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Advancing Equity Through Assessment: Lessons from a Faculty Learning Community

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Intersection: A Journal at the Intersection of Assessment and Learning

Early View

Abstract: Faculty engagement with equity-minded assessment is critical to closing equity gaps related to student success; however, there are several barriers faculty face in implementing such practices at both course and curricular levels. To address some of these challenges, a faculty Assessment Learning Community (ALC) was developed to provide financial resources, targeted guidance and support, context-specific strategies, and to encourage collaborative peer learning and support. This manuscript highlights lessons learned from the first two years of the ALC and provides a blueprint for other higher education institutions with similar goals and challenges.

Keywords: *Equity-minded assessment, faculty development, student success, disaggregated student data, institutional barriers*

Advancing Equity Through Assessment: Lessons from a Faculty Learning Community

The Assessment for Advancing Equity Learning Community (ALC) at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) was developed in response to key findings from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) reports, which highlight the need to embed equity into assessment practices. The ALC offers a scalable faculty development model that institutions can adopt to move from theory to practice in advancing equitable assessment by: integrating culturally responsive assessment methods that validate diverse ways of learning (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017); prioritizing disaggregated data analysis to identify and address equity gaps while emphasizing student involvement in shaping assessment practices (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020); and acknowledging real-world barriers to implementing equity-minded assessment (Heiser et al., 2023).

Equity-minded assessment is crucial but challenging. Faculty often struggle with limited institutional support, lack of assessment training, or uncertainty about implementing changes effectively (Heiser et al., 2023), resulting in inaction. The overarching question guiding this work is: What might a campus-wide model that engages faculty in meaningful equity-focused assessment look like, and how might it influence faculty assessment practices and related teaching and curricular work? We designed and evaluated the ALC to try to answer this question. The ALC addresses the challenges above by providing a structured environment in which faculty can collaborate, receive targeted guidance, and develop context-specific strategies that aim to reduce barriers to implementation and are supported, actionable, and sustainable. Specifically, faculty propose assessment projects to uncover and address

equity gaps in their courses or programs and then conduct these projects in a community-based environment anchored by a series of workshops led by assessment experts (both professional staff and faculty who have previously engaged in equity-focused assessment projects). In its first two years, the ALC engaged 29 faculty from 15 different units in 15 different assessment projects. This model has proven to be a versatile and low-overhead model for engaging faculty in equity-focused assessment projects that align with institutional goals.

Context

In 2018-2019, UCSD underwent its most recent accreditation review by its institutional accrediting body. A key recommendation was to “[c]ontinue to extend engagement in assessment of educational effectiveness; integrate results of assessment into regular program review processes.”

Although assessment is widely recognized as essential for improving student learning, engaging faculty in meaningful, large-scale assessment remains challenging, even at institutions with established academic program review processes. Faculty routinely assess student learning in their courses and often use the results to refine instruction. However, these in-class assessments are rarely connected to broader program learning outcomes or integrated into overarching program reviews, due to limited time, insufficient institutional support for integration, lack of incentives, and a lack of expertise in assessment practices (Janio, 2025).

To address the lack of resources for program-level assessment, the Division of Undergraduate Education (DUE) launched an assessment grant initiative to support faculty-led efforts, which provided departments with up to \$10,000 in funding. In its first two years, 19 departments participated; however, participation declined significantly from 2020–2023, with only three departments applying during that period. While the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to this decline, it also became clear that the pool of early adopters—those with prior assessment experience—had been largely exhausted, making it more difficult to engage the broader faculty population.

Although the funded projects were high quality, their variety in scope limited opportunities for coordinated, campus-wide improvement. The absence of shared expectations and strategic direction further constrained their collective impact. In January of 2020, the university adopted a Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence, which explicitly called for achieving equitable outcomes in retention, academic success, and graduation rates. This plan also introduced an accountability process that requires schools and departments to regularly present evidence of the effectiveness of their equity efforts.

Coinciding with the launch of this assessment initiative and the ongoing implementation of the Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence, the Academic Senate revised its program review guidelines to incorporate equity-focused criteria explicitly. At UCSD, academic programs undergo formal review every seven to nine years, overseen by the Academic Senate and administered by the DUE in partnership with the Division of Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs (GEPA). In their self-study reports, beginning in 2021, programs were required to speak to academic equity gaps, such as differences in retention rates, time to degree, and academic performance by race, first-generation status, and other demographic factors. Program review committees were also expected to comment

on the presence or absence of such gaps. By embedding equity into the program review process, the institution reinforced the expectation that departments examine not only their equity efforts but also the outcomes those efforts produced.

As institutional expectations around equity expanded, assessment became a more central component of departmental accountability and improvement efforts. To support this shift and address gaps in faculty expertise in assessment, we implemented three key changes to the Assessment Grant Program in the 2023–24 academic year. We increased the award amount to \$20,000, enabling departments to hire undergraduate or graduate students to assist with data collection and analysis. Second, the Assessment Planning Committee (described below) developed and distributed template assessment proposals that units could adapt to their specific contexts. These proposal templates were designed to focus participants' efforts on equity-focused assessment in key courses by helping departments identify and reduce outcome gaps. They also provided a practical starting point for faculty who were new to assessment, while helping to align campus-wide efforts with a common strategic purpose. Third, we launched the Assessment Learning Community (ALC). The ALC was designed to foster participation among faculty with limited assessment experience, build assessment capacity while providing support, and expand the institution's network of equity-minded educators.

In its second year, the ALC underwent refinements based on participant survey feedback and observations from the initial pilot. We revised the assessment plan template to better center equity in assessment of student learning outcomes. Minor timeline adjustments were also made to better support faculty participation. Due to budget constraints, the participation stipend was reduced to \$12,000. This paper describes the development, implementation, outcomes, and challenges of the ALC's first year.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The design and implementation of the ALC is grounded in the scholarship and practice of equity-minded assessment and evidence-based faculty development frameworks. Equity-minded assessment (McNair et al., 2020) emphasizes a shift from equity rhetoric to tangible action in faculty assessment practices. This framework prioritizes identifying and addressing inequitable educational outcomes, examining biases in assessment tools, and using disaggregated data to uncover and close equity gaps. Engaging in equity-minded assessment begins with self-examination of one's own beliefs, experiences, and practices and their influence on approaches to teaching and addressing equity gaps (Adams & Love, 2009; McNair et al., 2020). The ALC provides a non-judgmental space for colleagues to explore how their assessment practices may unknowingly contribute to disparities in student outcomes through deficit beliefs about students. This involves guided discussion about deficit thinking and challenging participants to move away from assumptions that blame students for inequities (Bensimon, 2009). Deficit thinking in assessment is often reinforced by systemic structures that attribute disparities in student performance to individual shortcomings rather than addressing broader institutional factors, such as inequitable access to resources, culturally misaligned curriculum, or biased evaluation criteria (McNair et al., 2020). Instead, participants were encouraged to critically examine and reflect on how institutional structures and policies contribute to disparities and to design assessments that not only promote more equitable opportunities for student success but also increase

awareness of how assessment practices can either perpetuate or challenge systemic inequities (DeLuca Fernández, 2015; Heiser et al., 2017; Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). By integrating these principles, the ALC helps faculty critically examine their assessment strategies and implement more inclusive approaches in their teaching and evaluation practices.

