ROUGH DRAFT

ASSESSMENT: The Fundamental Problems[1]

Preface

Generally speaking, assessment is not well received in academia. It's seen as top-down, outside-in, and antithetical to the culture and mores of higher education. Often (although not always) academics have a visceral sense that the whole effort of assessment and accountability is wrong. Yet even so, some institutions embrace it, a fair number of individuals espouse it, and undeniably we have to live with it.

How should we understand what's been called the assessment "movement"? What forces are behind it? And what's our basic problem with it? "The public", we hear, wants accountability, but we apparently don't. How are we to understand this disjunction? And how should we respond?

I. Who Wants Assessment?

To those of us on campus, the push for assessment of our work has a variety of local sources, fanning out as we go behind them into an array of individuals, constituencies, organizations, and agencies. Most academics, I think, realize that it's not just a local issue touted deans and presidents, but comes to them from accrediting agencies; beyond that, nobody seems to know much. In general, we can locate the push to assessment at at least five levels before reaching the fundamental driver.

1. On campus, a swarm of associate deans, institutional researchers, deans of faculty are talking up assessment. They start workshops, hold faculty retreats (attracting professors with modest stipends), and host lunchtime meetings intended to rally the troops around the cause of assessment. Sometimes, there is even an "assessment guy" on campus, a subject of light joking

[1] Standard note on Mellon funding.

and the bemused recipient, perhaps, of a t-shirt that says “The Assessment Guy” on the front, with a target painted on the back.

2. Hovering just off campus stand a clutch of entrepreneurs, consultants, and speakers, available to be brought in on short notice to “get faculty buy-in” and help committees figure out how to respond to all the accreditation requirements. (Currently this is a very modest but active small industry within academia.)

3. Further away, accessible mainly to presidents, stand the Foundations: the Andrew F. Mellon Foundation, the Davis Foundation, the Teagle Foundation, the Spencer Foundation and a number of others are all supporting “accountability efforts,” primarily with arguments that the public demands, and has a right to know, whether higher education really works and is worth the very high cost. The foundations also generally believe that there is some actual benefit to doing assessment work, whatever other constituencies believe.

4. Over the past decade, powerful regional accreditors, those who award general accreditation to colleges and universities across the six different geographical regions of the United States, have accelerated the assessment push dramatically. Specialized accreditors, those for nursing, engineering, and medical schools, for instance – have always required evaluation (testing often) of the graduates of their accredited schools. But regional accreditors, who work across the broad range of all higher education, have only recently adopted this. And now they are the most feared, most powerful drivers of assessment as it is perceived on college campuses. In New York or Pennsylvania, there is nothing like a “Middle States” accreditation visit to concentrate the mind on assessment. A decennial re-accreditation review is the immediate coercive force behind the desire to get some kind of assessment done on most campuses: “the accreditors require it” (which will lead soon to the real answer in our next section). Behind them

stands the Federal Department of Education, whose financial aid requirements mandate assessment as part of accreditation, whether accreditors themselves believe in it or not. Legislation has given assessment the force of law.

5. Across higher education more broadly, assessment has become so widespread and imperative as to sometimes be called a "movement," as in "the assessment movement." This phrase is fairly commonly used at higher education conferences. It conflates a number of meanings, including the implications that this is (a) a grass roots activity, (b) great masses of people are spontaneously involved, (c) it is "bottom up," and (d) it is somehow similar to the broad historic efforts for civil rights, feminism, or Christian conservatism.[2]

But clearly assessment, of course, is not a grass roots movement. If anything, there is broad and deep resistance across the higher education community; "the public", despite frequent references thereunto, is rarely involved in these discussions and have little or no interest in them. [cite "Change" article] No mass letter-writing campaigns have emerged for assessment in higher education, no street demonstrations, no burning of the University of Michigan flag. Far from being a grass roots movement, the drive for assessment is institutionally conceived and carried out.

So what is driving assessment on college campuses?

