



# 2019 Assessment Symposium EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION

On May 17, 2019, the Office of Assessment and Strategic Initiatives and Student Life Professional Development Committee welcomed 75+ staff and faculty from across the University of Tennessee for the 2019 Assessment Symposium, an annual event where colleagues come together, share, and enjoy important and timely topics in assessment. This year’s event lasted from 8:30-3:30pm and included the following topics ([full agenda here](#)):

- Strategic planning and assessment
- Alternatives to surveys
- Social justice and culturally responsive assessment

This report summarizes feedback gathered during a short participant reflection exercise administered at the end of the event. It also details improvements slated for future events based on that feedback.

## PARTICIPANTS & METHODOLOGY

At the conclusion of the Symposium, participants were asked to write on a notecard two key takeaways from the day, as well as one suggestion to improve future events. 49 participants submitted responses to the exercise described above. Elizabeth Spica, Graduate Research

Assistant in the Office of Assessment & Strategic Initiatives, analyzed the results using nVivo qualitative analysis software and prepared this summary report.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This section details the most prominent themes from both the key takeaway and suggestions for improvement responses from participants during the short reflection exercise. A hierarchy chart reflecting all themes can be found in Appendix A, and Appendices B & C contain the complete list of responses.

### I. Key Takeaway Themes

The following themes emerged most prominently in participants' reflections on their key takeaways from the Symposium (for a full list of takeaways, see [Appendix A](#)).

- 1. Components of Assessment & Strategic Planning.** Participants remarked that the step-by-step, scaffolded approach presented in the first session were helpful in gaining a better understanding of assessment and strategic planning. Participants most specifically mentioned Dr. Brown's framework and direction for creating mission statement, and a few captured the importance of a mission statement in their comments:
  - “have the mission/vision be the driving force of decision making. Not doing things and then rationalizing how they fit with a plan.”
  - “I learned how to write a mission statement with a very clear formula for guidance.”
- 2. Assessment as a Team Approach.** 13 participants commented on the team-based nature of assessment, whether regarding assessment as a team effort (instead of a solitary endeavor) and/or the importance of involving colleagues in coding and other assessment processes:
  - “Assessment is not a one superhero job! utilize the knowledge, experiences, etc. of colleagues!”
  - “The importance of a team approach to developing, interpreting, and coding assessment.”
- 3. Campus Labs' SRS Tool for Formative Assessment.** 9 respondents remarked on the usefulness of using Campus Labs' Student Response System as a tool for formative assessment and/or their excitement to utilize the tool in the future:
  - “Formative assessment (during process) can be more effective than summative assessment because creates opportunity to immediately address confusion.”
- 4. Social Justice / Coding Activity.** Participants commented on the value of learning to code and analyze data through the lens of social justice:
  - “Loved the final session, great insight great collaboration”
  - “Social justice being fostered in and considered a valuable component of interpretation!”
  - “Collaboration over data- seeing ideas from all tables for how to address this data.”
- 5. Survey Alternatives.** The survey session seemed to increase participants' awareness and willingness to explore assessment alternatives. While 2 commented on a technology issue, and 2 others remarked that all future sessions should be in person (not remote), at least 9 participants wrote about survey alternatives:
  - “surveys are often overused and underutilized”
  - “Push myself to try assessment methods outside of surveys, even though surveys are what I'm most comfortable with.”
  - “I have a greater awareness of assessment methods besides just surveys.”

## II. Suggestions for Improvement

The following themes were most prominently reported in participants' suggestions for improvement (for a full list of improvements, see [Appendix B](#)).

- **Shorter Duration.** The most frequently reported suggestion was to shorten the length of the sessions and/or the duration of the entire event, as participants seemed to lose focus by early afternoon. To shorten the event, participants suggested less down-time, to eliminate the networking break, and/or to include a session over lunch:
  - “Honestly hard to focus, even with the active nature.”
  - “It is a long day though, so perhaps shorten the program and focus on only one topic like a whole symposium on strategic planning.”
- **Additional Content Choices / Increased Relevance.** In addition to shorter session durations, participants requested to be able to select from multiple options:
  - “More breakouts but shorter duration.”
  - “Shorter sessions with more content choices”
  - “Keep sessions to about an hour”
- **Accommodating different levels of expertise.** Several participants commented that sessions or activities were not relevant for them or their skill level. Some mentioned using conference tracks based on level of expertise (suggested ways to look at groupings included entry & upper level; beginning, developing, advancing; coordinator, mid-level, senior staff; assessment champions, everyone else).
- **Activity Framing.** Participants found the coding activity to be too in-depth. Suggestions included using fewer data points, reviewing the codes in advance, and/or providing more time for the activity:
  - “I didn’t feel I had a clear enough understanding to complete the activity.”
  - “less complicated final exercise”
- **Other ideas.** Participants had additional suggestions for improving the event, suggesting that the use of more examples, incorporating additional tools that could be used with students, having live sessions only (instead of remote as was done for the Survey Alternatives session), and inviting additional outside speakers.