The ALC was also designed using effective, assessment-focused principles of professional development for faculty. Waterbury et al. (2017) found that faculty participation in a range of professional development opportunities, including workshops and consultations, resulted in improved knowledge of and comfort and skills with assessment. Similarly, Haviland et al. (2011) found that faculty participation in a series of assessment-focused workshops resulted in increased understanding of assessment fundamentals, improved confidence in their ability to engage in assessment, and a more positive attitude toward assessment. This kind of faculty buy-in and support for assessment is critical, especially as a component of a robust institutional culture of assessment (Fuller et al., 2016). Fuller et al. (2016) also point to the importance of institutional support and value as part of a robust culture of assessment; the efforts to connect this faculty assessment work with key strategic university initiatives reflect this importance.

The ALC operates as a learning community, defined as a group of individuals working together to achieve shared goals through collective inquiry and reflection (Lenning et al., 2013). Unlike communities of practice, which focus heavily on informal learning and the development of shared practices, learning communities emphasize structured collaboration, shared purpose, and the pursuit of measurable outcomes. This model was chosen for the ALC because research suggests that faculty often need ongoing support, peer engagement, and iterative learning opportunities to implement equity-minded assessment successfully (Heiser et al., 2023). The ALC design reflects these principles by creating an environment where participants actively engage in meaningful dialogue, share strategies, and implement equity-minded assessment practices aligned with institutional goals. By providing a dedicated space for faculty to examine their assessment practices through an equity lens, the ALC helps participants move from theoretical discussions to practical applications.

Research Questions and Ethical Approval for Research

Our goal was to build a program that would engage faculty from across the university and have tangible impacts on both the participants' confidence and on the culture of assessment across campus. In line with that goal, the work we present here is grounded in the following research questions:

1. To what extent does participation in a structured, equity-centered assessment learning community engage participants from across disciplines and strengthen their equity-minded assessment knowledge, confidence, and practices?
2. How does a structured, equity-centered assessment learning community influence teaching, curricula, and departmental assessment conversations across campus?

This work was done under exempt IRB protocol #811588.

Equity-Minded Assessment: Approach and Implementation

As a structured learning community, the ALC guides faculty members through scaffolded assessment projects tailored to their programs over a two-year timespan. The ALC was designed and offered via

the Assessment Planning Committee, a partnership between the DUE, the Teaching and Learning Commons (Commons), and Institutional Research (IR). This collaborative approach allows for the sharing of resources and expertise, and leverages support for sustained institutional assessment (Kinzie et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2024).

The components of the ALC are:

1. **Project proposal:** Faculty choose between two proposal templates – one focused on pedagogy, curriculum, and learning outcome alignment at the course level, and the other focused on curriculum sequencing and learning outcome alignment at the program level – designed to uncover and resolve underlying reasons for equity gaps in student outcomes. They could also choose to author their own proposal if it is focused on pedagogical or curricular solutions to equity gaps. In their proposals, faculty articulated their assessment questions and project goals, described their methods, outlined plans for data collection and analysis, and identified a timeline. Participants were also required to explain how their project would address differences in access or success, how findings would align with campus accountability structures, and how students would be meaningfully involved in the assessment process. Because these expectations were built into the proposal, the learning community sessions were designed to support faculty in carrying that work forward.
2. **Project implementation:** Implementation of the proposed project is scaffolded by a series of workshops (which comprise the ALC curriculum, described below) and the community that is formed through these workshops.
3. **Project reporting:** Faculty report on the results of their projects at a final ALC gathering and have the option to continue to report further results to future cohorts of the ALC, if they wish.

ALC Curriculum

The ALC curriculum was intentionally structured to guide participants through the process of refining and completing their proposed projects. To support equity-minded engagement with data, ALC team members from IR developed a training designed to prime participants for using data through an equity lens. The session introduced the concept of equity-mindedness in higher education; explained how program review and assessment efforts can contribute to equity within the major; emphasized the intentional use of institutional data to identify and address inequities; and provided resources to support continuous, equity-focused improvement. To gain access to unit data dashboards, participants were required to complete this training. One-on-one consultations were also provided to support faculty in analyzing institutional data through an equity lens and applying it directly to their assessment projects.

Selected faculty committed to participating in the ALC as a cohort during the academic year. Over the academic year, the cohort convened six times to pursue three overarching objectives: (1) build a community among those engaged in assessment work, (2) provide opportunities for learning and receiving support in assessment efforts, and (3) complete assessment projects that promote inclusive excellence.

An overview of each of the ALC sessions is given in Table 1; additional details about the learning objectives, activities, and deliverables for each session can be found in the Appendix. The first two sessions of the ALC focused on developing a stronger understanding of the institutional dashboards and reviewing relevant data sets together. Faculty examined trends, patterns, and potential equity gaps in their own courses and programs, asking questions such as whether the term in which a student enrolled influenced outcomes or whether differences emerged across student groups. These sessions also introduced fact-finding strategies and prompted faculty to consider additional sources of evidence, including student voice. This data exploration was further supported by one-on-one sessions with IR team members to help faculty interpret their data and to identify additional data that would help them with their projects.

Table 1.

ALC Session Overview

Component	Description
Pre-Work	Assigned equity reading, equity-minded data training, and project framing prior to program launch
Learning Community Sessions (6)	Scaffolded workshops guide faculty through assessment question development, data analysis, equity-focused interpretation, and action planning
Midpoint Report, Presentation, Feedback & Survey	At the 12-month mark, faculty submit a progress report, present preliminary findings, receive structured cohort feedback, and complete a midpoint survey
Final Report, Presentation & Survey	At the 24-month mark, faculty submit a final report documenting outcomes and action steps, present findings, and complete a closing survey

Session three centered on refining assessment questions. After exploring their data, faculty revisited and sharpened their questions to ensure they were equity focused and aligned with program review and accountability processes. Participants were encouraged to focus on changes they could directly affect within their roles, recognizing that faculty often have varying levels of influence over assessment practices depending on departmental structures and institutional policies. This approach empowers individuals to identify areas where they could make meaningful adjustments to their assessment strategies, even if larger systemic changes were beyond their immediate control. To identify potential impactful changes, participants are guided to formulate assessment questions that are Actionable, Answerable and Appropriate (“the three A’s”), a framework designed to ensure that assessment efforts are both meaningful and impactful (Moloney, 2020). This approach is especially useful in equity-minded assessment because it encourages faculty to focus on questions that they can realistically act on that are grounded in their course or program context. Rather than asking questions about student performance, the “three A’s” framework helps faculty to focus on and examine aspects of their

teaching, curriculum, and learning environment that may contribute to inequitable student outcomes. This shift supports faculty in using evidence to make informed, practical changes that address equity gaps. By using this framework, participants developed focused questions that could generate data-driven insights about disparities in student learning outcomes and inform practical interventions. Practical examples and opportunities to refine their questions in alignment with these principles were provided, exploring how the “three A’s” could be applied to ongoing assessment cycles to promote continuous improvement. In using this approach, while simultaneously considering spheres of influence, participants could strategically implement equity-minded assessment within their courses, programs, or committees, ensuring their efforts are both impactful and sustainable. This approach also helps faculty recognize opportunities to advocate for broader institutional changes by leveraging data and collaborative efforts within their professional networks.