II. The Fundamental Driver [DAN: precision crucial here – most important section]

Fundamentally, assessment in higher education is about increasing the "productivity" of colleges. The phrase to remember, and to notice in reports, position papers, and public arguments is "workforce development." This is the *sine qua non* of broad based, hard driving

[2] Less plausibly, it may be considered a bit like the so-called "Olympic movement", in which the now basically commercial enterprise of sports entertainment is described as a moral crusade of some sort.

efforts to assessment in higher education. Without it, that drive wouldn't be occurring; all the other manifestations referred to earlier either derive directly from it or have force only because of it. [clarify] Behind it, too, are legislative mandates driven by budget cuts, for greater productivity.

Essentially, powerful business interests are demanding a pool of employees – high skill, low cost potential employees, available for immediate employment at a manageable cost. Business groups, complaining about workforce problems, are pressuring state legislatures, and to a lesser extent on the Congress. These groups want a large reserve pool of available workers, educated at a high level. The accountability/assessment movement is essentially, then, a regulatory intervention of state and federal governments on behalf of business interests to "make resources more productive." With the goal of having available the right kind of labor force, businesses have turned to government to guarantee educational outcomes, and outcomes that will fit with economic goals of those businesses.

A variety of minor players also stand to benefit financially from assessment. There are also, of course, self-interested promoters: the Education Testing Service, Kaplan, McGraw-Hill, and other for-profit interests or non-profits that actually do make money (the College Board), who directly benefit from a massive increase in required testing, surveying, and the like. But these are relatively minor factors, I think. Profit-making colleges, such as the University of Phoenix and its larger corporation are also obviously involved, and make sizeable political donations in this effort. Certain kinds of schools do very well under assessment regimes, and take to it like flies to honey; they can often be expected to support it politically, since it makes their operations looks better.

Certainly the movement is also fueled by some general hostility to academia, to left-wing professors, to "professors getting away with murder." But this hostility is only harnessed in support of the effort, and is not the same as the insistent, highly directed and well funded effort by business. These different motivations can shape somewhat the different outcomes, although the power of government is an exceptionally blunt instrument in this case. [reduced money to states, from tax cuts, too]

Part of what is meant by "productivity" is more results per dollar spent per person working; the assessment effort is completely consistent with this, in that it is designed to get the most from education dollars spent. The question is, what are the results sought? That is, while public support may be garnered in this effort under the guise of getting your money's worth for your dollar spent in college, in fact there is no guarantee of employment at the other end. For instance, we have recently seen that computer science majors, until recently a fabulous example of education with a deliberate employment goal, have been deteriorating badly. Unions have been failing as well, airline pilots – a very highly skilled, responsible job – have been losing ground very rapidly. That is, while increased productivity and accountability may in fact be good for business or even for the welfare of the economy as a whole, this may have little direct benefit to students themselves. This is all part of the overall deterioration of labor's position in the global economy, especially in the United States, over the past 30 years.

III. Calls for Massive Cultural Change in Higher Education

In order to reach accountability through mass assessment, outsiders are calling not only for assessment that goes across the board, but for a "massive cultural change" in higher education. At the federal level, the Spellings Commission is, at this writing, actively discussing

the widespread use of the CLA – the Collegiate Learning Assessment (?) – a sophisticated standardized essay examination, the idea being that every college in the country (or a large portion thereof) would use the CLA to evaluate the basic skills of graduating students. The CLA is already in use at a number of colleges, on a pilot basis.

Regional accreditors, as well, call in their guidance documents for "every course, every department, every program" at every college, to do assessment: to establish clear goals, have definite objectives, and explicitly relate different learning tasks and assignments in every course to those objectives and goals. They project an ideal in which course, department, and institutional objectives are integrated; this moves in the direction of a thoroughly rationalized, somewhat mechanistic vision of how education works and how to achieve its goals. Professors are told that they need to rethink their goals and objectives, to produce "rubrics" to guide their grading, and to lay all of this out explicitly in written course plans and course syllabi. One hears fairly often the argument that any responsible professor would be doing this anyway, and a dismissal of the possibility of doing good work without such detailed course plans (which, again, have been common for some time in K-12 education).

