

Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2017

Epistemology, Pedagogy, and Student Affairs Assessment: A Voluminous Framework for Equity

Robin Phelps-Ward Jeff Kenney, and Jimmy L.
Howard*

Apr 15, 2017

Tags: assessment, epistemology, pedagogy, student affairs

Abstract

For the past twenty years higher education scholars have stressed the need to educate senior student affairs officers, divisional staff, and graduate students about the importance of building and maintaining a culture of assessment (Yousey-Elesner, Bentrin, & Henning, 2015). However, few have advocated for educating burgeoning student affairs practitioners about how ways of knowing influence cultures of assessment. We argue that an emphasis on epistemological frameworks in student affairs assessment teaching is seemingly missing in the graduate curriculum and the current teaching paradigm impedes perspectives that resist oppressive structures in higher education—those which disrupt and dismantle colonized thinking and advance equity. In this paper we speculate on the dominant narratives within assessment teaching in student affairs, build a case for critical epistemologies and epistemological pluralism, and share recommendations in the form of a course plan designed to spur dialogue and learning around the role of epistemology in assessment practice.

As we reflected on our experiences teaching student affairs master's students about assessment and our own memories of learning as students in assessment and evaluation courses, we reached a surprising conclusion—there was something missing. While we had taught and learned about the assessment cycle (Kuh et al., 2015), discussed the value of assessment in higher education and student affairs, and even proposed and executed assessment plans, we recalled the epistemological flatness present in the curriculum and the undeniable post-positivist lean that existed. Discussions about epistemology, ways of knowing, and paradigms of inquiry (Schwandt, 1997) were virtually nonexistent. Where were the critical race, queer, and feminist perspectives about student learning? Where were the conversations about assessment methods that went beyond surveys and focused on student voices and experiences? Why did the quantification of student learning outcomes always seem to take precedence? These questions and others drove our desire to focus on the ways in which educators of student affairs master's students teach about ways of knowing and assessment. More specifically, in this conceptual essay we discuss the importance of teaching pluralistically about epistemological perspectives to support future student affairs professionals in their assessment practice as they work to build cultures of evidence and equitable campus climates.

Speculating on Assessment Learning in Student Affairs

Since the proliferation of discourse around student affairs assessment culture (Oburn, 2005; Schuh, 2013; Seagraves & Dean, 2010), scholars in higher education have cultivated a vast collection of instructional guides, books, conference presentations, associations, and articles addressing the process, decision-making, resources, skills, and ethics associated with assessment inquiry (Roper, 2015; Yousey-Elsener, Bentrin, & Henning, 2015). However, despite an emphasis on the numerous important aspects of assessment, minimal attention has been paid to the training of student affairs professionals about the plurality of epistemological perspectives and aligned methods outside of the dominant post-positivist narrative (Newhart, 2015). Henning and Roberts (2016) noted the importance of understanding the

role of epistemology in assessment practice. “Given the political nature of assessment ... it is critical that assessors be attuned to the paradigms of stakeholders, including those of divisional and institutional leaders” (Henning & Roberts, 2016, p. 32). Because ways of knowing are tied up in values and beliefs about truth, what counts, and *who* counts, individuals’ epistemological perspectives have a powerful influence on the execution, outcome, and impact of assessment (Wall, Hursh, & Rodgers, 2014). We argue that more emphasis should focus on this crucial aspect of assessment.

An emphasis on epistemological frameworks in student affairs assessment teaching is seemingly missing and the current teaching paradigm does not aptly allow for perspectives or critical inquiries that resist oppressive structures in higher education—those which disrupt and dismantle colonized thinking and advance equity. Potentially adverse impacts can be understood as both unintentional and intentional. Undoubtedly, there are inquiries with spirited intent, aimed to support and encourage the success of minoritized and marginalized communities. However, short sighted, misguided, or unduly imposed inquiries and methods may ultimately produce narratives and inform policy which directly or indirectly inhibit program efficacy, influence campus climate, or misrepresent student success.

