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LEADING TO LEARN

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Learning to Lead, Leading to Learn

A Collaborative Syllabus for
Higher Education Leadership

Edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Chris W. Gallagher

Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University
Elon, North Carolina

Parlor Press
Anderson, South Carolina



Elon University Center for Engaged Learning
Elon, North Carolina
www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org

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Series editors: Jessie L. Moore and Peter Felten
Copyeditor and designer: Sophie Grabiec



The current edition is distributed and sold by Parlor Press with these ISBNs:
ISBN (PBK) 978-1-64317-592-8 ISBN (PDF) 978-1-64317-593-5

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Adler-Kassner, Linda, editor. | Gallagher, Chris W., editor.
Title: Learning to lead, leading to learn: A collaborative syllabus for higher education leadership / edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Chris W. Gallagher.
Description: Elon, NC: Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University, 2026. | Series: Center for Engaged Learning Open Access Book Series | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2026014134 (print) | LCCN 2026014135 (ebook) | ISBN 9781643175935 (paperback) | ISBN 9781643175942 (PDF)
Subjects: LCSH: Education, Higher—Administration. | Educational leadership.
Classification: LCC LB2341 .L38 2026 (print) | LCC LB2341 (ebook)
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026014134>

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Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank the inspiring leaders who contributed their labor, time, and wisdom to this collection; we are forever in their debt. We are also grateful to Jessie Moore and Peter Felten for their generous feedback, for shepherding this book through the publication process, and for ensuring that books like this one are open access.

CHAPTER 3

Learning to Lead without Authority**Accreditation and Assessment Mandates**

Chris Blankenship, *Salt Lake Community College*

Looking back over my twenty years as a teacher of college writing, I have to appreciate just how much authority I have had. Even as a graduate TA, the writing courses I taught were mine to design and run. While I might choose to cede some of that authority, such as giving my students a say in course policies in service to a pedagogical philosophy, the largest part of my job was one in which I held that ultimate authority of the final grade.

As I have moved into administration at my open-access urban community college, I have reflected on this idea of authority as something that I no longer possess in my current role. Despite the feeling of powerlessness that many faculty feel in contemporary higher education, they often have more authority in their jobs than they care to admit: academic freedom, faculty primacy over the curriculum, grading practices in classes, choice in research projects, and so on. On the other hand, staff and administrative positions, particularly those focused on accreditation and assessment mandates, are often saddled with a great deal of responsibility but no direct power to make change, as I found when I stepped out of my tenured faculty position and took on the role of director of learning outcomes assessment.

This chapter will describe how I learned to lead these efforts without any positional authority, using lessons from my training in traditional and feminist rhetorical theory as well as writing pedagogy. As I reflected on this learning for this chapter, I was struck by how much I had to

adapt this academic training for institutional leadership. Even though my background is in a communication-focused discipline, I couldn't just slap academic theory onto my work and call it a day. Learning to move past the abstraction, to think about people I sought to lead, their motivations, and the points of connection that we share—those are places where I was able to apply my knowledge to standing at the forefront of valuable institutional work, even while having no positional authority to demand that this work be done.

Institutional Power and Authority

Especially in academia's hierarchies, it may not be easy to account for authority. Department chairs, deans, provosts, or presidents might be seen to all hold direct authority over those in faculty positions, particularly when issues of evaluation, tenure, promotion, and professional conduct come by their desks; however, even these areas can be tenuous depending upon how strong the model of shared governance is within an institution. A union, a faculty senate or association, or an evaluation committee may hold more *de facto* power over these processes, even if the ultimate decision rests with someone in this line of authority. For example, a dean may need to weigh carefully the amount of political capital they need to spend in order to deny promotion to an influential faculty member, no matter how well justified they feel that denial may be. And when the waters are murkier—such as a disagreement over the extent to which the principle of academic freedom weighs upon a personnel decision, or the ways that budgetary priorities are determined—exercising authority that a position *technically* holds might be especially fraught.