Great efforts have been made to gain "faculty buy-in," apparently in the notion that the faculty have to not only do assessment, they have to like it as well. Conference speakers tell faculty that they need to adopt a "culture of assessment" in which evaluating one's own work and that of the programs and institutions is a natural part of routine activity. And that the whole process will be easier if faculty "get on board," stop being recalcitrant, and accept the necessity for change. Derek Bok, in his interesting and valuable recent book essentially calls for the entire American professoriate to change its way of thinking about teaching – that is, that at the level of specific individuals, every faculty member needs to change the way they see their work. [quote]

And if faculty don't "buy in," they are said to be afraid of change, hyper-conservative, difficult, recalcitrant, "obstreperous" (which I was told on a recent accreditation visit) – as if all of their resistance to the assessment movement is an irrationality. The idea seems to be that faculty are truculent, and essentially more interested in their own well being and comfort than in actually doing something good for education (the notion being that assessment is "obviously" good for education). Top professors are regarded often as if they are either purely self-interested, or fools. Students in a sense then can't be trusted to pick a good college, don't know the value of what they're getting, and need to be informed through numerical or quantitative indices, of how much they are learning and whether a college is successful or not. (A DOE website that they'll all go to?)

Overall, then, the argument for massive cultural change suggests that the industry as a whole is actually failing, or at least will soon be failing (falling behind India and China is the cliché), so that every individual school must make these changes and indeed every individual within every individual school must make these changes. Variability in the success of different colleges is not considered. Since our young people are not finishing college with the skills and attitudes they need, the fault must lie with the last step in their educational process, namely college. [That's several different ideas]

IV. But do Colleges Need Assessment?

In all this emphasis on changing the culture of colleges and universities there is irony in forcing assessment on people who don't want it. The irony is this: There is no zero-order correlation of assessment programs with the market success of a college. Many, even most, colleges did no assessment at all until recently when it became widely required by governmental

or accreditation mandate. And some of these colleges are, in fact, great by almost any standard. Harvard and Princeton, MIT, the University of Michigan, Cal Tech, Swarthmore, Haverford, Williams, and Reed – all are by every conventional measure we have, fabulously successful. They make money hand-over-fist, and have done so for decades or hundreds of years – a record which virtually no business in America can match. Thousands of students are pleading for acceptance, and most are turned away; they have far more paying customers than they can possibly accept. They charge extravagant amounts of money for their product, and people willingly to borrow massively, mortgaging their homes and their futures, in order to buy that product. The best professors are eager to work there; indeed, a single available position may draw anywhere from 100 to 1,000 applicants at these schools; many academics dream of working there. Current students generally love the college, believe they are learning, work hard at their studies, and are emotionally overwhelmed on the day they graduate. Alumni, for years, decades, indeed for the rest of their lives, are not only wildly loyal and enthusiastic about the place, but also are eager to give large amounts of money in many cases to those institutions. At the point of death, they happily divert large portions of their estate to "alma mater." All in all, this is a record that virtually no business can match. And almost all of them have significant animosity against the kind of assessment being proposed from accreditors and governmental agencies. At the basic level, the point should be clear: there is no connection between the doing of assessment, at least in the obvious ranking of these colleges, with their success as institutions. They're fabulously successful, and not only do they not do assessment, many of them hate the idea.

Maybe – just maybe – they have a point. Some people are suggesting these colleges are foolish, but the evidence is thin. They seem to be incredibly good at what they're doing, in

phenomenally competitive markets, and that success is validated everyday by the tens of thousands of students and parents who are willing to pay enormous sums of money to get what it is those schools are selling. Now it may not be exactly what the assessment people think they should be selling, but that's a different matter altogether.

