This column concludes a recent three-part series focusing on institutional effectiveness High Impact Practices (IE/HIP) mapped to the corresponding three principles on the PECC's Targeted Issues Checklist (TIC). By means of their implementation at the academic/ nonacademic program- and department-level, I propose that these IE/HIPs will enhance potential SACSCOC compliance.

In the first IE HIPs article, I posited that institutional – and for that matter, institution-aligned departmental – mission statements drive outcome formulation as well as actualizing their concomitant downstream assessment processes. Then, in the second article, I predicated IE/HIPs, which posited a reciprocally conceptual nexus between departmental missions and their derivative outcomes. With this final installment, I focus on the TIC’s last sine qua non element, i.e.: the Culture of Continuous Improvement (CoCI).

The CoCI comprises what-I-refer-to-as macroPECConomic criteria, that is: larger, more global, and often multi-factor macroassessment criteria, which change from one annual assessment cycle to another, such as department analyses of outcomes. In contrast, I use the term microPECConomic to connote particularized or more single-factor microassessment criteria, which do not change from one annual assessment cycle to another, such as a department's mission.

The following Targeted Issues Checklist image illustrates the CoCI instructions for completing the requisite five-column table that follows.
Meredith Gorran Farkas postulates that what constitutes a CoCI “is very much in the eye of the beholder,” she ultimately defines it as “where assessment is a regular part of institutional practice” (Gorran Farkas, 2015, p. 150). That workaday organizational practice is contextualized by what Banta, Jones and Black denominate a “shared conceptual framework” (2009, p. 34, *passim*), viz.: Sullivan University’s PECC. With that framework in place, Hamm asserts “organizations…lay a foundation, then outline expected behaviors that drive the values into the fiber of the organizations’ operation and people” (Hamm, 2017, p.) SU’s PECConomics strategy “provides direction for the assessment process; is mission-driven and informed by research; and, like the assessment process itself, should be continually evaluated and modified when necessary” (ibidem, p. 123).
Figure 2: Baxter’s Operational Excellence Framework Grounded on CoCI

This Culture of Continuous Improvement is assessed by means of a five-column table, which is purposefully mapped to the SACSCOC IE algorithm contained in CS 3.3.1, namely: The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas. By kick starting ancillary processes, which eventuate in departmental assessment, that five-column table constitutes the quintessential element of the TIC. For that matter, that CoIC table, AKA “Charlie’s Table,” encapsulates the algorithmic essence of SACSCOC assessment.

Figure 3: PECC's TARGETED ISSUES CHECKLIST (TIC) CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT 5-STEP TABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>Use this table, or an alternative format, to demonstrate engagement with the Culture of Continuous Improvement.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity or Outcome (or Prior Improvement)</td>
<td>How Assessed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In turn, this table is aligned to the PECC mission whose assessment steps are represented in the university's seven-step continuous improvement circle (CIC):
KAIZEN, THE JAPANESE CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:
Adopted by Six Sigma, “kaizen is a Japanese philosophy that focuses on continual improvement throughout all aspects of life.” (https://www.isixsigma.com/methodology/kaizen/kaizen-six-sigma-ensures-continuous-improvement/). As with the SU CIC, kaizen exhibits 7 steps, viz.:

Identify an opportunity
Analyze the process
Develop an optimal solution
Implement the solution
Study the results
Standardize the solution
Plan for the future

( Ibidem)

The aforementioned web page also provides the following essential impactful practices that undergird kaizen:
Replace conventional fixed ideas with fresh ones.
Start by questioning current practices and standards.
Seek the advice of many associates before starting a Kaizen activity.
Think of how to do something, not why it cannot be done.
Don’t make excuses. Make execution happen.
Do not seek perfection. Implement a solution right away, even if it covers only 50 percent of the target.

Correct something right away if a mistake is made.