Authority-Adjacent Leadership

Consider, then, the position of those who are adjacent to these more authoritative roles. A common misconception about anyone in an administrative position at a college or university is that they wield a similar kind of authority over faculty to those in direct supervisory lines. Although there are always exceptions, this is seldom the case. Put an

“assistant” or “associate” in front of a title like “dean” or “provost,” and that person is likely removed from the line of any direct supervisory authority over all but the few staff that their specific office may have. Other titles like “director” or “manager” likely have the similar challenges, despite the authority their non-academic analogs may hold.

My current position is an example. As director of learning outcomes assessment, my primary responsibilities, according to my job description, are to “work with faculty and academic administrators to plan, design and implement ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes for the improvement of teaching, learning and instructional programs” and to “lead... professional development efforts related to learning outcomes assessment.” A note of explanation here: In US higher education, assessment is tied to institution-wide accreditation. This is often a high-stakes effort, particularly for schools that don’t fall within the upper echelon in national rankings. In these instances, accreditation is an acknowledged marker of the quality of a credential granted by that school. Accreditation is also essential for US colleges and universities because without it, they cannot receive federal funding like student financial aid or grants.

At the comprehensive community college (i.e., two-year college) where I work, we rely on federal money much more than many other types of institutions since we receive less state money per full time equivalent student than four-year institutions (Community College Research Center 2022) and certainly don’t have the endowment that most universities do. In other words, the work that faculty, staff, and administration do who work with assessment and accreditation can have an impact on whether a school has the budget to operate effectively. To be accredited, institutions demonstrate the quality of their programs and work environment through a comprehensive self-study document and follow-up investigation by external peer reviewers from other institutions. These visitations are conducted every several years, resulting in an accreditation report listing strengths and areas for improvement. Depending upon the extent to which an area needs improvement, the accreditor can issue various types of warnings, from a recommendation that must be followed up on by the next visit, up through the need for immediate action and

threats of losing the institution’s accredited status. Additionally, some individual programs will have specific, profession-level accreditation, often conducted through national organizations. These accreditation standards vary by discipline and only impact the specific program, not the institution as a whole, though the assessment required by professional accreditors is often even more rigorous than that required by more general accreditors and thus dovetails well with those standards reported on in the institution’s self-study.

Thus, the paradox. While my position has high-profile, high-stakes responsibilities, people in positions like mine are seldom granted any kind of direct authority to mandate assessment of our programs, and any indirect authority depends entirely upon the willingness of those in formal reporting lines to take up my recommendations and hold faculty accountable to them. I report to an associate provost, who, as I outlined above, is removed from the direct lines of authority over faculty. But I do have an advantage that many others in my position don’t: I am organized within the same division as the faculty, Academic Affairs. Many other staff members who are responsible for assessment practices are organized in divisions with names like “institutional effectiveness,” often alongside offices of institutional research, analytics, and non-academic program review (Walvoord 2010). These professionals, despite their role in speaking to the learning that students do within their programs, are even further removed from the faculty who are (or should be) ultimately responsible for assessing the learning of their students.

Even with my organizational advantage, however, I still found myself at somewhat of a loss at how to proceed with the responsibilities of my new position when I stepped into the job. Prior to this position I had served as the director of faculty development for the 2020–21 academic year. My predecessor affectionately referred that role as a “yes job”: I had the autonomy and budget to bring in interesting speakers, provide books for discussion groups, organize workshops on salient pedagogical topics, pay faculty to develop open educational resources for their students, and give out awards for excellent work. I had no

real authority beyond my own staff, but I didn't need any. I simply had to ask faculty what they wanted to fulfill their professional activity requirements for yearly evaluation, tenure, and promotion, and then work with my staff on providing those opportunities. Where we didn't have clear answers, my staff and I (all teachers before our work in the Faculty Development office) came up with ideas based on the prevailing pedagogical trends in higher education. Even as the COVID-19 pandemic shut down our campus a few months into the year, our role remained largely the same. We supported our eLearning office in helping faculty move classes online and pivoted our work to focus on asynchronous and broadcast instructional methods. My position remained a "yes job" even throughout the crisis, and when I transitioned out of the predetermined year of this interim position and back to faculty the following spring, I felt a sense of accomplishment that I had been successful in my first administrative role at my new institution.