Attention to critical epistemologies is essential, especially given changing college student demographics amidst pressures to perform and “prove” learning in the neoliberalist market of higher education (Dixon-Román & Gergen, 2012; Wall et al., 2014). Neoliberal economic policies have manifested in assessment practices which claim to conserve and control higher education resources, in order to regulate external effectiveness and establish the public trust (Gergen & Dixon-Román, 2014). These practices, which commonly include ranking, accreditation, strategic planning, etc., are a cumulative force, that by their nature lend to standardization and ultimately homogenization.

This issue and possible paths forward are particularly relevant to student affairs educators responsible for the development of new and continuing professionals, such as graduate faculty and chief assessment officers. Thus, in this conceptual essay we discuss the

null curriculum (what our assessment courses do not teach), the value of teaching critical paradigms, the importance of embracing pluralism in our discussions of ways of knowing, and the role neoliberalism has in our efforts to teach and conduct assessment. We ultimately end our essay with a plea to those who teach in and outside of the classroom (i.e., higher education and student affairs faculty and mid-level and senior student affairs officers) to adopt teaching and training strategies that acknowledge interpretivist ways of knowing and we offer a semester course plan with outcomes and activities to guide graduate student learning. Our recommendations for future practice come in the form of a course plan which we hope others will integrate into their own teaching and build upon as they adopt pedagogical innovations in their courses centered on inquiry and equity. The effects of teaching future student affairs practitioners only one epistemological perspective are detrimental; however, by understanding the need to embrace epistemological pluralism in assessment curriculum, educators of student affairs professionals can lessen and eliminate these effects.

Addressing Anticipated Counter Arguments and Refutations

Our proposition to accentuate epistemology in assessment learning is likely to attract a number of reasonable counter arguments. We address these refutations before delving into our case for more deeply and passionately teaching about ways of knowing in assessment. We anticipate practical and ideological challenges concerning both the nature of student affairs graduate programs and student affairs practice. First, we are compelled to address the current state of assessment learning in master's level graduate curricula for higher education student affairs programs, and whether a focused discussion of assessment learning may be relevant.

We performed a preliminary and descriptive review of course offerings in 30 master's programs from select institutions, which varied by region, institutional type, and program type within the United States. We selected several institutions as curriculum leaders in the field based on U.S. News and World Report and [GradSchools.com](https://www.gradschools.com) rankings. We also identified institutions from the

NASPA graduate program directory and retrieved information through institutional websites. Our inquiry was specific to assessment learning and did not inventory research methodology course offerings. We were affirmed to find that a majority of the programs (52%) listed either a distinct assessment course or a combined research and assessment course on their program websites. Although some program websites did not list identifiable assessment courses, language about assessment and evaluation was often present in curriculum overviews.

The prevalence of focused assessment courses affirms the value of our conceptual essay. While assessment coursework is not a universal graduate student affairs experience, the volume of offerings across institutions warrants examination. Where a sizeable proportion of graduate programs are preparing student affairs professionals for entry and mid-level assessment work, it is prudent to question what is, and is not, being taught.

The outcomes of our review speak to an anticipated concern of limited curricular space in graduate programs that are over capacity. We expect that some readers may have concerns not with the merit and value of epistemological exploration, but where this development ranks in competition with other learning priorities concerning theory, administration, and counseling. And while these concerns are affirmed by the large number of graduate programs that focus their curricular attention elsewhere, a formidable number of established and reputable programs have emphasized assessment in their curriculum suggesting relevance for entry and mid-level work. We also anticipate retort which asserts that present attention to epistemology is adequate. That is, the real or valuable tasks of student affairs assessment require an engagement with epistemology that is not needed or adequately addressed in current research methods curricula. This concern will be addressed more thoroughly in our *case for critical epistemologies* section.