Colleges are not a paid monopoly, although what they sell is in much greater demand than it used to be as it becomes increasingly necessary to have a college degree in order to get a good job. But colleges do not create that demand, nor did they create that monopoly – any time businesses want to, they can hire people without college degrees. But they don't. And the massive governmental support for higher education in the form of student financial aid is demanded by the voting public of the middle class, not by the colleges themselves who don't have much political clout on their own anyway.

And as educators often note, the industry itself has been rather successful. The usual claim is that we have the best higher education system in the world in the United States today, and that certainly seems by almost all measures to be true. Yet pundits and scholars do suggest now that "failure is coming quickly if we don't do something," mainly in the form of large scale engineering and science programs in China and India. Of course, China and India are producing more engineers in part because they have enormously larger populations than we have, but let that be. We have been damaged in science recently not by the intrinsic actions of educational institutions, but by the political actions of the federal government, which in instigating visa structures and impediments has radically cut down the number of science and engineering students coming to the United States. And our science and math weakness comes not from the colleges so much as from the elementary and secondary education of students who enter college:

that is, the entering pool of potential science students is quite a bit smaller than it used to be. The fact is by any market measure, American higher education is a tremendous success.

In short, there's no clear reason to such schools – admittedly, handling a small minority of post-secondary students – why they should be doing any assessment. They make tons of money, they're under high demand from both students and professors for admittance, and they produce (seemingly at least) fabulous job success among their alumni (yes, it may be that they simply select people who are going to be successful – but those people do still want to go there). There is no evidence that assessment is at all necessary for their success – in fact, it obviously isn't.

V. Assessment is Expensive

Assessment itself can become quite expensive very quickly, a fact not lost on the faculties and colleges under scrutiny. Calls for assessment ignore usually the financial, and certainly the organizational and human costs. The testing apparatus alone for a national exam would be enormous and quite costly; even short of that, the idea that real people, many of them highly paid Ph.D.s, should be spending a lot of their time on this is daunting. In addition is the cost of the destruction of millions upon millions of man-years worth of routines; the creation of committees in every college and university; the creation of new staff positions, new offices, reams of paper, countless hours of computer time, all for the assessment of students, which is in fact already being done. Accreditation self-study teams must do their work, at length. There is time, there is work, there is damage to culture, damage to tradition – an important part of the value of many colleges, and on and on. Elite colleges, least of all, are not rationalistic enterprises; in fact, that is part of what they sell to their students and certainly to their own

alumni. Students don't go to such schools to be treated as automatons; quite the opposite. And finally, coercion itself is costly, as any sociologist or historian can tell you. People will resist being forced to do anything, even if it is "for their own good." And while the good sought may be ambiguous, as it is in this case, the cost is quite certain. The cost is certain, the gain is not.

The entire enterprise, too, overlooks the centrality of student motivation in higher education. In elementary school, the pupils may be pushed around fairly easily, and even convinced to do things they don't like on the grounds that it will please their parents or teachers. In many sectors of higher education, though, such appeals don't work. Students have their own goals, for good or for ill. Some want only to drink and party; others only to get a job; others fight desperately for high grades. Others want only to be left alone. The notion that an outside force, even the administration, will successfully impose various evaluation methods may or may not work, depending on what the students think of it. If the assessments are high stakes, what is certain is that the students will be affected, will find a way around the measurement if they can, and will make of it what they will – with unpredictable consequences. [real awkward]

All of this, the financial cost, the organizational disruption, the motivational morass – is typically ignored in the assessment equation. To put it positively: students and teachers are regarded as relatively inert objects that can be moved this way and that, with no input of their own, with no cost in their motivation, their time used, all at the point of law.

VI. Different Colleges have Different Goals

"Higher education" comprises a vast array of institutions. What they have in common is quite generic: they are post-secondary, geared primarily to teaching students in formal settings; the students have all completed high school or its equivalent; and that's about it. Some are

explicitly remedial, making up for the deficits of whatever education has transpired up until that point. Some are vocational/technical schools that train students in welding, auto mechanics, keyboarding, computer applications. Some – many – are religious institutions, ranging from fundamentalist and Pentecostal to a range of evangelical, to catholic or Christian service institutions. A few, highly visible, are military academies and institutions, both private and state run as well as those run by the federal government. There are massive research universities, scientific institutes, agricultural schools, and a tremendous host of community colleges closely tied to their local business and employment sectors. If all of these are to "do assessment," the assessment will – or should – have stunningly little in common from one to the next.