Session four examined different types of assessment measures, including exams, enrollment data, grades, surveys, interviews, and focus groups, and explored when and why each approach might be appropriate given a particular question. The faculty reflected on their data and resources, examined how institutional structures contribute to disparities, and further refined their assessments using an equity-minded approach. Since a key approach of the ALC is to amplify student voices in assessment processes, participants are guided in this session to integrate qualitative and quantitative data that capture student perspectives, ensuring assessments were informed by the lived experiences of those directly impacted by institutional policies and practices (Singer-Freeman & Robinson, 2020). By integrating student feedback, faculty can identify barriers that may not have been visible through standard assessment data alone, such as cultural biases in test design or mismatches between course content and student needs. The inclusion of student voice through surveys or focus groups also helps ensure that the perspectives of all disaggregated student groups are represented—even those whose numbers fall below the minimum sample size threshold and would otherwise be excluded from quantitative analyses. This practice not only improves assessment accuracy but also fosters a more inclusive learning environment where students feel their experiences are valued (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

Session five served as a progress check-in, with groups sharing updates, challenges, and insights. The sixth and final session focused on interpreting data and drawing conclusions, identifying equity gaps, and discussing how findings would inform next steps.

Throughout the year, we emphasized interpreting data through an equity-minded lens, encouraging faculty to consider the context behind disparities before drawing conclusions. Each meeting also included space for sharing progress and receiving feedback, which helped build trust within the cohort and maintain project progress.

Assessment Plan Template

Throughout the program, an assessment plan template guided participants’ work. This structured resource helped participants align their assessment questions, data collection methods, and analysis plans with the program’s overarching equity goals.

The template was structured around the ALC sessions and served as both a planning and reporting tool throughout the project cycle. Faculty were asked to articulate how their assessment questions advanced equity and to explain how the work connected to institutional processes, including campus program review and accountability reporting. The template asked participants to identify the student populations included in their study, specify the quantitative and qualitative data sources they intended to use (aside from their unit dashboards provided by IR), and describe how they would collect data.

The template asked faculty to outline their analysis approach, describing how the data would be examined and how findings would be interpreted in relation to the assessment question. It also guided participants to articulate how results would inform instructional or curricular changes and to specify how the faculty would share findings with relevant stakeholders. By embedding these structured prompts, the template supported intentional, equity focused assessment design while promoting consistency with expectations for initiatives such as program review and accountability across disciplines, departments, and colleges.

Participants and Assessment Project Descriptions

The 2023–25 cohort brought together units from nine programs, with representation from four out of nine schools (i.e., academic divisions) and institutes on our campus—Biological Sciences, Engineering, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences—as well as three of our eight undergraduate colleges. This broad representation is significant as it has the potential to create a meaningful impact on our undergraduate students. It also provided participants with opportunities to discuss connections across disciplines and identify shared challenges and goals.

There was a broad range of assessment projects, with several programs utilizing the pre-packaged options described earlier and others exploring equity-focused assessments or broader curriculum assessments tailored to their specific needs. Projects that focused on course sequencing explored student outcomes across a series of courses. Key assessment questions varied; one examined enrollment patterns, particularly at the intersections of race/ethnicity and major versus non-major pathways. Another investigated differences in courses (non-lab vs. lab-based) and whether team formation strategies, major-specific experiences, and personalized individual or team projects could help identify or address equity gaps. Additionally, another project assessed how student outcomes were affected before and during a major curriculum change.

Teams working on course-level assessments concentrated on specific questions related to their courses. Some projects examined pre- and post-assessments to understand the topics or concepts where students struggled. These teams then disaggregated the data to understand how different student groups, based on transfer status, first-generation status, or minoritized demographic characteristics performed. Other projects explored the impact of alternative grading approaches on student success and students' perceptions of the course.

Groups conducting equity assessments focused on exploring existing opportunities and equity gaps within courses. Their questions delved into understanding students' perceptions of course content—specifically its relatability to their lives, the development of critical thinking skills, and its connection to

real-world issues. Additionally, they examined student preparedness and course perceptions to determine whether these factors contributed to observed differences in D/F/W rates (percentage of students receiving a D or F grade or withdrawing from the course) and major choice outcomes.

Lastly, a few groups focused on assessing their curriculum as a whole. One group examined a program learning outcome for collaborative problem-solving to determine whether equity gaps existed. They sought to assess whether the curriculum primarily supported students already proficient in problem-solving or if it effectively aimed to support students from all backgrounds. Another group analyzed Canvas (a learning management system) data across their courses to identify inequities in instructional delivery. Their assessment delved into rethinking pedagogical approaches to address the findings and improve equity within the program.

Program Evaluation and Findings

Survey Instruments & Respondents

The Planning Committee evaluated the effectiveness and impact of the ALC by administering two post-program surveys, one immediately following the program and another during the subsequent academic year. Together, these survey instruments were designed to answer questions related to programmatic evaluation as well as the broader impact of the ALC in shaping a culture of assessment that reaches into classrooms and curricula across campus.

The first survey gathered anonymous feedback from our faculty participants upon completing their participation in the ALC. It was designed both to improve the structure of the ALC and to inform our first research question by capturing participants' experiences and confidence in equity-minded assessment practices. This survey asked respondents to rate their general satisfaction with the experience, including: The extent to which the ALC met overarching objectives; the effectiveness of specific ALC elements in advancing participants' assessment work; the pace of the ALC; and participants' level of confidence with specific assessment-related topics. Each of these survey components asked participants to respond along a Likert scale and to elaborate, as desired, with an open-ended text response. A series of additional open-ended text response questions in the survey invited participants to reflect upon: their most consequential takeaways from the ALC; which elements were most helpful to participants and their assessment collaborators; which elements could use further improvement; recommendations for additional topics to cover in future iterations; and any other general feedback participants would like to share. Overall, this survey aimed to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and learning to inform future iterations of the ALC.