We expect questions related to capacity. With no slight to the potential of our students and professionals (it should be obvious that we believe in the capacity for all learners to engage in such a philosophical introspection) we anticipate concerns over the congruence of epistemology learning with the standards of rigor

in student affairs preparation programs and potential for student success in engaging and mastering these concepts. Similarly, some may question the capacity of our instructors to teach to and meaningfully integrate issues of epistemology into assessment curriculum. Our response to this concern is imbued with the same confidence we have in students. Additionally, we offer specific outcomes and teaching strategies to support educators in our *recommendations for future practice* section.

Also, questions may be raised as to whether this “depth” of exploration is appropriate for applied programs at all. Are questions of epistemology, and the relevance of their application, the purview of master’s programs (of which few student affairs programs are) or doctoral level training? Beyond graduate training, we anticipate challenges to our argument concerning professional practice of student affairs assessment. Perhaps the premier question is the real relevance of epistemological introspection and congruence to daily work of student affairs assessment. Where assessment work may be an absent or tertiary activity for many entry and mid-level professionals, what is the value of broadly cultivating such learning which may only be called upon in a handful of specialized positions? We argue that epistemological examination and philosophical literacy will serve to produce more conscientious consumers and producers of knowledge in our field, and lend to increased engagement and deliberation in cultures of inquiry.

And finally, and perhaps most significantly, we anticipate challenges to our argument which brings to the fore whether practitioners should be readied for acculturation or transformation. Does the current system and tradition of assessment in higher education student affairs need to change? Do student affairs educators have greater responsibility to prepare learners to assimilate to existing systems and navigate successfully in established conduits? And is it reckless to prepare practitioners to challenge systems that are reluctant or obstinate to change? We hope that the entirety of the reflection herein does justice as a compelling and productive counter argument that will serve as a touchstone for student affairs educators contemplating ways in which to connect epistemology, assessment, and pedagogy to advance equity in higher education.

What Student Affairs Assessment Courses Do Not Teach

In their discussion about curriculum inquiry and what schools teach Flinders, Noddings, and Thornton (1986) grappled with the concept of the null curriculum. They defined the null curriculum as “what schools do not teach” (p. 33) and used earlier arguments from Eisner (1985) to explain the differences between the explicit curriculum (the publicly announced program of study), implicit curriculum (the values and expectations not within the formal curriculum), and null curriculum in education. Flinders et al. (1986) explained, “The null curriculum explicitly calls our attention to what has long been a matter of common sense—that, when developing a curriculum, we leave things out. It is a truism of the field that schools cannot teach everything” (p. 34). Ranging from benign neglect to conscious exclusion, the null curriculum manifests in educational programs regardless of the degree of intention. However accidental or unintentional, limited or absent conversations around epistemology inadvertently communicate an unsettling dominant narrative and value around an objectivist epistemological preference in student affairs. Foremost, failure to examine epistemology altogether further establishes the values and beliefs of predominant ways of knowing.

Our experiences as learners and assessment educators inform our assertion that the examination of and reflection upon epistemology is largely absent from assessment learning in graduate education. As a brief anecdote to support this premise we offer the experience of facilitating a lesson within an assessment for higher education and student affairs course about research epistemologies and theoretical perspectives. During the lesson in which Broido and Manning’s (2002) work served as a frame, several students summarized their understanding of critical, race, ethnicity, and gender perspectives, utilizing words such as “specialization,” “interest,” or “agenda.” While the conclusions our students drew sufficed for the purpose of comprehending the readings and their central concepts, the notion of critical, race, ethnicity, and gender perspectives as an addendum or “special interest” to more robust perspectives was disconcerting. Thinking that relegates critical perspectives and positions them as