That feeling of accomplishment was the catalyst for my application to my current role. As faculty, my penchant for doing a disproportionate amount of institutional service kept me involved in both department and college-wide faculty leadership, culminating in my service as chair of the Faculty Senate Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee. I came to this position the very semester that our accreditation review cycle had come up and when our college assessment coordinator (the only administrative-level assessment specialist on campus) had abruptly retired. It quickly became clear that even the longstanding members of the committee weren't prepared to effectively step in and address our peer reviewers' questions about how the college was addressing the newly updated standards of our accreditor, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). These new standards required all colleges and universities to assess student learning in entire majors (hence the term "program learning outcomes assessment"), rather than assessing learning in individual courses (or "course level learning outcomes").

Because the visiting team did not believe we had a systematic enough process for program learning outcomes assessment, the NWCCU issued

our college a "recommendation" rather than reaffirm our accreditation fully. This meant that we were expected to address the problem and would be formally reevaluated three years later during our next mid-cycle visit. As happens so often in the wake of accreditation issues, upper administration jumped into action. The now vacant assessment coordinator position was moved from the division of Institutional Effectiveness into Academic Affairs, elevated to a director level, and rewritten to require teaching experience in addition to assessment expertise. Seeing what I felt were very positive changes in the approach to assessment at the college, and remembering fondly my time in Faculty Development, I applied for the position and was hired at the end of the spring semester in 2022.

Upon getting access to all the records and resources of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Office, though, I quickly realized that I had a very different task ahead of me than I had in either of my prior leadership positions. First, I was under a critical institutional mandate. As I described earlier, accreditation is serious business for any college or university. While a "recommendation" is the lightest of the criticisms that our accreditor can offer, if it goes unaddressed, it can lead to stronger reprimands. Our president was taking this recommendation to heart, thus the reorganization and additional resources put towards the office.

Second, the faculty were burnt out on assessment changes. My predecessor, a knowledgeable psychometrician, had done a great deal of top-down institutional assessment, and expectations of faculty involvement and data collection/analysis methods changed multiple times. As a faculty member at the college for six years, I had personally witnessed at least three different assessment processes, some of which I had been philosophically or methodologically opposed to. Especially following all the shifts in teaching due to the pandemic, faculty simply didn't have the will to learn yet another assessment protocol. It was clear that the faculty saw assessment exclusively as an exercise in compliance: conducted solely to show those in power, particularly accreditors, that assessment is happening. This compliance mindset completely

disconnects assessment from the culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning that is often cited as the primary pedagogical goal of assessment in the first place (Suskie 2018).

Third, I had no authority to require anyone to do anything. Reporting to an associate provost, I was completely outside any chain of command of faculty. The best that I could do was report to the provost, who could then require action from the deans, who could then require action from the departments. But, as I outlined above, even those in positions of positional authority have limitations with faculty, particularly when it comes to issues that touch on curriculum and instruction, like assessment does.

Ultimately, the purely compliance mindset was a large part of what had driven our problems with assessment in the first place. While I could potentially entreat the provost/deans/chairs to wield their positional authority on my behalf to attempt to ensure that faculty conducted assessment, that would only reinforce the framework of compliance that I was trying to get away from. I knew that I needed a different tactic to emphasize assessment as a tool for improving teaching and student learning, which is when I started to reflect on what I had learned about rhetoric and conceptual framing as entry points.

Motivating Faculty Engagement

The first task in my new position was to get the lay of the land. I knew, both from experience and from our accreditation report, that we had no systematic way of conducting program assessment across the college. As a comprehensive community college, some of our programs with accreditation from professional organizations (Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing, ABET, etc.) were conducting some kinds of assessment each year. Beyond these programs, though, regular, systematic learning outcomes assessment at the program level was sparse. These programs would need to do something that they hadn't done before. But with multiple assessment methods having been passed down over the last several years, asking faculty to do yet another new thing would be difficult at best.