The second survey gathered additional insights from faculty participants during the fall quarter of the following academic year, with a focus on informing our second research question by examining the ALC's influence on teaching, curricular work, and assessment-related collaboration beyond the initial cohort. Rather than asking participants to rate the ALC itself, this survey invited participants to reflect on the ongoing impact that their participation in the ALC had on their teaching and assessment work. Respondents were asked to identify themselves and their assessment collaborators by name and to

share more details about their ongoing efforts. The results of this survey demonstrated that a small group of faculty collaborators had a far-reaching effect across our campus, a phenomenon we describe as radiant reach (discussed below).

Both surveys were shared with all 15 faculty participants in the ALC. A total of nine participants responded to the first survey, resulting in a response rate of 60%. Twelve participants responded to the second survey, resulting in an 80% response rate. Each of the academic programs participating in the ALC are represented in the survey results, as some units had more than one participant.

In addition to quantitative analysis of the close-ended survey responses, open-ended survey responses were analyzed using thematic analysis methods. Due to the small number of respondents ($n < 12$) for each question, a streamlined approach was utilized instead of a rigorous qualitative coding process. The process involved two assessment professionals affiliated with the Planning Committee reading all responses multiple times, manually coding recurring themes, grouping responses in alignment with those themes, conferring on the consistency of themes with the associated responses, and further analyzing outlying responses that offered singular insights about specific participants' experiences. In the summary of survey findings below, it is noted which points of qualitative feedback reflect recurring themes and which reflect unique insights.

First Survey Findings

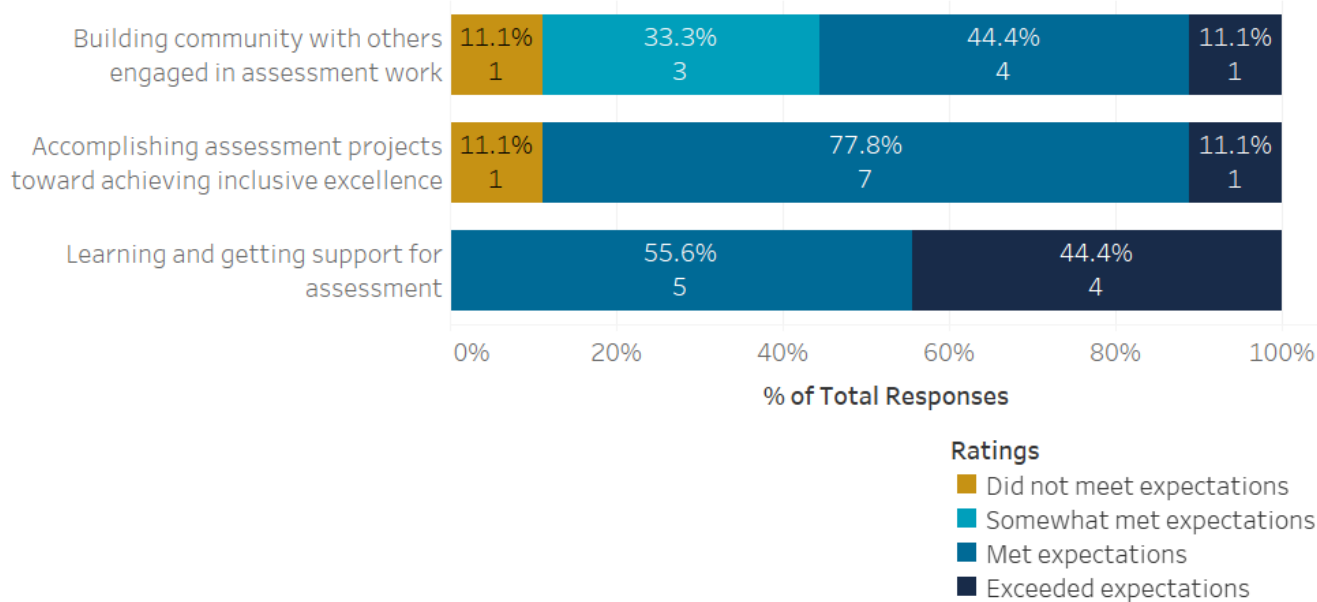
Overarching Objectives

The first survey asked respondents, "To what extent did the Assessment Learning Community meet our three overarching objectives?" The quantitative results are summarized in Figure 1.

In the open-ended feedback for this question, two respondents (22.2%) expressed appreciation for the structured support provided by the Planning Committee and for having time during the meetings to work on small group projects and make progress on assessment tasks. For example, one respondent shared, "I appreciated that this assessment community provided TIME for us to work on our assessment projects. We quickly realized this was one of the biggest benefits to this learning community, as our assessment project kept getting bumped from our other meeting agendas since we had so much stuff going on." Two respondents (22.2%) suggested that future iterations of the ALC should focus on facilitating more collaboration and connection, especially among participants from similar academic units.

Figure 1.

Participant rating of ALC’s meeting of three overarching objectives



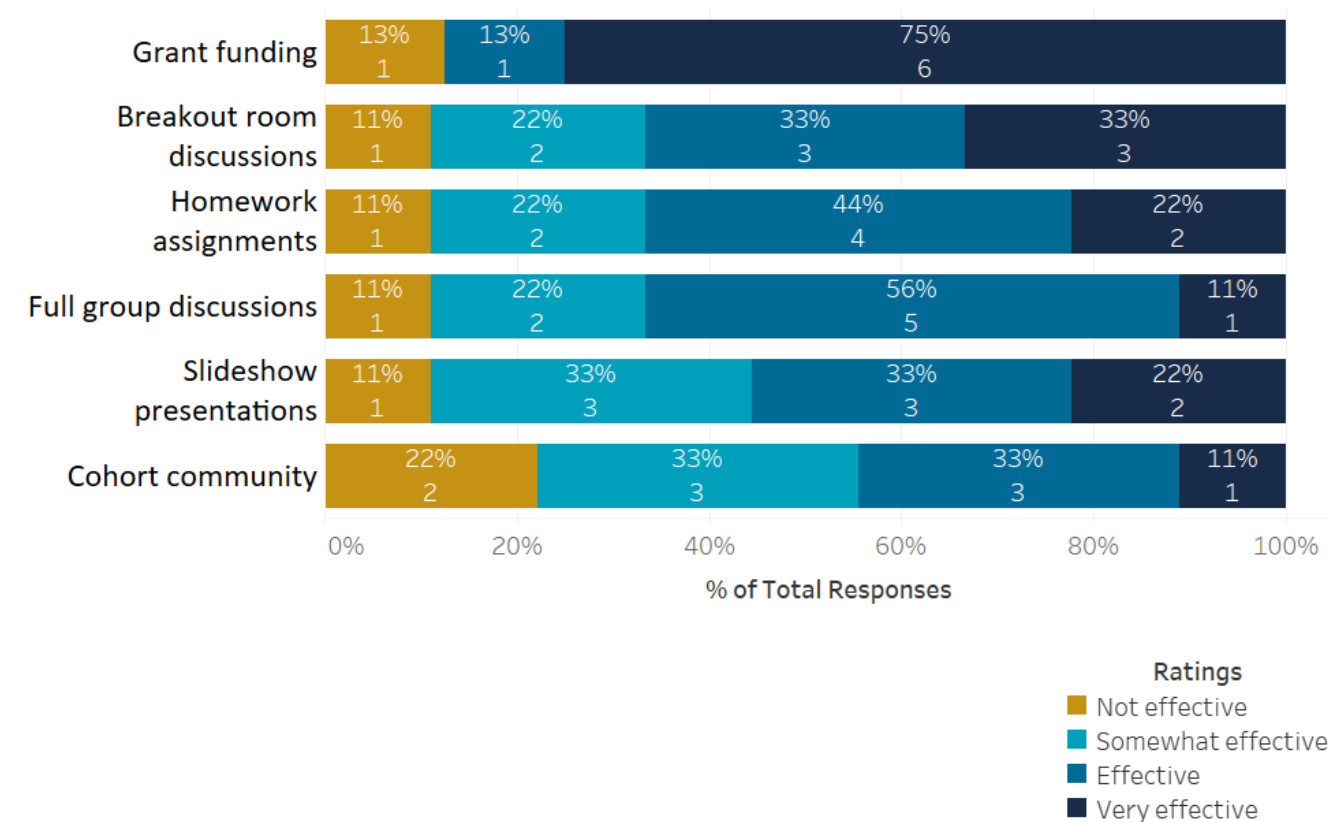
Effectiveness of Learning Community Elements