## IMPROVEMENTS SLATED FOR FUTURE EVENTS

As a result of feedback provided during the short participant reflections, the following improvements are slated to be instituted for the 2020 Assessment Symposium event:

- Collaborative event to be combined with lunch
- Duration of Symposium to be shortened, with conclusion after lunch with charge from leadership
- Sessions to be shortened to 50 minutes, with ten minutes of transition time between each session.
- More sessions to be provided, with tracks established based on level of expertise
- All sessions to be conducted face-to-face, rather than remotely
- Session ideas to potentially include:
  - Assessment Plans
  - Mission Writing
  - Learning/Program Outcome Writing
  - Survey development
  - Data analysis
  - Direct Assessment
- Working sessions for departments to be made available throughout the morning so departments have an opportunity to collaborate and discuss assessment planning with an expert available for questions (bring your own data or strategic planning time).

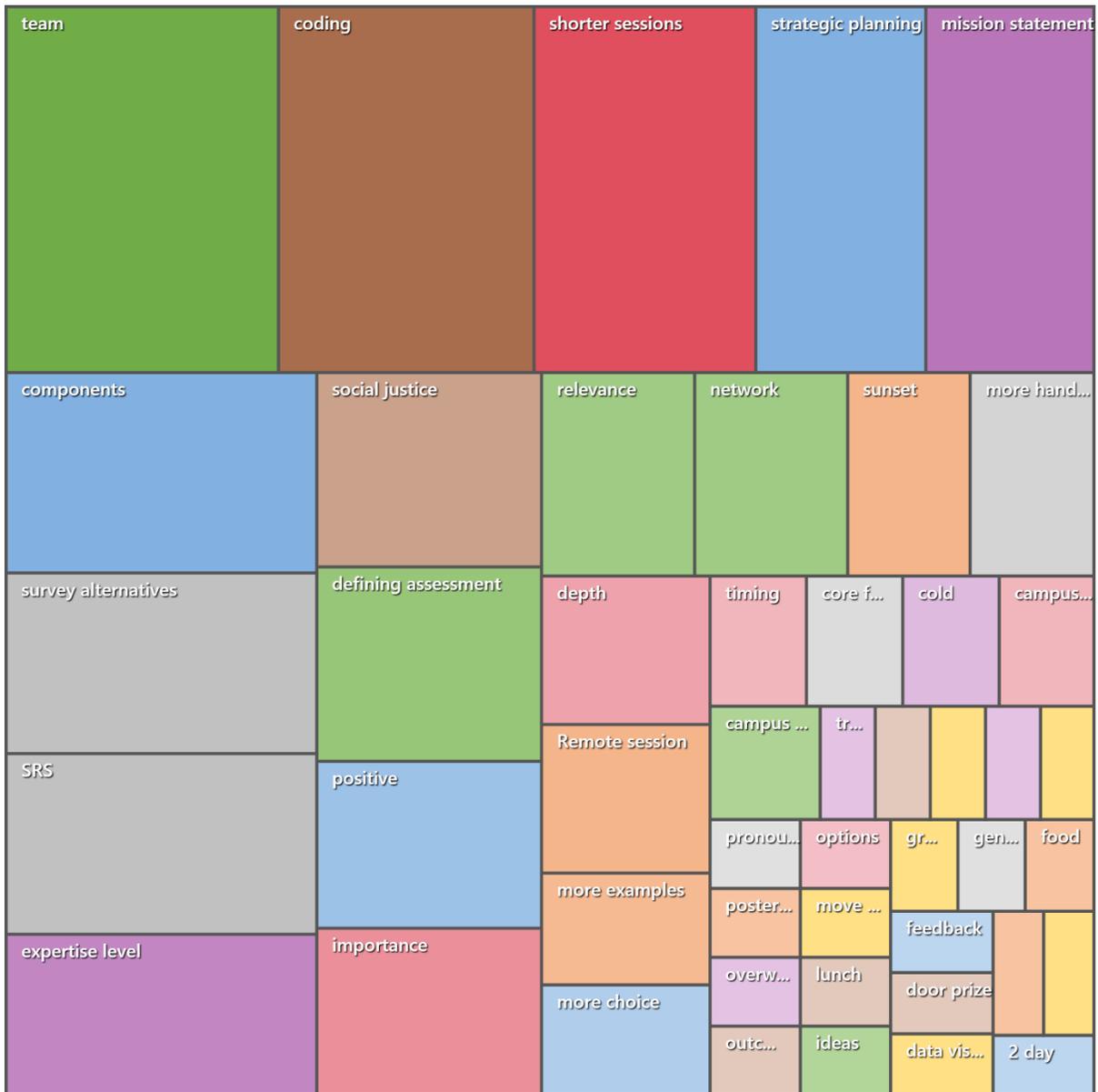
# ADDITIONAL INFO & COMPLETE RESULTS

- [NVivo file / Raw data](#)
- [Appendix A. Hierarchy Chart](#)
- [Appendix B. Full list of Takeaways](#)
- [Appendix C. Full list of Suggested Improvements](#)

Questions regarding this summary may be directed to [dslassessment@utk.edu](mailto:dslassessment@utk.edu).

## Appendix A. Hierarchy Chart

The hierarchy chart below reveals the most common takeaway and improvement codes that surfaced in the participant reflections:



## Appendix B. Full List of Takeaways

- How to define assessment; breakdown of mission statement creation; and how to articulate the "seeing the forest through the trees"

Social Justice being fostered in and considered a valuable component of interpretation!  
Also, the different "types" of social justice realms/needs.

- I really got the most out of Melissa's program in the AM, working on our mission/being deliberate about what's in and what's OUT!
- Refreshers on topics I haven't had since grad school (formative, summative, etc.).

Coding activity helped me understand coding.

- Loved the final session. great insight great collaboration

Appreciate having participants from outside Division

- Making sure key initiatives feed into core functions then into outcomes, etc.

Talking with other offices about doing combined/shared assessment and collection of data for a collaborative initiative

- Better use of campus labs  
networking with colleagues
- Developing mission

In-depth review of assessment types/forms

- Assessment is good.

Assessment is useful.

- Implementing formative assessment  
Utilizing Campus Labs more
- I really appreciate the framework for mission statement creation.

I look forward to using the SRS tool in Campus Labs.

- Add assessment to weekly 1:1s and staff meeting agenda  
Involve all layers in assessment  
Revisit mission statement to lengthen  
Coding is time consuming
- A roadmap for strategic planning and assessment  
How to use existing data instead of surveys
- SRS from Campus Labs  
I need help.