decentered alternatives not only illuminates students' personal epistemologies centered in their cognitive development (Hofer, 2001), it buttresses positivist and post-positivist philosophies of knowledge, which seem to flourish without contest in the student affairs discipline. Centering epistemological examination in the graduate curriculum directly concerns opportunities to advance equity in student affairs inquiry. While the assumptions, values, and methods of more marginal inquiry traditions are dissonant with, if not incompatible or antithetical to, positivism, contemporary critical institutional assessment scholars have critiqued the current positivist paradigm and epistemological foundations of data analysis and inquiry within higher education (Dowd & Bensimon, 2014; Hernandez, 2015; Rios-Aguilar, 2014; Wells & Stage, 2015). Without a critical framework and understanding of critical epistemologies student affairs practitioners will perpetuate systems of inequality and never transform higher education for minoritized and marginalized students.

A Case for Critical Epistemologies

Of particular interest in the discussion of necessary epistemological frameworks in advancing equity through student affairs inquiry, are critical epistemologies which center and critique issues of power, identity, and representation. While the relative acceptance of critical epistemologies in mainstream inquiry traditions is somewhat irrelevant given the discipline's espoused desires for advancing justice, it is nonetheless confirming that emergent (i.e., radical, marginal, liberatory) frameworks garner greater attention from educational practitioners and scholars. Notably, recent editions of long established texts for student affairs graduate training now feature critical epistemological frameworks (e.g., Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). We believe unique opportunities for equity are latent in student affairs inquiry, and require introduction and closer examination to traditions of intersectional, feminist, postcolonial, queer, and poststructural perspectives to elicit transformation through assessment work.

Emerging from critical epistemological frameworks, critical inquiry continues to center notions of social justice and equity

(Dowd & Bensimon, 2014; Harper, 2012; Patton, 2015; Wells & Stage, 2015). Scholars posit that by posing questions, disaggregating, and reporting data in ways that promote equity, higher education practitioners and scholars can more congruently address the nuances of the experiences of marginalized groups on college campuses (Banks, 2006; Dowd & Bensimon, 2014). This is possible when we ask students to question the nature of knowledge, their own beliefs about knowledge, and whose stories are possible to become knowledge. Our argument is that a focus on critical epistemologies, allows students to explore more equitable habits and practices for knowledge production. Essentially, critical inquiry scholars suggest that positivist interpretations and understandings of aggregate data can inadvertently perpetuate the oppressive systemic issues they attempt to address (Dowd & Bensimon, 2014; Rios-Aguilar, 2015). Dowd and Bensimon (2014) argued that cultural leaders within higher education play an important role in embedding the values of equity in accountability measures, including assessment. Student affairs educators exist among the cultural leaders with the power to influence the implicit curriculum and remove critical epistemological conversations from the null curriculum.

Critical scholars are committed to addressing and dismantling institutional and systemic issues that impact higher education. What is noticeable about the contemporary scholarship on critical epistemologies and perspectives is the direct articulation of white supremacist policies and practices, and how they have impacted students, scholarship, and practitioners within higher education (Cabrera, 2014; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Harper, 2012). This scholarship has crested at a very important time in higher education when marginalized and minoritized student experiences are central to the debates within higher education. In his article about the minimization of racist institutional norms in the academy, Harper (2012) explained that

aspiring higher education scholars and practitioners are socialized to use assorted semantic substitutes for 'racism.' ... Because they do not read about it in the literature or talk about it explicitly in class, many graduate students could be led to believe, perhaps unintentionally, that racism no longer exists. (p. 23-24)

Therefore, neglecting to account for race, racism, or counter

narratives as important sources of knowledge and data, may be a product of scholarly and professional preparation. More likely, though, it is a combination of graduate preparation, white ways of knowing valued in the academy, and the taboo nature of racism.