The first survey asked the respondents, “To what extent have the elements of the Assessment Learning Community been effective in advancing your assessment work?” The results are summarized in Figure 2. Faculty respondents rated the effectiveness of six elements of the ALC, and all components received at least 80% “Somewhat effective” or higher. Among them, the grant funding awarded to faculty in the ALC was the highest-rated component, with 7 out of 8 (88%) respondents identifying it as “Effective” or “Very effective.”

In the open-ended feedback, three respondents (33.3%) highlighted the effectiveness of the grant funding in enabling the hiring of student staff and providing essential resources to support their projects. Furthermore, three respondents (33.3%) expressed appreciation for the structure of the ALC, including the homework assignments and access to assessment professionals as consultants to keep projects moving forward. As one respondent wrote, “It was really helpful to have time to sit down and hash out our assessment plan and to have access to the wonderful [assessment professional] staff.” While some respondents felt that the sequence of sessions did not always neatly align with their project timelines, one person noted, “In general, I appreciated the structure offered by the ALC meetings, even if we were not always at that exact point in our assessment.” Looking ahead, this feedback has enabled our Planning Committee to adjust the sequence of certain elements within the ALC to better support all participants.

Figure 2.

Participant rating of effectiveness of ALC elements



Confidence with Assessment Concepts and Practices

In the first survey, participating faculty were also asked, “Based on your participation in the Assessment Learning Community, please indicate your level of confidence in the following assessment-related topics.” The results are summarized in Figure 3. Faculty respondents rated their confidence in seven assessment-related items, and four items received a rating of “Somewhat confident” or higher from all respondents. These findings underscore strong confidence in equity work and data analysis, with opportunities for growth in assessment planning and identifying where and how to effectively access data.

While very few respondents submitted open-ended responses for this section of the survey, one participant noted that the ALC “was an important introduction to the kind of equity data that is available to all of us as instructors.”

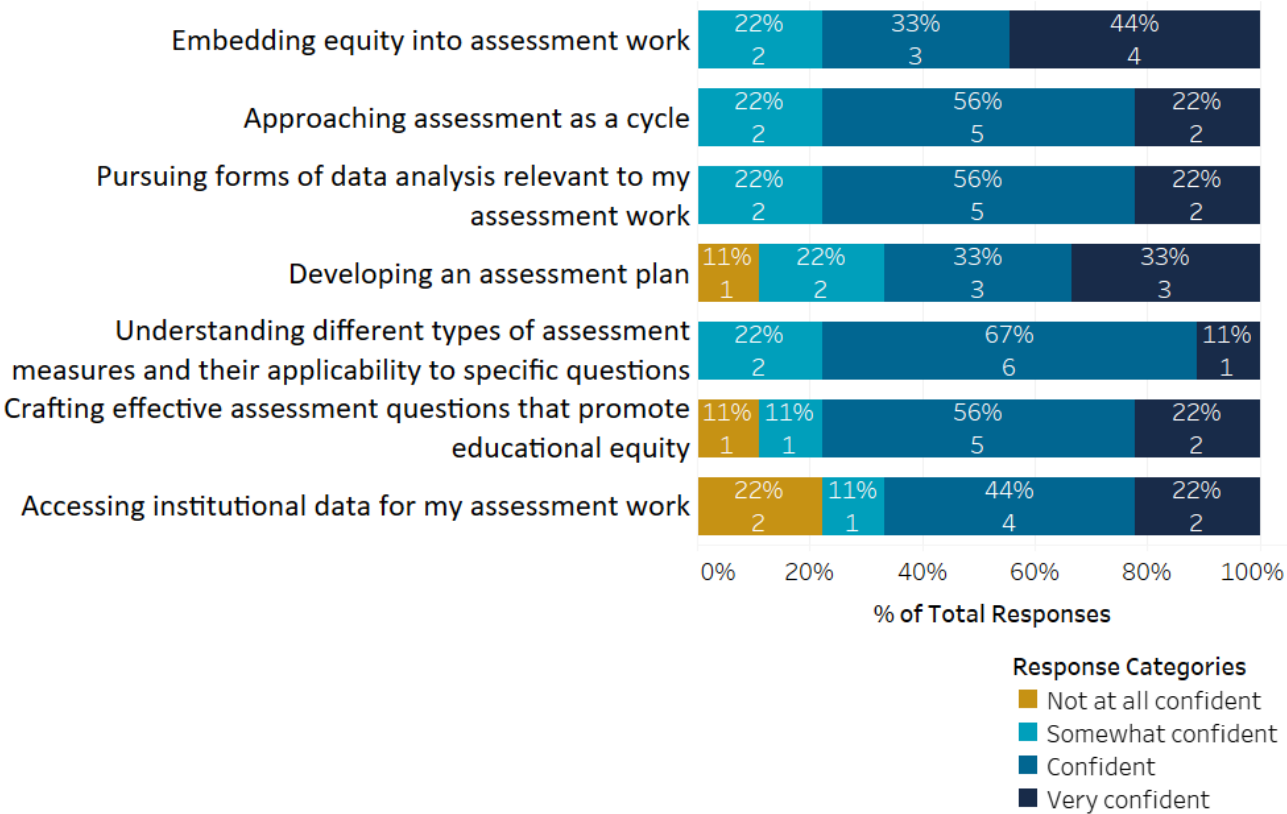
Open-Ended Feedback: Biggest Takeaways

We asked participants to respond in their own words to the following questions: “What are some of your biggest takeaways from the Assessment Learning Community? For example, is there a specific

reading or concept that you still think about? A discussion you had with a colleague regarding a session topic? A problem in your assessment work that you have overcome?”