- Learning to code was incredibly helpful.  
Getting a step-by-step plan for strategic planning.
- Assessment isn't a destination.  
Ask more questions.
- Importance of social justice.  
Surveys are often overused and underutilized.
- Revisit our mission/vision/strategic plan using tools provided.  
Coding exercise - using a tool to review the data - other methods
- Creation of mission statement  
Overall process of vision and priorities
- How to write a mission statement.  
Practice ways to code open-ended responses.

- Assessment is not a solitary process.  
Assessment helps us improve or sunset initiatives.
- Refresher on strategic planning.  
Social justice lens.
- Use assessment to guide everything  
make it a habit
- Assessment is not a one superhero job! utilize the knowledge, experiences, etc. of colleagues!  
When a department starts with a strong (and specific) identity (mission, values, vision, core functions and initiatives), assessment becomes easier.
- Considering alternative ways to evaluate besides survey
- I learned how to write a mission statement with a very clear formula for guidance.  
I have a greater awareness of assessment methods besides just surveys.
- The information on how to use Campus Labs to gain valuable, realtime assessment info.  
General best practices when it comes to assessment - I have never been presented with that info before.
- Learn from each other  
Ways to align assessment with strategic plan
- 1 of my 3 assessment plans for FY 20  
The structure of strategic planning (don't forget to send the presentation)
- More than one person should view survey and results to ensure sound  
Other ways to get data besides surveys
- Collaboration over data- seeing ideas from all tables for how to address this data.

Data/Assessment is important!

- The three parts of assessment  
How to share the story from a social justice event
- Assessment can not be done in a silo. Not one person's job!  
Formative assessment(during process) can be more effective than summative assessment because creates opportunity to immediately address confusion.
- Our office is very behind in terms of strategic planning and assessment compared to other offices.  
I appreciated the 5 clearly explained parts of a strategic plan.
- Core functions  
Social Justice Codes
- Consider how strategic planning is organized  
Explore additional ways to use data.
- The value of planning and analyzing assessment data as part of a team because we each bring our own lens to the table.  
It can be a great and empowering thing to "sunset" programs/initiatives that aren't working
- Learning the definitions of core functions and key initiatives  
Learning how to use campus labs for quick responses.
- Aligning our mission, vision, values, strategic priorities, and objectives --> to best evaluate and plan for our students
- Clear outline of how mission, vision, values... all connect with one another.  
Connecting with other department to assess how they use assessment.
- Seeing & learning how use SRS  
Connecting w/coding & analyzing results
- Surveys are not the only way to collect data.