Some colleges have no problems at all with assessment. For-profit, proprietary business schools take to assessment like flies to honey, certifying the precise skills which their students are guaranteed to have learned. Some of the service academies, too, seem to relish the assessment procedure, clearly marking out those of their students who do and do not have the requisite skills – and they do indeed have an excellent job placement record. Community colleges, with their tuition driven need [DAN: true?] for high placement rates, are very good at it, matching students directly into the local economy; similarly, the proprietary business schools reward their financial aid officers for finding aid where none seemed to exist; and their career services offices may be required to place – immediately – upwards of 95% of the graduates, in order to simply keep their own jobs. Professional schools have long been subject to direct assessment in the form of national examinations. In nursing, in engineering, and in chiropractic, minimum thresholds of expertise are required for every graduate, since the risks of failure are so spectacularly high. A bridge could fall, people could die.

At the far end of the higher education spectrum, though, liberal arts and religious schools often seem quite wary, if not actively hostile, calls for assessment. These two sectors, so politically disparate, in fact have grown up from the common roots, namely the training of ministers; and for them, the shaping of the human being, the inculcation of values, the fortification of a certain perspective on life, are often more important than the accumulation of specific job skills. Love of learning, leadership skills, citizenship, motivation, a strong work ethic, and ambition are the stock in trade here – and valuable "skills" they are. They are not "taught" in the usual sense. And the faculty, in its academic purity, may casually dismiss their importance. But valuable those offerings are, nonetheless.

Finally, these more vaguely-goaled colleges promise a sense of community, a feeling of family, an even a sense of happiness. The public – many students and their parents – are willing to pay very heavily in terms of work and money to achieve these ends. In post-college life, one's energy, motivation, eagerness to embrace life – these are all exceedingly valuable traits. They are, however, hard to measure. The skills and knowledge so easily testable by an assessment program are good things to have, but they are not the point of a liberal arts education.

VII. Goal Itself is a Problematic Concept [need intro paragraph]

(1) In the realm of organizations, and of colleges in particular, *goals are problematic*. Not just a problem, but an insoluble problem, always to be reconsidered, renegotiated, newly understood, never finally settled. Certainly colleges have missions, somewhat vaguely defined; but to say that a college has goals is a tricky business.

Are the college's goals what the mission statement says? This is a public sentiment, but less empirical than aspirational; lots of people or possibly only a few, worked on writing the

thing, and it gets published in college documents, reports to accreditors, and on the inside cover of the catalog. But whether anyone actually follows it is very much an empirical question; whether it actually represents even the aspirations of most of the people who work there is another such question; whether it even represents the aspirations of the communications person who probably fashioned it is yet another.

Or are the goals what the president says? She gives speeches to raise money, rally the troops and gather the alumni to the cause, and to make herself look good. Do her pronouncements represent actual goals?

Or paragraphs on the web site? I've heard serious people say, in serious meetings, that we "should" do certain things because that's what the college is "trying to accomplish, like it says on the web site." In this case what's on the web site is used as a rhetorical strategy in a concrete argument.

Realistically, at any college or university different people have different goals. In a sense, the institution is a big pile of resources (money, facilities, power) – which for most people first represents a job that they hold – a means to economic satisfaction. This is true for the students as well as for faculty and staff. Whether this agglomeration of people actually has a unified direction or a consistency of activities and investments is itself yet another empirical question. Whether an organization is a "thing" is a topic much debated over many years by sociologists, and is a commonly used example of what is called reification.