Figure 3.

Participants’ confidence in assessment-related topics



Four respondents (44.4%) noted how useful it was to be in community with colleagues facing similar challenges; getting a broader sense of systemic and systematic issues; and building coalitions with a shared sense of purpose toward educational justice. One respondent wrote, “It was very helpful to be among colleagues who are committed to improving equity in their departments. I found it useful to hear from colleagues across campus about the various challenges we are all facing, which makes us more aware of the systemic nature of these issues.”

Two respondents (22.2%) also cited specific readings and conversations from the ALC that they have since shared with their other campus colleagues, including the importance of framing assessment work in terms of “equity gaps” rather than “achievement gaps” to avoid blaming individual students for structural inequities. Additionally, one respondent elaborated on the importance of asking the right assessment questions for their work, rooted in a deeper understanding of what students are learning from a given curriculum.

Open-Ended Feedback: Elements Needing Improvement

We asked participants to respond in their own words to the following question: “Which elements of the Assessment Learning Community could use improvement, and how would you suggest improving them?”

The two most recurring themes of critical feedback were that 1) respondents would have liked even more opportunities to interact with their ALC colleagues to glean additional insights from peers (n = 4, 44.4%) and 2) respondents would have liked to receive additional bespoke data sets earlier, to inform their initial assessment planning processes (n = 2, 22.2%).

Open-Ended Feedback: Future Topics

We asked participants to respond in their own words to the following question: “Are there any topics that you think future iterations of the Assessment Learning Community should cover that we did not discuss?”

The only recurring response to this question—shared by two respondents (22.2%)—was to think about ways of engaging colleagues who might be resistant to the foundational frameworks of equity-minded assessment. As one respondent suggested, it could be helpful to have a “session about brainstorming/presenting our findings in front of our colleagues and troubleshooting some potentially problematic responses.”

Second Survey Findings

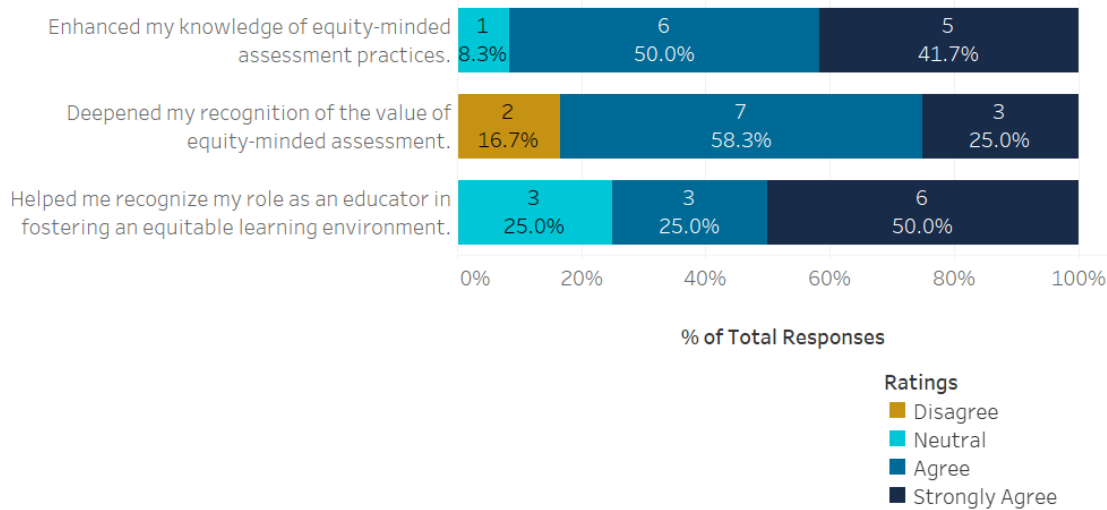
Impact on Equity-Minded Assessment Knowledge and Practices

The second survey asked faculty participants three questions related to the impact of ALC on their equity-minded assessment knowledge and practices. Figure 4 demonstrates the results from 12 respondents. The results showed that ALC had a positive impact on respondents’ knowledge and practices in this area. For example, 11 (91.7%) respondents reported that their knowledge of equity-minded assessment practices was enhanced through participation in the ALC. Additionally, 10 (83.3%) respondents acknowledged a positive impact on their recognition of the value of equity-minded assessment, and nine (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that the program enhanced their awareness of their role in fostering an equitable learning environment in which all students can succeed.

While the majority of respondents reported a positive impact, some respondents remained neutral or reported no impact. For example, one respondent (8.3%) reported no impact on their knowledge of equity-minded assessment, and three (25%) respondents reported that the impact was neutral or had no effect on their awareness of their role in fostering an equitable learning environment. Similarly, two respondents (16.7%) disagreed that the ALC deepened their recognition of the value of equity-minded assessment, possibly due to their prior understanding of the topic.

Figure 4.

Impact of ALC on participants' equity-minded assessment knowledge and practices



Overall, the findings suggest that the ALC was effective in enhancing faculty participants' equity-minded assessment knowledge and practices, although some participants may have already possessed a strong prior understanding.

Radiant Reach

The second survey, administered during the fall quarter of the academic year following participation in the ALC, aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the ripple effect created by a small group of faculty collaborators. This phenomenon, which we refer to as our radiant reach, underscores the ongoing influence of these faculty participants on thousands of students across our campus.

This reach is further supported by campus-wide initiatives that align with the goals of the ALC. For example, one of IR's ongoing institutional initiatives aims to improve data literacy and to promote equity-minded use of data across the university. By contributing to both the planning and implementation of the ALC, IR not only supported individual faculty but also helped align department-level assessment efforts with broader institutional priorities for equity and accountability.

Our work advancing equity through assessment has a radiant reach, in the sense that the knowledge and skills cultivated within the ALC locus extend to improve educational experiences for thousands of students across campus. This means that working closely with just a handful of faculty members can have a significant impact on a substantial proportion of the student community in a single academic year.

The 15 faculty participants in the inaugural ALC cohort represent less than 0.4% of the 3,800+ total faculty at UCSD. Yet, that relatively small group of committed and collaborative educators has the potential to have a broad impact across the campus community. Although it is too early to assess the impact of course or curricular changes on closing equity gaps, our survey feedback suggests that participants are making meaningful and intentional changes toward this goal.

The 12 respondents to the second survey named more than 40 additional faculty, staff, and graduate student colleagues who are collaboratively engaged in their ongoing assessment projects. Additionally, respondents named more than 35 different courses in which they are applying their knowledge from the ALC in specific ways. From Fall 2023 to Summer 2024, this work has directly impacted over 1,600 unique undergraduate students, representing more than 5% of the total undergraduate student community.