My first thought was to return to the very basics of traditional rhetoric that I had been steeped in since my earliest college courses in the field. Aristotle (2006) outlined rhetoric as a way to examine the available means of persuasion in contexts where the authority lay elsewhere, such as a vote in the Assembly or a judge in a courtroom, and thus persuasion was needed to drive the motivation of those with the power to make a decision. Aristotle's artistic proofs, sometimes referred to as his appeals to audience, are *logos*, the appeal to the audience's sense of reason; *pathos*, the appeal to the audience's emotions, and *ethos*, the appeal to the audience's sense of the writer/speaker's credibility. There's certainly more to Aristotelian rhetorical theory than just these simple terms, but they form the core of so much of my academic training that they made an excellent frame for my approach to leading in a role where my ability to enact positional authority would be associated with my ability to persuade.

Appealing to Reason: Logos

In the academic world, it's often the appeal to reason that takes center stage: lines of logic, rigorous methods, detailed analyses—the belief that the best ideas will win out, even if we have to go through vigorous debate to figure out which ones are the best. Everyone who has worked in academia knows otherwise, though. There aren't always clear answers to questions, and certainly emotions can run high and hot. This is especially the case for questions of workload and the tensions between academic freedom and accountability, which are so prevalent in assessment. In thinking through my understanding of the traditional rhetorical framework of the three appeals, it quickly became clear that reasoning simply wouldn't be the driving force behind how I needed to learn to lead through this change.

When it came to program learning outcomes assessment, most faculty already knew some of the reasoning behind doing the compliance aspect of the work. Why did we need to do it? Because our accreditor demanded it of us, and therefore, the president and all other academic administrators on down from there demanded it of faculty.

Reasons beyond accreditor compliance for doing learning outcomes assessment may not be as readily apparent, but are difficult to argue with when presented: Why should we assess the learning outcomes of our programs? Because we believe that the credentials that we confer are valuable, as we can see from the learning outcomes that ground our programs and curricula. We should be able to demonstrate what students who earn these credentials know and are able to do upon earning these degrees and certificates. Why should our learning assessments not just be our course grades? Because individual courses cover more than one learning outcome in the vast majority of our programs, and we want to be able to say, specifically, what our students are doing well and what they aren't doing well. Having this data will allow us to make meaningful changes to our curricula or make evidence-based arguments on why what we're already doing is working well. Also, because many of us use factors in our grading that are related to, but ultimately not the same as, the learning we want to see in our students. If a student can pass every exam in a course but still fail due to attendance, then unless there is a learning outcome that is directly about showing up to class, that course grade isn't exclusively about learning.

Faculty already knew or readily accepted this reasoning, but that didn't drive motivation or engagement in ways that would be meaningful or sustainable. To lead through this change, I had to learn to appeal to them in different ways.

Appealing to Emotions: Pathos

Appealing to an audience's emotions is often given a bad rap. It's associated with manipulation, playing off feelings like pity, fear, anger, or disgust to bypass rationality, despite being quite a reductive way of thinking about how emotion factors into our reasoning. We know, physiologically and neurologically, that human brains don't separate reason and emotion but integrate them as part of overarching cognitive processing (Damasio 2005), so I felt that it was best to lean into this fact when it came to attempting to lead from this new role. I knew I needed to speak to the affective elements of the teaching profession that

I know so well myself. I wanted to emphasize the positive feelings surrounding being not just an educator, but one who is engaged in always working to improve student learning through meaningful changes to our teaching.

The emotion that was most relevant to my audience was their devotion to their students. Few faculty who choose to teach at a community college come here without a passion for teaching. There are few resources for faculty to conduct research, and many of those are for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning projects; similarly, the pay for community college professors is often substantially lower than our four-year university counterparts in all but the most strongly unionized states. Even in the trades programs that don't exist at the universities, our faculty could generally be making more money working directly in their trade than as a professor. What brings faculty to open-access, community-focused institutions is the desire to teach.

