New survey illustrates challenges and opportunities for assessments

Many higher ed leaders say their institutions struggle to reliably measure and demonstrate student learning outcomes
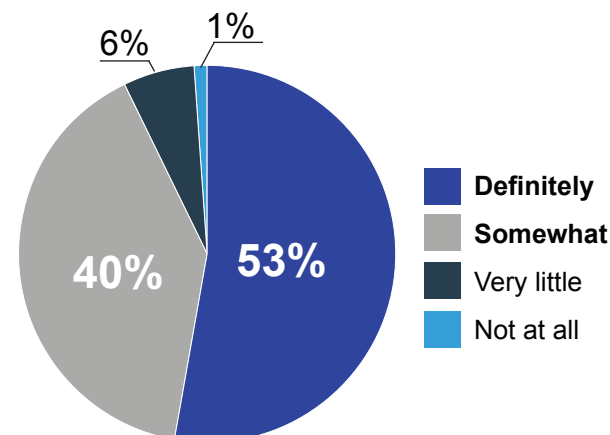
University Business (UB) and ExamSoft partnered to develop and deploy a survey of higher education leaders in the UB audience, exploring the challenges of measuring and assessing student learning outcomes at their institutions. Some 386 college and university leaders from around the country responded and participated in the survey.
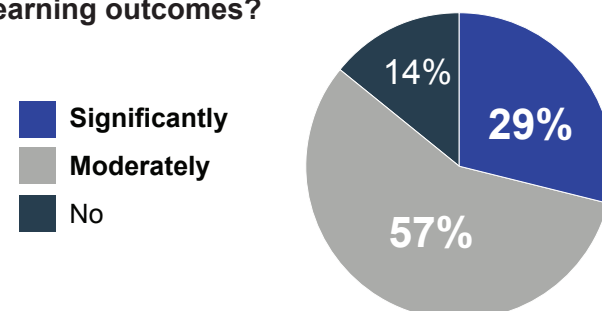
Measuring learning outcomes overall

The first question asked respondents if their institution's leadership has been under more pressure in the last 3-5 years to find ways to reliably measure and demonstrate student learning outcomes overall. By far, the leading answer selected was "Yes, definitely" at 53%, while another 40% said "Yes, somewhat." Just 6% said "Very little" and 1% said "Not at all."

Those respondents who answered yes were then asked if it is a challenge for their institution to reliably measure and demonstrate student learning outcomes overall. Some 57% said this was a "Moderate" challenge while another 29% described this as a "Significant challenge" for their institution. Just 14% said this was not a challenge.

Would you say that your institution's leadership has been under more pressure in the last 3-5 years to find ways to reliably measure and demonstrate student learning outcomes overall?

6%   1%
40%   53%

- Definitely
- Somewhat
- Very little
- Not at all

Is it a challenge for your institution to measure and demonstrate student learning outcomes?

14%   29%
57%

- Significantly
- Moderately
- No

Centralization of assessment

Respondents were then asked to describe how centralized the assessment or exam process was at their institution. While the leading answer was "Each course or professor can use their own assessment/exam platform or system" (41%), significant percentages also selected "Each department, school or college can use their own" (29%) and "We use one central platform for most, or all, of the institution" (30%).

As a follow up, the next question asked if it would be helpful to have one central platform for assessment or exams across all or most programs and departments at their institution. Some 46% said this would be helpful, with 19% saying "Definitely."

When asked if it was challenging for their institution to gather and measure evidence of academic quality and student learning specifically for accreditation purposes across all programs, 16% said "Significantly" and 65% described it as "Moderately challenging," for a total of 81% saying this was challenging. Just 19% said this was "Easy" for their institution.

Similarly, respondents were asked if it was challenging for their institution to identify students who are struggling academically in courses, prior to final exams. A majority, or 54%, said this was challenging.

The next question then asked respondents how confident they were that their institution could provide struggling students with the resources they need to help them succeed and persist to graduation or completion. The vast majority—or 64%—said they were only "Somewhat confident," while another 12% said they had a "Low level of confidence" and 3% were "Not confident at all."

81% of respondents said it was challenging for their institution to gather and measure **evidence of academic quality and student learning** for accreditation purposes.

54% said it was challenging for their institution to **identify students who are struggling academically**

46% said it would be helpful to **have one central platform or system** for assessment or exams used across all or most departments and programs.

"This survey illustrates the fact that while many institutions are under pressure to measure and demonstrate student learning outcomes, the capability to deliver on this consistently can be challenging," says Britt Nichols from ExamSoft. "At the same time, many respondents acknowledged that it would be helpful to have a central platform used for assessment across the institution, which is indicative of why we are seeing many universities adopt ExamSoft's digital assessment platform to provide that solution."

ExamSoft provides higher education institutions with the comprehensive assessment platform needed to administer exams more efficiently, gain unprecedented insight into student learning, and prevent academic dishonesty with unparalleled exam security features.

*To learn more, go to **ExamSoft.com/higher-education***

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