Beyond the courses faculty have identified as directly impacted by their assessment work in the ALC, their influence extends to thousands more students across campus. From Fall 2023 to Summer 2024, the participants in the inaugural ALC cohort collectively taught more than 5,100 unique undergraduate students, representing over 15% of the total undergraduate student Community, spanning 47 of the 140+ majors available across campus.

The second survey also asked faculty participants to describe the impact that their work in the ALC has had on other faculty members or courses within their units. Accounting for the various collaborations named by survey respondents, from Fall 2023 to Summer 2024, over 13,700 unique undergraduate students were enrolled in courses potentially influenced by the ALC, representing more than 42% of the total undergraduate student population. Through these concentric circles of potential impact, the ALC is demonstrating a radiant reach that advances educational equity across UCSD, see Table 2.

Teaching Impact

We asked ALC participants to respond in their own words to the following survey questions: “In what ways, if any, have your teaching strategies or teaching philosophy changed after participating in the Assessment Learning Community? Can you provide specific examples?” Six respondents (50%) discussed changes in teaching strategies and philosophies centered on an increased awareness of student needs. For example, some respondents explained that they are working to make aspects of the “hidden curriculum” more visible and explicit to foster more equitable outcomes, particularly for first-generation students and transfer students. One respondent also explained that their work in the ALC has shaped new approaches to teaching assistant (TA) training and the sense of intellectual community within their courses, sharing, “Through the [ALC] and the grading approach developed with support from the [ALC], I’ve become more focused on creating community—what that means, how to involve students in the community in a variety of ways, how to work with TAs to create positive learning communities in their sections. For TAs, we’ve made some adjustments to TA training.”

Curricular Changes

We asked participants to respond in their own words to the following statement: “Please describe any curricular change(s) that were made or that your group plans to make based on your assessment

project, including course sequencing, major/minor requirements, frequency of offerings, prerequisites, etc.” Four respondents (33.3%) indicated that their assessment work emerging from the ALC has led to more data-informed approaches to resource allocation within their units. This includes offering certain courses more often during summer sessions to address high demand, as well as hiring additional TAs for courses with higher enrollment or those that consistently show equity gaps. Respondents hypothesized that an increase in the TA-to-student ratio for some of these courses could be one effective mechanism for closing equity gaps and planned to explore this further in future assessment work.

Table 2.

Radiant reach of ALC participants on UCSD undergraduate students (Fall 2023-Summer 2024)

Type of reach	Number of undergraduate students (% of undergraduate students enrolled at UCSD **)
Direct reach via modified courses taught by ALC participants*	1,678 (5.2%)
Indirect reach via courses taught by ALC participants	5,152 (15.8%)
Potential reach via modified course taught by ALC participants* and their collaborating colleagues	13,766 (42.3%)

Note. “*” Calculated based on 12 survey respondents, rather than the entire group of 15 participants. “**” Calculated based on AY23-24 3-quarter enrollment average of 32,569 undergraduate students.

Two respondents (16.7%) also discussed changes to grading policies and philosophies in their units as a result of ongoing assessment work emerging out of the ALC. For example, one respondent shared that “the pilot alternative grading approach marks a significant change to the way the courses have been structured and the way students are graded.”

Seven respondents (58.3%) noted that it was too early to report definitive curricular changes, given the recency of the ALC and the ongoing nature of their assessment projects. We plan to follow up with the cohort in the future to understand how these efforts may evolve into long-term transformation.

Impact on Other Faculty or Courses

We asked participants to respond in their own words to the following question: “How has this project influenced other faculty members or other courses within your department or school (e.g., shared practices, pedagogical changes, cross-course collaboration, and or course sequence)?” Six respondents (50%) explained that they have been involved in ongoing communication with faculty colleagues in their unit, sharing assessment findings and strategies for closing equity gaps at departmental meetings. For these respondents, such communication has helped improve alignments across their unit, including more unified articulation of student learning outcomes across lower-division courses, shared

approaches to equity-minded grading of student work, and universal adoption of asset-based messaging in recruiting students to the major.

In another noteworthy example of unit-wide impact, one respondent shared that they have been working closely with a student hired via their assessment grant to develop an assessment survey instrument and coding protocol that can be used widely across their academic unit. This project is thus helping to scale equity-minded assessment work more broadly. Together, these findings suggest that participation in the ALC influenced teaching, curricular work, and assessment-related collaboration beyond the initial cohort.

Student Impact

We asked participants to respond in their own words to the following question: “Have you observed any changes in student engagement, performance, attitude, or feedback as a result of the changes you implemented after working with the Assessment Learning Community? Please share any specific examples you may have collected.” One respondent noted that students have reacted positively to changes in grading policies and philosophies within their unit. They shared evidence that students have reflected on how a shift away from high-stakes exams has allowed them to “engage more deeply with the readings, lecture material, and assignments” in a way that promotes learning.

Ten respondents (83.3%) emphasized that it was too soon to observe broader patterns, given that the ALC had launched only recently. We will continue tracking these impacts through follow-up surveys and engagement with faculty, particularly as more assessment-driven course changes are implemented.

Continued Support for Assessment

We asked participants to respond in their own words to the following question: “What would you need as a faculty member to continue to engage in assessment?” The most recurring themes in these responses highlighted the importance of access to data (n = 5, 41.7%); financial support (n = 4, 33.3%); protected time allocated to assessment work (n = 4, 33.3%); shared investment and community among colleagues (n = 4, 33.3%); and institutional recognition (n = 3, 25%). One respondent shared, “The [ALC] has been great, and our team really appreciated the funds to help spearhead this project. These projects take time and energy, and I think a lot of faculty would be willing to engage in ongoing assessment if there were incentives and a strong supporting community.”

Lessons Learned

The 2023-25 Assessment Learning Community cohort showcased a wide variety of participant projects, reflecting the broad scope of work being undertaken. The foundational data provided by IR met the needs of some, but did not meet the needs of others, especially those whose projects focused on sequenced courses and tracking students from one course in the sequence to the next. Although IR was successfully able to provide ad hoc analyses to all who requested them, this approach is not scalable, as it is resource-intensive and laden with course-level nuances. Faculty who collected their data, such as through pre- and post-assessment of learning outcomes, were able to analyze row level data.

If we want to create a broad culture of assessment with a goal toward closing equity gaps, we must not only continue to engage faculty but also significantly increase the number of faculty who engage deeply with equity-focused assessment. The ALC provides helpful support, but it also requires faculty to commit significant time and could be strengthened by alleviating more of the workload from faculty members. For example, rather than just training faculty on how to conduct assessments, a team of assessment specialists could collaborate with faculty to perform some of the assessment work, such as designing and conducting surveys to analyze student learning outcomes.