To tap into this energy around students, though, I had to be able to show that participating in program learning outcomes assessment was about even more effective teaching. This involved appealing to faculty to shift their thinking about the foundational purposes of assessment. Natasha Jankowski describes four philosophies for thinking about these purposes: (1) compliance/reporting, or assessment purely for the sake of accountability to entities like boards of education and accreditors; (2) measurement, or assessment focused on valid, quantitative methods and accurate measures to document and record learning; (3) teaching and learning, or assessment as part of effective pedagogy that is formative and intended to improve teaching and learning; and (4) student-centered, assessment as a reflective practice where students actively participate in the assessment process, "not simply the object of assessment, but the primary beneficiaries" (Jankowski 2017, 11).

I needed to change the discourse around assessment to one of the latter two philosophies, and while student-centered assessment is an ideal goal, it would be a much more difficult shift in culture and implementation, especially at a college that works exclusively in smaller credentials (15–60 credit-hour associate's degrees and certificates),

serving largely students who don't attend full-time due to family and work obligations. The teaching and learning philosophy seemed like a natural fit since it was already aligned so well with our college mission, the inclinations of those who choose to work at a teaching-focused institution (myself included), and the robust Faculty Development and eLearning offices on our campus.

To attempt the cultural change, I needed to shift the way that we talked about assessment. My research as a graduate student dealt with the ways that we teach argumentation in writing, and in particular, the conceptual metaphors and cognitive frames that we use to discuss what argumentation is and does. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* argue that the language we use around certain ideas conceptually maps one concept onto another (2003). For example, if we describe argument as “attacking a weak point” or “defending a position,” with ideas being “weaponized” or a tactic being “scorched earth,” then we see the mapping “*argument is war*.” Lakoff extends this theory to political discourse in his books *Moral Politics* (2002) and *Don't Think of an Elephant* (2004), where he discusses the broader implications of how choices in language can reframe or reinforce systems of values. In this case, I wanted to emphasize the values underlying choosing to become a teacher at an open-access institution. I learned early on in my study of traditional rhetoric that coming back to these positive emotions that drive initial motivation, especially for something as fundamental as a career choice, can build a more sustained commitment to change.

As I prepared for the responsibilities of my new position, I began to change both internal resources and public-facing documents away from accountability and reporting back to teaching and learning. Assessment was not just something we needed to do for the Board of Education; it was something we should be doing for our students. Assessment didn't just result in a report renewing our accreditation; it resulted in actionable information to allow us to improve our students' experience in our classes. Assessment wasn't just a part of institutional success; it was a part of effective pedagogy and thus an essential part of being an active, engaged teacher.

Perhaps most important, though, was my decision to eschew the pervasive idea of a “culture of assessment” (Ikenberry and Kuh 2015). This approach appears in a great deal of contemporary scholarship on institutional assessment to describe infusing assessment into most standard practices. The intent here is a good one: to always be considering how we know a practice is an effective one and in what ways. But for my campus, there was so much exhaustion around assessment and its constant changes that I wanted to avoid the word as much as possible, especially as a justification for the changes that we had to undergo as part of the accreditation recommendation. So, instead, I chose to use the idea of “a culture of curiosity” to highlight the actual pedagogical purpose of learning outcomes assessment, using the phrase “I wonder...” when talking to faculty and academic leadership about the assessment work to be done. “I wonder how students are reading these outcomes when they encounter your program documents?” “I wonder how this outcome could be looked at directly in one of your courses?” “I wonder if a timed in-class exam is the most effective way to see how students are learning this thing you want them to learn?” Emphasizing the curiosity that goes into being both a good teacher and a good learner, I hoped, would effectively reframe what was previously considered an onerous task. Framing myself and other faculty as learners in this new process as well also helped to smooth these paths.