Assessment is more than just collecting data.

- Do not complete assessment in a silo.

Be transparent in telling respondents how and when the data collected is used.

- Incorporating assessment as part of daily tasks, not as something extra.

Differences across our division when assessing programming versus service and how important collaboration and thinking of collaborative events could enhance outcomes and understanding between academics, services, and programming. WIN-WIN-WIN

- More information on priorities/annual planning stuff.

Our professional standards are based on social justice, but most people here are barely at diversity + inclusion.

- A few new alternatives to using surveys for assessment. Direct, formative assessment using Campus Labs SRS. Short reflections.

Better understanding of components of assessment and strategic planning.

## Appendix C. Full List of Suggested Improvements

- Provide today's info as PowerPoints sent to all participants (lots of info; need to revisit to better implement in practice!)
- Warmer place :-)  
Shorter - honestly hard to focus, even with the active nature.
- It was too long and while I appreciated introductory topics I don't feel I was able to gain as much as I could -- maybe do tracks 1) assessment champions 2) everyone else?
- less time for lunch  
less down time  
work time within departments  
additional outside speakers (from different divisions)
- Make sure that technology is working beforehand!
- More hands on practice w/assessments
- Examples
- Moving past learning outcomes and into how to ask the questions you should be asking to measure the outcomes
- Really liked the real life data analysis but it was too complex for me with our time  
Maybe have participants bring their own data set? (plan ahead) - something to work on that is immediately relevant?
- I would have appreciated more examples of programmatic change of other actions that were instituted because of assessment. We should do a poster presentation exhibit in which each department showcases what they do.
- Review codes in advance  
Add activity with movement in the afternoon  
Tracks for different levels/positions  
Objectives design- entry  
Strategic planning- upper level
- More time for activities OR less action steps with activities.
- I think some more director-level professionals could use more skill building. Young professionals are the first group to enter the field with this proficiency already developed.
- Different experience level breakout sessions. beginning - developing - advancing
- Have more content/programming as opposed to the networking time.
- Coding activity would be better with handpicked data points (4-5 max) that fit multiple codes to show more about the process, especially with people that aren't data people.  
Include pronouns on nametags.
- Can improve by expanding to 2 day conference to cover all material in depth.
- Lunch time periodic professional development to revisit what tools might be helpful to gather data- web/interactive (like the tool used today) Other savvy student-focused tools that will help us to reach goals.
- Length. It is hard to stay focused all day.
- Would be great to work in Planning.
- It is a long day though, so perhaps shorten the program and focus on only one topic like a whole symposium on strategic planning. Good job!
- Cover data visualization techniques we can use on our own.
- Ensuring technology works
- Providing door prizes and a more tropical-temperated location (maybe "The island" with some outdoor stuff).
- Smaller groups  
less complicated final exercise  
multiple day symposium (some things felt rushed for time)
- Action Plans section was rushed and very in-depth. I didn't feel I had a clear enough understanding to complete the activity.

- Offer more "class" options so that attendees can pick and choose what is most relevant.
- Nothing - I like that campus partners/academic professionals also participated
- Both sessions in-person  
Nothing, I love it.
- Ideas for how to infuse assessment in a non assessment culture.
- Provide pens/notebooks for notetaking.
- Different track system (coordinator, mid-level, senior staff)  
How we can collaborate as departments with data.
- I would like more time for getting feedback on assessment/strategic planning w/in the office. For example, have each person or unit bring something to workshop and group people together. Give them time to read and then discuss/critique each person's/unit's assessment etc.
- Practice (more) new types of assessment besides survey ex. practice a rubric for \_\_\_\_\_
- Remove "networking time"  
Activity coding give more time or reduce coding options.
- Don't have a session done remotely.
- Last session was long; may keep it to 60 minutes.
- Thinking about how we incorporate formative and summative assessment to make decisions.
- Warm lunch  
Good work
- OASI can provide previous data of effectiveness of previous events.
- Shorter sessions with more content choices.
- More breakouts but shorter durations. There was a lot of information to digest all at once in Dr. Brown's session - it was great but for a lot of people new to the new assessment practices UTK has implemented. I represented my office in lieu of leadership who were out, so it was a great experience.
- Keep sessions to about an hour.



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