

# Institutional Assessment: The Big Picture

Whittier Law School \* November 14, 2015

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# Focus for This Session: The Big Picture

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## OVERVIEW

- **Contexts and texts at the institutional level:** thinking and speaking clearly
- **The past as prologue:** what you don't know can get in the way
- **Values and justifications:** why institutional assessment matters for sympathizers and skeptics

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- You will be able to distinguish between institutional assessment in law schools and related concepts and practices
- You will be able to explain the historic context that shapes current discussions of assessment
- You will be able to explain the value of institutional assessment to skeptics who believe it is a waste of time

# Contexts and Texts at the Institutional Level: Overview

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- Contexts: law schools and universities
- Texts: accreditation, assessment, and more

# Contexts and Texts at the Institutional Level: Law Schools

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- What goals should law schools as institutions (or a particular law school) be expected to achieve?
- Why should they be expected to achieve those goals?
- What means can be used to achieve those goals?
- Do stakeholders other than law professors have a role in determining whether goals have been achieved?
- What are the roles of stakeholders and how might they proceed?
- Are law schools different from colleges and universities?

# Texts as Tools: “Accreditation”

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- **Minimum** requirements set at **national level; not institution-specific**
- To be **determined by authorized general or specialized entities**
- **Imposed by federal government** in light of federal funding for loans and in view of federal policy views regarding characteristics of educational institutions
- Also **imposed by state supreme courts** in determining who has had a “quality” legal education that should provide a sufficient basis for taking bar examinations in a state or across the country
- In the US, **regional accreditors** control colleges and universities and free-standing law schools; **ABA is specialized accreditor** for law schools overall

# Texts as Tools: “Assessment”

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- **Measuring/ evaluating performance v. stated standard**
- **Can be relevant in a number of respects**
  - Formative (feedback) or summative (conclusory)
  - Course/instructor-based or institutional
  - Assumes that measurement/evaluation is framed in terms of some standard
  - **Standard can be “input”-based** (is K-12 performance related to \$\$ spent?) or **“output”-based** (without regard to inputs, how do students perform as against stated achievement goals?)
- **Rationales:** can be **fostering learning** or **encouraging accountability**

# Contexts and Texts: Summary

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- **Institutional Contexts Matter:**

- Law schools v. universities
- Differing stakeholders and perspectives

- **Terminology matters:**

- “Accreditation”: Driven by external actors
- “Assessment”: May be driven by external or internal actors
  - Tied to stated standards
  - Institution or course-based
  - Goals may relate to learning or accountability

# The Past as Prologue...

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- **What you don't know can get in the way**
  - Changes in educational accreditation standards generally
  - Changes in ABA accreditation standards more specifically
  - The need for forward-looking approaches

# Some History re Accreditation Generally

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- K-12: Nation at Risk
- Colleges:
  - Regional Accreditors and Their Role
  - Looming Issues: Federally supported student loans?
- Coming Attractions: Possible changes?

# Law Schools: More to Come

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- **Changes in Accreditation Requirements: In Brief**
  - Consumer Data
  - Learning Outcomes
  - Competency
  - Skills and Experiential Education
  - Formative and Summative Assessment
  - Institutional Assessment: Academic Program, Learning Outcomes, Assessment Methods
- **What next?**

# Past as Prologue: Summary

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- History of accreditation and assessment nationally
- Current pressures:
  - Higher Education Act reauthorization pending
  - ABA and Outcomes-Based Accreditation: Needed Experience
- Taking Counsel
  - Look beyond the present moment
  - Don't expect authoritative rulings at the outset
  - Do your best and learn from others

# Values and Justifications: Overview

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- Thinking about why institutional assessment matters
- Thinking about resistance and how to overcome it

# Values and Justifications: Pros

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- **Benefits from thoughtful course assessment**
  - Better learning from students if they know course learning outcomes
  - Clearer focus from faculty if they own their goals and focus assessment techniques accordingly
  - Capacity to see through the fog and focus for improved learning
- **Benefits from thoughtful institutional assessment**
  - Shared emphasis on institutional outcomes assessment can build bridges among faculty members and their goals and align efforts in varying courses
  - Overall student achievement can be enhanced if faculty align efforts
  - If honest evaluation is pursued on a continuing basis, can result in “bragging rights” regarding accomplishments by students and enhance recruitment & placement

# Values and Justifications: Skeptics' Views

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- **Don't assume everyone is persuaded**
- **Understand skeptics' viewpoints:**
  - "This is all busy work with no benefit"
  - "I know what I'm doing; you have no standing to tell me otherwise"
  - "I'm not convinced by this education-speak malarkey"
- **Possible responses:**
  - I've found benefit in thinking about assessment because... Here's an example.
  - I'm not telling you, but I hope you will help me understand...or join me in ...
  - Let's get practical; I don't like "education-speak" but here is what I think

# Conclusion: The Big Picture

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## LEARNING OUTCOMES

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# Next Steps: Key Elements

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- **Assessment Aspirations, Concepts, and Drivers:**
  - Purpose; Language/Process/Cycle; Culture
- **Accreditation and Assessment: Related Perspectives**
  - Dean's Perspectives;
  - ABA's New Requirements
- **Lessons from Experience**
  - Classroom Assessment
  - Institutional Assessment in Action
- **Pulling It Together**