



A Letter from the ACPA Commission for Assessment and Evaluation

Organization Endorsement for ACCELERATE: Assessment Principles for Best Practice

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From The A.C.C.L.E.R.A.T.E Principles: Moving Us Closer to Continuous Improvement

On behalf of the ACPA Commission for Assessment and Evaluation (CAE), we are pleased to express our full support and endorsement of the revised assessment principles for best practices in assessment, A.C.C.L.E.R.A.T.E. CAE is an entity group of ACPA College Student Educators International representing staff and faculty committed to advancing assessment in higher education. Established in 1961, CAE has a long history of developing and promoting guiding frameworks (e.g. principles, standards, competencies) and offering professional development and training institutes. The resources CAE develops are designed to build the knowledge and skills needed to conduct high-quality, equity-centered assessment, and to translate assessment findings into positive change for students. The A.C.C.L.E.R.A.T.E principles not only reflect our core values (Equity, Scholarship, Mentorship, and Education) but also complement and strengthen the joint American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER) competencies.

A particular strength of the A.C.C.L.E.R.A.T.E. principles is their commitment to access and opportunity, as evidenced in the Equity and Empowerment-Motivated principle. CAE has identified Equity as a core commitment, undergirded by ACPA's values and Strategic Imperative for Racial Justice and Decolonization (2019): how can assessment highlight and remedy longstanding inequities in education, as well as use processes and tools that foreground agency and well-being? The A.C.C.L.E.R.A.T.E. call to "seek excellence and catalyze fairness at the individual level" empowers full staff and student participation in higher education, to the benefit of individual organizations and higher education as a sector.

While the ACPA and NASPA AER competencies succeed in providing staff with a broad definition of what skills and abilities are needed to conduct meaningful assessment within the profession, what they lack is the "why" underlying assessment. Without the "why," we are in danger of becoming technicians focused on compliance, rather than practitioners crafting meaningful and educational experiences using assessment to continually enhance programs and services. This is especially true when we consider the idea of continuous improvement, the most important and difficult part of the assessment process. For decades, much of the focus has been on assessment methods and presenting results in engaging ways. As a result, many staff have been taught to believe the assessment cycle ends when they submit results or materials for their division's annual report. If we adhere to this intermediate AER competency:

Communicate and display data through a variety of means (publications, reports, presentations, social media, etc.) in a manner that is accurate; transparent regarding the strengths, limitations, and context of the data; and sensitive to political coalitions and realities associated with data as a scarce resource. (p. 21)

there is no incentive to be action-oriented and respond to student needs. When we use the A.C.C.L.E.R.A.T.E. principle, Action-Driven, to inform the same AER competency, the focus shifts from only communicating results to communicating results that convert findings into data points that tell a meaningful story and identify areas for improvement.

To ultimately move away from assessment being a check-the-box activity, assessment specialists at all levels need to be able to communicate the why. The A.C.C.L.E.R.A.T.E. principles emphasize that assessment must be embedded within organizational goals and theoretical frameworks and centered on students' learning experiences. As an assessment specialist can attest, conducting assessment for its own sake, without a clear purpose or connection to decision-making, often leads to frustration in students and staff (especially when important data go unused). By highlighting the contextual factors that shape assessment and encouraging staff to ground assessment in a commitment to change, the A.C.C.L.E.R.A.T.E. principles complement the technical focus of the ACPA and NASPA standards and provide student affairs organizations with shared language and concepts to strengthen assessment practice.

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References

American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (2015). *Professional competency areas for student affairs educators*.
https://www.naspa.org/files/dmfile/ACPA_NASPA_Professional_Compencies_1.pdf