3 CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:

A Culture of Continuous Improvement occurs when an idea, action, function, or initiative has been organizationally routinized to become an engrained part of an institution’s *modus operandi*. CoCI is the process of purposefully and metacognitively internalizing an assessment ethos. Defined as “thinking about thinking,” metacognition is a term whose post-modernist connotation was popularized by John H. Flavell in a 1976 article entitled the “Nature of Intelligence.” Simultaneously, then, the internalized CoCI ethos is integral to what *Assessment Essential*’s author, Trudy Banta calls “a culture of assessment” (Flavell, 1976, p. 276). To create a culture of assessment, Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves assert that an organization’s “values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors reflect a shared appreciation of assessment practice and its value to instructional advancement” (2013, p. 73). The opening sentences to Banta’s *Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice* categorically posits that, “Effective assessment doesn’t just happen. It emerges over time as an outcome of thoughtful planning, and I the spirit of continuous improvement, it evolves as reflection on the processes of implementing and sustaining assessment suggests modifications” (p. 3). As Banta suggests, these iterative practices are inarguably acculturated over time as noted in the aforementioned SACSCOC CR 2.5, which asserts that assessment should be “ongoing.” MacAyeal also plumps for “ongoing-ness” as one of a culture of assessment’s five mindsets, i.e.: “1. Assessment needs to live in the ongoing, daily work of everyone….Libraries, departments, and individuals need to include assessment as part of their expected work and build assessment activity into their goals. Initiatives should grow organically out of continuing work and should be completed by those engaged in that work” (p. 1-2).

On May 21, 2005, the late author David Foster Wallace delivered the Kenyon University Commencement Address in which he told this story: "There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says 'Morning, boys. How's the water?' And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes 'What the hell is water?'"
If they have successfully annealed assessment to their workaday practices – as Sullivan has with its PECConomics – a culture of assessment becomes higher education’s water.

11
12
13

14 Figure 5: PECC’s TARGETED ISSUES CHECKLIST (TIC)
15 Mission-Predicated Continuous Improvement Steps
16

Targeted Issues Checklist for Academic Programs and Support Units

NAME OF PROGRAM OR UNIT: Insert name of program or unit

REVIEW DATE: Insert date of PECC review

Mission: To ensure quality assurance, the Sullivan University Planning and Evaluation Coordinating Council (PECC) systematically evaluates and assesses institutional effectiveness processes and their data and values-driven results as presented by members of the Sullivan University community. Presenting members are primarily responsible for academic programs, academic support functions, student support functions, and administrative support functions. Institutional effectiveness processes focus on:

(A) alignment with the Sullivan University mission, goals and outcomes;
(B) consistency with Sullivan University’s seven-step continuous improvement circle (CIC), encompassing the following:

1. Through an ongoing, integrated, institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation process, identify outcomes and goals that coincide with the mission;
2. Identify appropriate measurement instrument(s);
3. Through research-based evaluation processes, gather data;
4. Analyze, evaluate and interpret data;
5. Make plans for improvement based on analyses of data;
6. Implement plans for improvement and;
7. Evaluate and measure implemented plans to “close the circle.”

(C) achievement or progress toward desired results in accomplishing its mission; and,

(D) satisfaction of various constituencies with our processes and graduates.

Function: Composed of senior-level university and academic administrators, the PECC evaluates academic and administrative areas with this checklist, which describes all of the activities to be evaluated and helps determine if expected progress or improvement has been demonstrated. The evaluation checklist provides a single document to describe the findings based on PECC reviews of the academic programs, academic support functions, student support functions, and administrative support functions of Sullivan University. Additionally, this checklist is designed to ensure that all planning and evaluation functions are carried out in a timely and effective manner and that academic, academic support, student support, and administrative support areas meet these various requirements (“targeted issues”). This checklist is not a substitute for addressing these issues on a departmental basis but serves as assurance that the academic program or support unit and the PECC have addressed specific issues.

17
18

20 NOTES: Subsequent to its first assessment cycle, all programs should ensure evaluation of prior assessment cycle improvements and add longitudinal data as needed to columns three and four. All locations and learning modalities should be included in assessment and parsed out in longitudinal documentation. Use program-specific assessment and/or the Ruffalo® Noel Levitz instrument and corresponding data. Then, to operationalize the CIC without being overly discursive, one might tabularize input, such as:

21
22
23
24
25
Figure 6: SULLIVAN UNIVERSITY’S 5-COLUMN EVIDENTIARY TABLE operationalizing the CIC’s 7 steps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIC STEP 1</th>
<th>CIC STEP 2</th>
<th>CIC STEPs 3-4</th>
<th>CIC STEPs 5-6</th>
<th>CIC STEP 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify pro-grammatic/departmental outcome(s):</td>
<td>Identify Measurement Instrument(s)</td>
<td>Data Gathered /Analyzed NOTE: be specific.</td>
<td>Implement Data-driven Improvement Plan NOTE: be spe-</td>
<td>Evaluate result-ant Improvement (s) NOTE: be specif-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>a.)</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>b.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: add additional rows as needed

