

Key Points  
Testimony of John M. Cornwell, Ph.D.  
Before the Texas Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education  
May 28, 2008

**Background:**

Doctorate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 1987.

Assistant Provost for Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment & Professor of Psychology, Loyola University New Orleans, 2002-2007

Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness & Adjunct Professor of Psychology, Rice University, 2007-current

Taught undergraduate and graduate courses in statistics, testing and measurement, program evaluation, training and development, and psychometrics.

Developed and implemented university level student learning assessment efforts at Loyola and Rice. Assessments included: CLA, iSkills, and California Critical Thinking test.

Led Loyola's successful SACS reaccreditation.

**Point 1 – Institutional Effectiveness.**

The missions of their institutions of higher learning are the most important higher education policy concern for boards of regents, legislatures, and citizens. How effective is the institution in achieving its mission and attempting to continuously improve in pursuit of its mission is the fundamental question.

**Point 2. – Validity of Assessment Tools.**

Validity of any assessment instrument or assessment program requires knowing about the context of how the assessment is going to be used to make decisions and about whom. In other words, an assessment instrument or a program cannot be said to be valid (or invalid) without specifying the context for its use.

**Point 3. – Purposes for Evaluation.**

*Formative* evaluation/assessment is used to investigate whether processes are working as intended. It is especially important to ask with new or changed efforts regarding student learning. (Note: former SACS 400+ Must Statements for accreditation was more of a formative evaluation).

*Summative* evaluation/assessment is used to investigate how well mission-related outcomes are being achieved. This evaluation is probably most relevant to policy makers and stakeholders interested in knowing whether outcomes associated with the mission are being achieved. (Note: current SACS Principles of Accreditation emphasize summative evaluation).

*Level* of Assessment can be the individual student, the program, or the institution for formative and summative. One cannot always aggregate the individual information in order to understand and make valid decision at the program level or institution level.

**Point 4. – Unintended Consequences.**

Efforts to reward or punish specific actions or outcomes can lead to changes in behavior not originally intended and not as desired. This can happen for an individual, a program, or an institution.