Finally, if the organization does have a cohesive or consistent direction and practices, that's an empirical finding – not an end set out in advance and consciously pursued, necessarily. Certainly some organizations do that; in fact, that may be a definition of a formal organization, as opposed to simply a group. But in this sense "goals" can only be discovered after the fact,

intuitive and deduced from massive data about how the organization actually operates in the real world.

In sum, it's clearly quite difficult to figure out exactly what the "goal" of a college really is and if we do, it's a task that has to be handled as a matter of discovery and less as a matter of aspiration. [DAN: where does this leave aspirations, which are real?]

2. *Serendipity happens*. Despite a commitment to preconceived goals, surprising things happen, sometimes quite good. And probably more often than not, the things that one tries to do don't happen. Even Peter Drucker, foremost management thinker of the 20th Century (possibly after Frederick Taylor who peaked at about 1910) says many times in his work that surprising things occur, unexpected results happen all the time, and that management must be alive to the possibilities of surprising positive outcomes; and then be ready to exploit them. [examples?] Often things occur better than the things you tried to do, and they're totally different – but great. These count. The sheer fact that a "goal" wasn't met doesn't mean that good things aren't happening, or even that better things than were originally intended aren't happening.

3. *People don't have fixed goals* – that's in the nature of human beings. They change, lose interest, move on; at any one time there are a variety of interests and concerns, needs, wants, desires, and hopes. To set clear goals and then try, over time, to meet them is quite difficult given that people keep changing their minds and other things come up. Over the past 30 years, at the more macro scale, there has been an enormous shift in what students claim to want from a college education (see CIRP), moving from a desire for personal growth and intellectual development, with a broader goal of democratic citizenship, to being something more of a consumer of educational "products" to a serious desire to have marketable skills and take one's place as an employee. The notion, common at the current time, that we should lock in by

governmental regulation one set of such goals makes a mockery of the fluctuating history of education and its purposes. Young people grow up – during college itself, their goals change quite significantly.

Even in the best colleges, students lose interest, drift, change their minds, have enthusiasms and then lose them, are bored and then become excited. They may not like history or math, will become grouchy if forced to do it, then forget about the grouchiness – or remember it and have a bad attitude about those subjects for the rest of their lives.

The standard approach to assessment, I find, essentially ignores motivation as a variable, or it has a very simplistic notion of motivation. Bludgeon them with a test! "High stakes testing" rests in part on the notion that it is a way to motivate students – that is, they don't actually want to learn and so the best thing to do is to force them through intimidation or fear. [examples? proof?] The underlying problem with the whole standard approach is that students may simply not want all of this stuff, therefore they have to be forced. That's the underlying attitude. Students and professors are implicitly regarded as stupid, irresponsible, either ignorant of their own profession or radically self-interested in a way that is somehow bad for everyone else.

VIII. Assessment and New Goals [important section]

The assessment movement, therefore, is in essence a powerful effort to impose fixed new goals on colleges and college students. It embodies a new vision of what students are:

1. Students are relatively inert objects, something like a raw material taken into a manufacturing process to be turned out modified in specified ways at the other end. If they don't come out that way, it is the fault of the organization itself and the people staffing it; no

consideration is given to either the independent motivations of the students themselves or of their history before coming to college.

2. Students are primarily potential employees, members of a latent workforce that can be drawn on or not as needed.

Colleges, too, are seen in particular ways.

1. The overall goals of the institution should be set not by the students themselves or the faculty, nor by the colleges as a whole, but by outside constituencies or "stakeholders", specifically governmental entities. **(etc.)**

2. The crucial outcomes of the college are to be skills, specifically marketable or employable skills needed by business, as opposed to say, artistic, literary, religious, etc. The emphasis come to by some very traditional colleges of "cultural knowledge," including for instance a familiarity with Latin, with major literary works, etc. is left out of this new formulation almost entirely, as are value considerations of a general nature.

3. Colleges are tightly coupled machines in which goals and objectives are closely nested throughout the entire hierarchy. They need clear goals, stated in advance.