As I often note, SACSCOC is not prescriptive and does not particularly care how an institution provides compliance evidence. However, as an evaluator, I often see tables used consistently to summarize IE processes for all campuses and delivery modalities across programs. As an exemplar, the following model demonstrates a variation-upon-a-theme use of tables succinctly to record CIC (and, hence IE requisite) current and longitudinal processes:

35 FIGURE 7A: EXAMPLES OF 5-STEP COCI TABLE

THE INSTITUTE FOR LEGAL STUDIES
Paralegal Studies Program Continuous Improvement Actions
2011 – 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Reason for Action Taken</th>
<th>Result of Change</th>
<th>Continuing Improvement Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB, IC, FIM</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>A review of Program Level SLOs in other Paralegal Studies programs across the country and in other academic programs within Sullivan University revealed that the FLS program was top-heavy with 12 SLOs. It was determined by various program constituencies that the program's SLOs needed to be revamped and narrowed.</td>
<td>Through the efforts of the Legal Studies advisory board, FIM faculty, and others in the legal community, the Program Level SLOs were narrowed down to the following:</td>
<td>The Program Level SLOs will continue to be treated as needed to meet the needs of students, the paralegal profession and the legal community. Program Level SLOs affected: 11 through 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graduates of The Institute for Legal Studies will possess nine competencies: 1. Identify and assess ethical and professional responsibility issues. 2. Define and use legal terminology. 3. Differentiate federal and state court structure and procedures. 4. Conduct factual investigations in an organized manner. 5. Conduct legal research in an organized manner. 6. Analyze and interpret the law in an organized manner. 7. Prepare legal documents, including pleadings, memoranda and legal briefs. 8. Demonstrate strong communication and interparental skills appropriate for the legal field. 9. Use legal technology and determine its impact on the practice of law.
Wendy Weiner has postulates the following fifteen elements, which she feels, are needed to achieve a culture of assessment:

1. clear general education goals,
2. common use of assessment-related terms,
3. faculty ownership of assessment programs,
4. ongoing professional development,
5. administrative encouragement of assessment,
6. practical assessment plans,
7. systematic assessment,
8. the setting of student learning outcomes for all courses and programs,
9. comprehensive program review,
10. assessment of co-curricular activities,
11. assessment of overall institutional effectiveness,
12. informational forums about assessment,
13. inclusion of assessment in plans and budgets,
14. celebration of successes,
15. responsiveness to proposals for new endeavors related to assessment.

(Weiner, 2009, p. 28).
Zumuda offers these helpful six steps to achieve CoCI:

**FIGURE 8: ZUMUDA’S SIX STEPS OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

| Step 1: Identify and clarify the core beliefs that define the school’s culture. |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| **Explanation**                  | **Operating Principle**           |
| Some faculties may hold achievement in the academic disciplines as primary; others may believe that the social and emotional development of students is primary. Both are core beliefs and drive teacher support for the status quo or the need to change the status quo. | - Each school is a complex living system with purpose. |

| Step 2: Create a shared vision by explicitly defining what these core beliefs will look like in practice. |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| **Explanation**                  | **Operating Principles**         |
| This is the shared vision of what the school community will look like when its core beliefs truly inform practice. It is a narrative description of what is seen and heard in every part of the school community. | - A shared vision articulates a coherent picture of what the school will look like when the core beliefs have been put into practice. - The legitimacy of a shared vision is based on how well it represents all perspectives in the school community. |

<p>| Step 3: Collect accurate, detailed data and use analysis of the data to define where the school is now and to determine the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision. |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <strong>Explanation</strong>                  | <strong>Operating Principles</strong>         |
| The collection and analysis of data lead to rich conversations among a staff about the meaning of the data and an honest assessment of teaching and learning practices. By identifying the gaps between where a school is now and the shared vision, staff members gain clarity on what they have to do to achieve that vision. | - Once staff members commit to the shared vision, they must gain clarity on their responsibility for achieving that vision. - When staff members perceive data to be valid and reliable in collection and analysis, data both confirm what is working well and reveal the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision in a way that inspires collective action. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 4: Identify the innovation(s) that will most likely close the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Explaination**  
Staff must have the opportunity to learn what the change is and what impact it will have, both individually and collectively. They must be able to see what it looks like in practice. | **Operating Principles**  
- All staff must see the content of staff development as a necessary means to achieve the desired end.  
- It is not the number of innovations addressed in the staff development plan but rather the purposeful linkage among them that makes systemic change possible and manageable. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 5: Develop and implement an action plan that supports teachers through the change process and integrates the innovation within each classroom and throughout the school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Explaination**  
Staff members must be trained, coached, and supported throughout the staff development process so that they can integrate the change into the classroom and into the system. Resource allocation will need to balance individual staff needs with overall constraints in time and budget. Leaders also will have to be responsive to specific concerns and still ensure that all teachers meet their responsibility for the innovation to succeed. | **Operating Principles**  
- Staff development must promote collective autonomy by embracing teaching as a distributed quality of the school.  
- Planning must provide the clear, concrete direction necessary for systematic change while remaining flexible enough to accommodate the "nonrational" life in schools.  
- Staff development must reflect the predictable stages of teacher concern about the complexities of moving from new learning to systemic consequences. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 6: Embrace collective autonomy as the only way to close the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision, and embrace collective accountability in establishing responsibility for closing the gaps.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Explaination**  
Student achievement holds primacy here, but how it is both defined and measured varies depending upon the core beliefs articulated in Step 1. | **Operating Principle**  
- A competent system proves itself when everyone within the system performs better as a result of the collective endeavors and accepts accountability for that improvement. |

