing interview scripts, conducting interviews/focus groups
 - Using Microsoft Excel to clean and analyze sets of data
 - Analyzing data (creating pivot tables, statistical analysis, data coding)
 - Knowing what information to include in a report
 - Writing effective reports and conveying data visually
 - Possessing enough context to produce relevant recommendations
 - Leading change efforts to implement recommendations with stakeholders
- Assessment's learning curve is very shallow and arduous: it requires time, training, existing skills, and learning through experience. For this reason, collaboration is absolutely critical.



Other Barriers to Creating a Culture of Assessment

- **Significant time and energy must be expended along each step of the assessment process**
 - Creating a structure of assessment (annual planning/learning outcomes rubric development) takes a significant amount of time, before even conducting assessment
 - The newer a person is to assessment, the longer each step of the process takes.
 - Potential Solution: consistent collaboration and standard operating procedures
- **Frustration & lack of motivation when trapped in the not-so-ideal assessment cycle**
 - Without assessment "success stories" to motivate us, the time and energy expended may not seem worthwhile, especially if we are not seeing actionable changes.
 - It can be frustrating to face a shallow learning curve, this frustration can compound when we are unable to achieve desired results of assessment.
 - Potential Solution: "Assessment Handbook" training resources & examples
- **Assessment itself is intimidating and, often, it can bring to the surface undesirable results.**
 - Most student affairs professionals aren't in this field for the opportunity to clean data on Microsoft Excel, and it's never fun to encounter a sea of "Strongly Disagree" results.
 - Potential Solution: Demystify assessment & Reframe through lens of equity

Exploring Strategies to Create a Culture of Assessment

- **Creation of "Assessment Handbook" with resources & standard operating procedures**

- Seven Sections Outlined
 1. Introduction to SAI Assessment & The Assessment Cycle
 2. Assessment Planning (Annual Assessment Plans & Timelines)
 3. Learning Outcomes
 4. Standard Operating Procedures for SAI Assessment
 5. **SAI Assessment History (2015 - 2021 Examples, Success Stories)**
 6. Assessment Training Materials
 7. Outside Assessment Resources (MOOC Content, articles, videos)

- **"Demystifying" Assessment**

- Identifying our motivations for assessment & focusing on a desire for improvement
- Understanding that "assessment" does not need to be rigid and excessively formal
 - Asking our students "how did you like the training?" is a form of assessment
 - Sharing out relevant data through informal reporting (Alcala Bazaar example)

- **Re-framing Assessment as a Tool for Promoting Equity**

- Dedicating time & energy to assessment as a means of elevating students' voices

Equity-Minded Assessment (NILOA Standards)

- **NILOA (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment) recently proposed six standards for framing assessment in student affairs through an equity-minded lens.**

- When we reframe assessment as a tool for listening, we can see how assessment cultures must be equity-minded to ensure that the voices of all students are heard.

- As SAI moves forward with its assessment culture, I encourage us to center equity-minded assessment frameworks. My five dimensions are intended to align with NILOA's six practices.

1. Check biases and ask reflective questions throughout the assessment process to address assumptions and positions of privilege.
2. Use multiple sources of evidence appropriate for the students being assessed and assessment effort.
3. Include student perspectives and take action based on perspectives.
4. Increase transparency in assessment results and actions taken.
5. Ensure collected data can be meaningfully disaggregated and interrogated.
6. Make evidence-based changes that address issues of equity that are context-specific.

Additional Recommendations from Cycles 1 - 3

01. Celebrating Assessment

Recognizing & debriefing assessment efforts once a year at an SAI staff meeting

03. Simplifying Assessment

Re-evaluating & simplifying our 2020-2021 plan to promote greater success

02. Assessing Assessment

Taking a step back to evaluate our assessment approach & needs regularly

04. Sustaining Assessment

Striving toward assessment that is collaborative, naturally recurring, and beneficial to all.

Where Do We Go From Here? Proactive Planning for 2021 and Beyond

Now that we've discussed the barriers to assessment culture, some of my efforts this year to address these barriers, and some strategies for sustaining our current success...

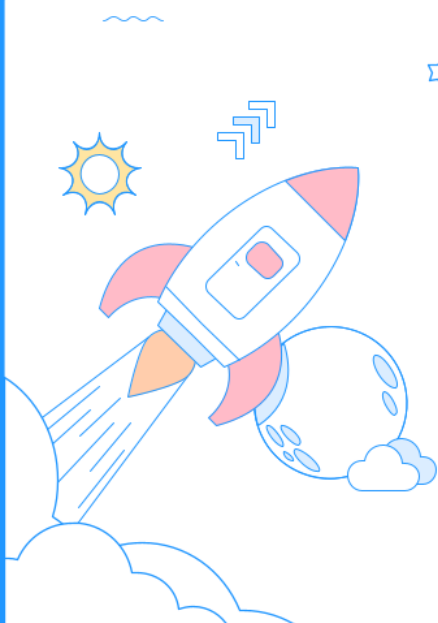
Where do we go from here? How can the SAI team continue to promote a culture of assessment to elevate students' voices?

But first... any questions?



Discussion

- Where do we go from here as an SAI team?
- What does SAI need to prepare for in order to promote a culture of assessment in 2021 - 2022?
- What challenges have we encountered this year? What challenges might we encounter next year?
- What successes should we build upon from this year? What are you looking forward to/excited for?
- What does practicing "equity-minded assessment" look like in the context of SAI?
- What resources might you personally need to contribute to SAI's culture of assessment?
- What questions do you have, moving forward?



Resources

Ready to learn everything you need to know about assessment?

NILOA's Equity-Minded Assessment Standards

<https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/equity/>

Developing a Culture of Assessment (Schuh, 2013)

<https://www.mec.cuny.edu/academic-affairs/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/10/Developing-a-Culture-of-Assessment-in-Student-Affairs-John-Schuh.pdf>

USD's Student Affairs Assessment Website

<https://www.sandiego.edu/student-affairs/assessment/>

SAI's Assessment Handbook (to be finalized in spring)



Appendix E

1:1 Interview Script for SAI Professional Staff

1. Through my action research and analysis of SAI's assessment culture needs, I have identified five dimensions that would characterize a strong culture of assessment:

1. Using an appropriate variety of assessment methods to gather quantitative & qualitative data
2. Selecting valid, effective assessment methods to fit the needs of each assessment project
3. Promoting collaboration between relevant stakeholders in all assessment efforts
4. Consistently using assessment data to inform changes to programs and advising
5. Reporting assessment data to tell a story of the student experience and student learning

1A. In your opinion, which of these five dimensions has improved the most throughout the 2020-2021 academic year?

1B. Which of these five dimensions has changed the least throughout the 2020-2021 academic year? Why?

2. Compared to recent years, what have been some positive changes or improvements that have taken place in SAI's assessment efforts this year? Can you describe a time in the last two years when assessment has gone particularly well?

3. Compared to recent years, what are some of the difficulties or challenges that have arisen throughout SAI's assessment efforts this year? Can you describe a time in the last two years when assessment has been particularly challenging?

4. What additional training or resources would be helpful to enhance SAI's Culture of Assessment? What recommendations would you suggest to promote a sustainable and strong culture of assessment moving forward after my time in this role ends?