The accountability movement is, then, an effort to consolidate the higher education industry as an industry, to narrow its focus, and to coordinate its goals with those of major players in the economy. It's an effort of what the Germans used to call *Gleischaltung* – the "coordination" of every entity in a society under Nazi party rule. **[a bit much, Dan]**

IX. CODA

Still, we must do something. The demands for some kind of assessment and "accountability" coming from state and federal government are continuing and strong; higher

education is taking the blame not only for America's anxiety in facing global economy, but also for the employment difficulties of young adults. As literacy of college graduates slips, colleges themselves are charged with doing a bad job – regardless of the effect of the first 18 years of life, regardless that colleges are called to do remedial work for which they were not designed. But given the incessant demand for assessment, filtered through accreditors, can we turn that demand into something good?

We should. Some colleges certainly are wasteful. In many of our major universities, undergraduate educate is given short shrift. Little attention is paid to skills, knowledge, or the motivation of students for life after college. Not only do professors have competing areas of interest for themselves, but the institutional incentives are in many places dramatically skewed towards research and scholarship and away from undergraduate education. Concrete research on these problems will reveal more, and in more detail, about where the problems lie and what might be done to correct them. This being said, it's certainly not the case right now that the colleges doing assessment are the best colleges; there is no zero-order correlation between the caliber of an institution and whether it does systematic assessment. But all of that said, how could assessment be done well?

Here are some basic principles:

1. Assessment should not interfere with the ongoing work of the institution, at least in the gathering and analysis of data. It shouldn't take enormous amounts of time away from people's work.

2. More broadly, assessment should be inexpensive: involving few people, small cost, and the sampling of time, students and work. There is no need to "change the culture" to invest every course, every program, every syllabus with clear goals and rubrics for achieving them. It

may be true, in controlled studies, that such design makes courses more efficient at reaching those declared goals. But what is left out is whether those are the right goals, the cost of teaching of outsiders imposing their goals on teachers, and whether this approach does not correlate – as I think it does – with a certain narrowness of mind, which in fact is more damaging to the broader educational purpose in the long run.

3. What we want is not the most assessment; we want the *least* assessment for the most learning. In a sense, the goal should be not a lot of assessment; after all, the goal isn't more assessment, it's better colleges – or more appropriately, better education in the long run.

4. Assessment should be intellectually responsible, a consistent part of the enterprise of the university itself. Multiple methods, attention to proper controls (which may be, in some cases, not having controls), the use of good data carefully collected, and so on. As my friend Diane Pike says, "assessment isn't rocket science, but it is social science." Part of intellectual responsibility demands that one acquire not just data, but self-control and self-discipline in analyzing, a lack of self-deception and a relentless honesty in seeing what is there. This may be difficult in the immediate sense – you don't want to know that you're failing – and also politically quite difficult within one's institution. If assessment results become widely publicized, as is the plan of the accountability types, that will obviously increase the incentives for deceit as various levels, including the kind of downright cheating which has become such a problem to significant portions of the teaching profession under No Child Left Behind.

5. Assessment should be useful, so that findings can be fed back into policy and pedagogy throughout the institution.

6. Assessment should be true to the institution's mission.

7. Goals of the institution and its programs should remain flexible, and open to re-evaluation throughout the assessment process. This opens the door to serendipity – the possibility that good outcomes may occur without having been consciously intended.

In the end, some colleges and universities especially, perhaps, the elites are certainly open to the charge that they have been diverted from their primary task of undergraduate education. This charge has been leveled for years, in fact, probably throughout the entire history of university and college education. The goals keep changing; the critics change their focus; and things go on. In the market, however, higher education in America has been fantastically successful, and the irony of business critics' attacking universities as "not doing their job" shouldn't be lost on anyone. The irony, too, of a nominally "conservative" pursuit of heavy governmental intervention in an entire industry should also not be lost. But whatever the failings of higher education, an assessment program based on scientific management is certainly not the answer. The answer is rather to get back to our initial mission – not to change to a different one entirely, especially with no evidence of its value for anyone directly involved.