(Zumuda, 2004 pp. 18-19)
As show below, course-mapping is also an essential tool in assessing CoCI.

**FIGURE 9: JANKOWSKI’S MAPPING LEARNING OUTCOMES: WHAT YOU MAP IS WHAT YOU SEE**

(http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/Presentations/Mapping.pdf, slide 9).
**FIGURE 10: IE HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES (IE/HIPs) MAPPED TO THE CIC STEPS IN FIGURE 4 & AND TO THE ACTIONS IN FIGURE 6:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIC</th>
<th>CIC AC-</th>
<th>CIC HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES (HIPs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identify programmatic/departmental outcome(s):</td>
<td>adhere to the SU Alignment of Mission (<a href="http://libguides.sullivan.edu/c.php?g=558679&amp;p=5398800">http://libguides.sullivan.edu/c.php?g=558679&amp;p=5398800</a>) and Outcomes (<a href="http://libguides.sullivan.edu/c.php?g=558679&amp;p=5398801">http://libguides.sullivan.edu/c.php?g=558679&amp;p=5398801</a>) IE/HIPs listed in the prior Academic Illuminator articles and on the accompanying LibGuide; consult the internet for sample programmatic outcomes (but ensure they accord with the SU Outcomes IE/HIPs), such as these from Georgia State University: <a href="http://oie.gsu.edu/files/2014/07/GSU-Program-SLOs.pdf">http://oie.gsu.edu/files/2014/07/GSU-Program-SLOs.pdf</a> be specific.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identify Measurement Instrument(s)</td>
<td>prefer use of direct measures* versus indirect measures; do not use grades; ** rubrics may aid measurement; measurement instrument(s) should be outcome-directed in order to measure the requisite learning-outcome-specific results. If it does not, find one that will (consult: MENTAL MEASUREMENT YEARBOOK, or other such compilations); use multiple measurement instruments for interrater reliability and cross-validation of data; use multiple measures, thereby maximizing reliability and validity;¹ triangulate data from any multiple instruments to outcomes; be aware of the distinction between formative and summative assessment strategies; be specific.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>provide longitudinal data (preferably for the most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>Implement</td>
<td>develop concrete plans for implementation of changes;⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Evaluate resultant Improvement(s)</td>
<td>during the subsequent assessment cycle, use the prior methodology to assess the efficacy of improvements be specific</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Direct measures, as Suskie notes are: “direct evidence of student learning is tangible, visible, self-explanatory evidence of exactly what students have and haven’t learned” (2004, p. 95). Her examples include: student ratings by their field experience supervisors; scores and pass rates on appropriate licensure/certification.
exams; capstone experiences; other written work or performances; portfolios; scores on locally-designed tests; employer ratings of graduates; student reflections on their values, attitudes and beliefs.\textsuperscript{4}

Nevertheless, \textbf{Indirect measures} can provide a useful supplement and check on the findings from direct measures. They include: Surveys of students and alumni; exit interviews with graduating students; data on placement and other measures of post-graduation performance.\textsuperscript{5}

Grades may: 1.) leave unclear the expectations for student learning; 2.) collapse information about multiple learning outcomes; 3.) incorporate other aspects of student performance, such as attendance and participation; and, 4.) be less likely to tell where exactly improvement is needed.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{3}https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/teaching/course-mapping.

References


*Institutional Effectiveness Continuous Improvement Circle* (fig.). (2015). Unpublished manuscript, Sullivan University Creative Communications Department, Sullivan University, Louisville, KY.