Regardless, faculty must be recognized, rewarded, or compensated for this work. We have experimented with different funding levels for ALC participation and associated projects, with \$20,000 allocated in the first year and \$12,000 in the second. More faculty members participated when the funding amount was greater, and we consistently received feedback that monetary support for assessment efforts is a key factor in faculty members' decisions to participate. However, this level of funding is not scalable. We cannot afford to provide additional compensation to dozens or even hundreds of faculty to participate in this level of assessment, nor do most faculty have the time to dedicate to such intensive efforts alongside their existing responsibilities. Hiring more assessment staff would require more resources but might result in more faculty being willing to do this work without monetary compensation, thus allowing these efforts to scale further.

We are exploring other forms of recognition, as well as ways to support and make assessment engagement more manageable for faculty members. One way we are exploring alternate compensation is through recognition of this work in the faculty promotion process. While department-level service often carries little weight in faculty promotions, campus-wide service is more highly valued. Although this work is at the department level, it serves a higher-level campus goal; therefore, we plan to collaborate with department, school, and campus evaluators to recognize this assessment work as a campus-wide service. However, this recognition should extend beyond mere service. Many faculty members who engage in assessment are teaching faculty, whose scholarship focuses on education. They bring a scholarly approach to their projects (Richlin, 2002), and indeed, many integrate this assessment work into broader educational research projects. Our work in this pilot provided us with the momentum to explore new ways to cultivate a culture of assessment on our campus. It also opened the door to deeper conversations about equity-minded assessment and how faculty can support each other in this work. Based on participant feedback, we have made several changes to the program to better meet faculty needs, including providing earlier access to data, creating more opportunities for peer collaboration, and focusing more on communicating assessment findings in meaningful ways to help bridge siloed efforts and leverage assessment work already underway across campus.

For the 2024-26 cohort, we restructured the focus of faculty projects, allowing them to choose between two pre-packaged grant options or propose their own project. The pre-packaged options were updated to focus more directly on equity. One pre-packaged option focuses on course-level assessment of equity in student learning, helping faculty examine whether course structures, pedagogies, and assessments genuinely support student learning or unintentionally create barriers to

it. The other option offers a broader perspective on curriculum assessment and reform, with a focus on equity of outcomes. This approach enables faculty to analyze equity gaps across courses and consider where more significant curricular changes may be necessary.

One of the biggest changes for the 2024-26 cohort was requiring all applicants to participate in data training so they could access their data before submitting their proposal. In the 2023-25 cohort, data training occurred later in the process, resulting in varied additional data requests and making projects more challenging to manage. Moving this step earlier has streamlined the process, ensuring that everyone is on the same page from the start.

Another improvement was the addition of targeted readings, specifically chosen to align with our sessions and the assessment planning exercise. After attending a conference hosted by the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE), we decided to incorporate their field guide into the required readings. Developed by members of AALHE's Access and Success in Assessment Committee, this guide builds on Montenegro and Jankowski's (2017; 2020) framework from NILOA. It provides practitioners with a structured approach to thinking through bias in assessment; appropriate assessment methods; data collection and analysis; and student voice, all of which are key focuses in our discussions and sessions this year.

Our sessions were also restructured based on feedback from participant post-surveys to improve the flow of information and allow more time for discussion, questions, and team-based work. One major shift was adjusting how we discuss data collection methods. Before that session for the 2024-26 cohort, the presenter asked faculty which methods they were considering, then tailored the discussion accordingly. This approach made the session more engaging and relevant, and the faculty were deeply engaged in the material. We also made space in our schedule to dedicate an entire session to student voice, recognizing the crucial importance of including student perspectives in assessment work. Finally, we updated the assessment planning template to better align with project proposals and the content of our sessions. This has made it easier for faculty to develop their assessment plans and to communicate their approach more clearly.

Though we have not yet completed the sessions for our 2024-26 cohort, we are excited to hear about the experiences faculty have had so far. At the same time, we are eager to see the progress of the 2023-25 cohort as they approach the final stages of their projects. Last summer, we brought both cohorts together for a combined meeting, serving as a kickoff for the 2024-26 cohort and a check-in and presentation for the 2023-25 cohort, during which they shared their progress. This was an incredibly valuable practice, allowing the 2023-25 faculty to showcase their work while giving the 2024-26 cohort insight into the process and potential impact of their projects. Given its success, we plan to continue this structure moving forward.

One area we hope to strengthen in future cohorts is the integration of student voice in both the design and interpretation of assessments. While faculty in the 2023-25 cohort were encouraged to consider student perspectives through tools such as surveys, reflections, and focus groups, this remained an area of variation across projects. As we continue to refine the program, we want to pay closer attention to how student voice is incorporated and to explore ways to support faculty in this area,

emphasizing that students can also serve as collaborators in shared sense-making at various points in the assessment cycle. Research from Chase et al. (2023) suggests that even modest forms of student involvement, such as reflecting on participation criteria, can increase students' sense of agency and ownership. These findings also highlight how centering student feedback, even in small ways, can support equity by strengthening student agency and informing more inclusive assessment practices.

The 2023-25 cohort submitted their final reports in Fall 2025, and we are eager to review and to learn from their findings. However, beyond closing the loop on individual projects, we view this as an opportunity to establish a lasting culture of support and recognition—one that elevates faculty efforts and integrates their work more intentionally into our institutional reporting and continuous improvement initiatives.

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Appendix

Table A1.
ALC Session Overview (2023-25 Cohort)

Component	Objectives	Activities	Faculty Work Between Sessions
Pre-Work	Develop shared equity lens and foundational understanding of equity-minded assessment	Equity-minded data training; assigned reading (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcolm-Piqueux, 2020)	Reflect on prompts
Session 1	Establish expectations; introduce equity focused assessment and project data	Overview of ALC goals and responsibilities, community of practice framing; dashboard orientation	Engage in guided dashboard analysis using equity-focused prompts to identify initial patterns and questions
Session 2	Deepen analysis of dashboard data and refine equity-focused assessment questions	Data overview and Q&A; fact-finding activity	Meet with stakeholders; continue fact-finding; refine assessment questions
Session 3	Refine equity-centered assessment questions and identify data needed to support the project	Workshop assessment questions; discuss strategies for embedding equity into project; consider available and needed data sources	Begin assessment planning template; Complete the project description section
Session 4	Identify appropriate assessment measures and develop an analysis approach	Review different types of assessment measures, discuss comparative data analysis approaches	Complete analysis and logistics sections of the assessment planning template; prepare 4-min project update
Session 5	Share findings & receive feedback	Team presentations; structured cohort feedback using guided prompts	Complete the action plan section of the assessment planning template
Session 6	Interpret findings through equity lens and identify next steps	Discussion of equity gaps; guided reflection prompts	Complete midpoint survey and prepare 12-month progress report
Post-ALC Milestones	Sustain implementation and monitor progress	12-month survey and report; 24-month survey, report, and final presentation; quarterly check-ins (as needed)	Continue implementing action steps and documenting progress