Once I had the framing language figured out, I knew I also needed to convince faculty to come along with me on this change, despite the work that it would entail. For this, I looked further into my training in feminist rhetoric, specifically, in what I learned about alternatives to the “*argument is war*” framing. My introduction to feminist rhetorics, and one that created a lasting impression on how I approach persuasion, is Foss and Griffin's 1995 work on what they call “invitational rhetoric.” In this article, they present the idea that persuasion for conversion to a point of view may be harmful and not truly result in a meaningful understanding. Instead, they advocate for the presentation of perspectives under the principles of “equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (2) with the goal of achieving understanding

and collaboration. Setting aside the accountability framing was one step in this rhetorical move. Faculty already knew about it; they had been operating under it for years now. But over the years, I had learned that respect is key in creating sustainable change. Traditional rhetoric gave me a process for constructing effective arguments, but feminist rhetorics, and in particular, invitational rhetoric, gave me a framework to acknowledge an individual's autonomy and value their experience within whatever topic we were discussing. By setting aside the pure goal of persuasion to focus on collaboration, I found new ground on which to push the conversation forward while still meeting the requirements of my job.

So, when I began meeting with faculty in the first months of my new position, I didn't focus on the institutional assessment mandate, the literature on pedagogy, or any other tactic relying on traditional persuasion. Instead, I told them stories about how I thought about my classes and my students, how I saw changes in their confidence and skill as I looked at data I gathered on their learning and made changes in cycles. I described what I wanted my students to learn and how that was demonstrated in their work under a variety of different grading systems and with iterations of assignments that I continued to develop over several semesters. I talked about gathering with my colleagues who taught in the same associate's granting programs I worked in, how we collaborated on defining learning goals for the program, and how the individual courses that we taught all worked together to create a cohesive curriculum that spoke to those program learning outcomes. Then, I asked faculty questions about their own students, what they wanted them to know and be able to do when they complete a course or a program, how they know that students have accomplished these learning goals, how this information helps them to improve their students' experiences from semester to semester.

By focusing on the students, the real reason to look at learning outcomes in the first place, I was able to start showing faculty that the college's new approach to assessment was a positive one that already aligned with their own devotion to student learning. And as I created resources, presented at meetings, and continued to listen and learn about

how this approach landed with faculty, I started to see less resistance and apathy to doing the work. I had people reaching out, wanting to know more about how to use assessment to improve their teaching. It wasn't a groundswell, but it was a marked improvement from the attitudes I experienced before I took the position.

Appealing to Credibility: Ethos

Ultimately, I believe that at the heart of leadership lies ethos, the appeal to the audience's sense of the writer/speaker's credibility and character. Nobody looks to leaders for guidance, no matter what level of official authority you may have, unless they believe that you know what you're doing and trust that you have their best interests at heart. I was very fortunate to have some credibility with faculty at my college when I began my new position. Thanks to my visibility as the interim director of faculty development a few years earlier and my more recent work on the Faculty Senate Leadership Committee, I managed to make connections across campus in ways that faculty who remained siloed in their own departments aren't often able to do. That said, I knew that I could lose that goodwill I had accumulated if I were to sweep in and try to demand huge changes in service to the accreditor recommendation we received, even though there was pressure from the college president to do exactly that. At heart, I was and remain a teacher, someone devoted to education, and I believe this regardless of what my job title says; however, much like many faculty who move into administration, I had to show that my character remained unchanged.

I wanted faculty to know that I was with them, that I was one of them. The division between faculty and administration, between compliance and academic freedom, is a common tension in higher education. Part of my attempt to move beyond this tension with faculty was demonstrating shared positive values, like my devotion to teaching through my stories of student learning; however, I also wanted faculty to know that I shared their frustrations as well. In an article that has stuck with me since graduate school, Barry Kroll (2008) likens effective rhetoric to aikido, which, while a form of martial arts and therefore

somewhat at odds with the philosophy of invitational rhetoric, provided me a helpful frame for addressing resistance. As Kroll describes, aikido is the “art of peace,” focused on principles to do the least amount of harm in a situation where a person cannot back down to defuse a conflict. In my case, despite my wanting faculty to *want* to do assessment as part of effective pedagogy, I knew that the assessment mandate, ultimately, would require faculty to do the work. So, when faculty expressed frustration with assessment, I would agree, that yes, assessment as it had been done, with my predecessor’s standardized rubrics and reports that didn’t speak to student learning, was a major problem. But, just like faculty do in their departments, we could solve this problem together. I encouraged them to look to their own needs as faculty, at what information could they gather that would help them be better teachers, and I encouraged them to collect this information in systematic ways. Similarly, I acknowledged the shifting assessment expectations over the years, which created uncertainty and new labor every time. I invited faculty to collaborate with me, working through existing power structures and shared governance to create a series of policies and practices that would be codified and enduring. At every step, whether dealing with apathy or outright resistance, I learned that I had to be at the forefront of the change in order to make space for the voices of the teachers that assessment is meant to serve.

