

## **History of assessment practices in the United States**

Sandy Cobb, 10/8/04

Assessment practices began to spring up in the early 1900's, and the US government was a predominant driver. IQ tests and other standardized tests became popular in public schools. These early tests seemed to focus more on determining what one was capable of rather than assessing learning, as is the trend today.

SATs were created in the 1920's to determine a potential student's ability to benefit from higher education. SAT and ACT scores are still being used today for the very same purpose. Many oppose this type of standardized testing, claiming test bias, against gender, race and socio-economic background.

Five waves of educational reform occurring between the 1950s and the 1990s's included the role of tests in tracking and selection emphasized in the 1950s, the use of tests for program accountability in the 1960s, minimum competency testing programs of the 1970s, school and district accountability of the 1980s, and the standards-based accountability systems of the 1990s. Issues and concerns of test bias have arisen in many types of tests. (Linn R. L., 2000)

I found several Web sites dealing with the history of assessment at well-known universities. I discovered that the Old Dominion University first began assessment practices in the mid 1980s

Assessment has become increasingly important in higher education in the past fifteen years with pressure to turn attention to student learning from many directions.

The Virginia legislature directed all public institutions in the Commonwealth "to establish assessment programs to measure student achievement" in Senate Joint Resolution 83, and in April 1987 the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) mandated guidelines for a statewide campus-based assessment program, the first of its kind in the United States. (The History of Assessment at Old Dominion University)

Apparently, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) began assessment practices in 1984, beginning with the "Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE) installed as graduation requirement." (A Short History of Assessment at UALR)

Indiana Wesleyan University coordinated assessment activities for the first time in 1989 in preparation for a North Central Association (NCA) accreditation visit in 1999. (College of Arts)

I agree with Lorrie Shepard's point of view in her article "The Role of Assessment in a Learning Culture." She emphasized the **importance** of focusing not on the kind of assessments used to give grades or to satisfy the accountability demands of an external authority, but rather ***the kind of assessment that can be used as a part of instruction to support and enhance learning.*** In her article, Shepard appeals to educational researchers and others involved in teacher education, and states that "The transformation of assessment practices cannot be accomplished in separate tests and measurement courses, but rather should be a central concern in teaching methods courses." (Shepard, L., 2000)

My research revealed that early on assessment activities within college and university settings were predominantly related to the accreditation process. ***Today, assessment practices are still a very important part of accreditation, but educators have come to recognize the value of assessing student learning for purposes of improving instructional practices.*** The trend today is for colleges to become "***Learning colleges***" that embrace more effective, innovative methods of teaching, learning and assessing, for the teachers as well as the students! We have come a long way in the past 100 years!

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