In addition to reinforcing my identification with faculty values, I also wanted to bolster my ethos by respecting faculty agency in determining what they felt was valuable. Instead of attempting to impose standardized methods or measures across such a diverse array of programs, thus flattening any meaning the data might have at the individual or program levels, I encouraged faculty to develop their own metrics and instruments that spoke to the epistemologies and methodologies that were meaningful to their own disciplines. As I told our director of institutional research, who expressed some skepticism about this approach’s ability to produce quantitatively valid data, our accreditor just requires us to have a system, and this type of assessment could be systematic without being normative. What our campus needed wasn’t a simple table of results; it needed an overall picture of student learning, and this could

be done with an approach I learned of only after I started my new position. Called “evidence-based storytelling,” it emphasizes the use of data, from assessment and other related measures of student success, to present a narrative of institutional learning rather than just a list of decontextualized metrics (Jankowski and Baker 2019). Hearing about this method in a workshop, I was immediately interested in learning more. It seemed to mesh so nicely with the rhetorical framing that I had already been adapting that I quickly found the article (and others that cited it) and integrated the concept into my discussions with faculty. This approach allows me to bring together disparate types of evidence to form a cohesive and coherent view of learning in our programs, emphasizing the teaching and learning philosophy of assessment as well as my character as a teacher, while also speaking to our accreditation compliance needs. Learning that assessment scholarship, which I had previously found to be overly quantitative and prescriptive, could dovetail so nicely with my rhetorical training, encouraged me to dig deeper into the literature and continue to find new ways to adapt to this leadership challenge.

Takeaways

While I addressed individual faculty, faculty senate, and department leadership during that first year, I found my approach turned their skepticism, concern, and frustration into focus and resolve. Upper administration had already made our need clear, but rather than leaning on that mandate to attempt to borrow authority that I didn’t hold myself, I kept to my stories as a teacher, my shared frustrations as a faculty member, and my respect for shared governance and faculty expertise. What started as just a few highly motivated individuals approaching me for guidance turned into a flood of emails, phone calls, and invitations to meetings. Assessment processes within departments and on college-wide committees were discussed and revised independently of my intervention, and I saw the culture of curiosity start to gain a foothold through these revisions.

Currently, I am beginning my third year in this position, and we have just finished our mid-cycle accreditation report where our peer reviewers will specifically investigate how well we have addressed this recommendation. Reaching this point hasn't been easy. Adapting the abstraction of rhetorical theory and the very different audience of writing pedagogy to academic leadership took a lot of careful thought and plenty of mistakes along the way. But I've learned that this adaptation is part of becoming a leader. I'm convinced that everyone entering positions like mine, where there is plenty of responsibility but little authority, has a lot that they can bring from their disciplinary training, whatever that might be. We just have to be willing to let go of what we think we know and ask ourselves, "How does this speak to the challenges in front of me?"

As for me, although there have been plenty of bumps along the road, we've made substantial progress towards turning assessment into a meaningful part of teaching and learning at the college. But nothing has made me prouder than a recent note from our director of strategic analysis and accreditation, who is leading the preparation for our evaluation: "I just wanted to let you know I've had meetings with faculty leadership and Chairs' Council to get feedback on the mid-cycle report over the last week and they have a lot to say about every section *except* L[earning] O[outcomes]A[ssessment]. They're always like "Oh, it's been fine, Chris is great, no notes." If that is the current response to the previously onerous task of assessment, I'll take it as lessons well learned and a job well done.

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