Scholars have argued that critical race theory and generally critical epistemologies should be used to question the academy's methodological and epistemological preferences (Covarrubias & Velez, 2013). Covarrubias and Velez troubled the positivistic perspective of information and argued that quantitative data is not objective. The very notion that the methods, researchers, and data can be objective is problematic. The fact that this idea has not been questioned, calls for a greater level of critical awareness within the field. Not only can a deeper understanding of critical epistemologies and perspectives advance scholarly methods, they also have the power to transmute our perceptions of race, racism, and equity in higher education. Critical inquiry, methods, and analysis are vital in exploring the experiences of marginalized students and uncovering the inequalities (covert and apparent) within higher education, but educators must open the door to discourse about the less often chosen paths for student affairs assessment and inquiry (Dowd & Bensimon, 2014; Newhart, 2015; Rios-Aguilar, 2014; Wells & Stage, 2015). It is within these critical frameworks, where critical assessment practices are rooted. Critical frameworks compel us to dismantle positivist understandings of data. An exploration of critical epistemologies propels students towards the expansion of the myopic and often oppressive frameworks from which they are likely to interpret and understand assessment data. We implore the use of critical assessment practices to dismantle white ways of knowing and knowledge creation. Critical assessment practices include disaggregation by race, ethnicity, gender, and other marginalized identity groups, seeking out counter stories, utilization of assessment data to reduce equity gaps, and ultimately working toward the dismantling of oppressive policies, practices, and programs within higher education (Banks, 2006; Espino, 2012; Guido, Chávez, & Lincoln, 2010; Harper, 2012; Patton, 2015; Stage & Wells, 2014; Wells & Stage, 2015).

In response to movement away from a sole focus on the dominant epistemological narrative, Stage and Wells (2014) asserted, "In

general, there seems to be a fear from this perspective that if you tamper with a positivist epistemology, the whole quantitative approach is somehow tainted” (p. 4). Positivist epistemologies still have utility in higher education scholarship and assessment; however, researchers who do not consider critical frameworks for their inquiry risk missing variables that could impact their models and data analysis (Hernandez, 2015). The enmeshment of student affairs assessment officers, divisional staff, and other student affairs professionals in the development, direction, and future of colleges and universities necessitates that educators create spaces to engage in epistemological plurality within their teaching.

Toward Epistemological Pluralism

While the value and necessity of epistemological pluralism in the graduate training of student affairs practitioners and the dynamic tension of working professionals are plainly at odds, advocating for the suppression of post-positivism or an exclusive concern for critical frameworks is not the goal. Rather, an imploration for the broad introduction, cultivation, and affirmation of diverse knowledge traditions is the outcome of this section. The opportunities of equity through student affairs inquiry will ultimately manifest in rich heterogeneity that can only serve minimally to expand students’ personal epistemologies and maximally to eliminate conscious and subconscious traditions of epistemological univocality in the academy.

Feyerabend (1968) and Kuhn’s (1970) respective pleas for epistemological pluralism are seminal markers for modern science’s philosophical transition from positivism to postpositivism. Both contributions implore diverse perspectives and approaches to inquiry, and forewarn of value impositions which may reproduce scientific dogmas indicative of the logical empiricists. Intentionally heeded or not, Barash (2015) discussed residual positivist doctrines anticipated by Feyerabend and Kuhn, which continue to inform the contemporary research enterprise. From Feyerabend to Barash, each contributor has considered a number of social psychological factors which drive the scientific community’s detrimental propensity to narrow its epistemological field of vision.

Beginning with the process of admissions, future student affairs scholars and practitioners (and their ideas) are directly and indirectly sorted for epistemological fit, and those who enter the academy are immediately submitted for enculturation, through which a complicated network of curriculum gaps, social pressures, and political entrees obstruct a scholarly community's field of vision and realm of possibility. Feyerabend (1968) and Kuhn (1970) argued that the development of science is not as linear or consistent as the presumptions of the logical empiricists. Actual science, imagined as a train, does not simply progress faster and faster down a single track. Good science advances through fits and starts, and when necessary abandons course and jumps tracks entirely, advancing in an entirely new direction. The dogmas of logical empiricism insist the train, in spite of new evidence, plow forward, keep steady pace, always in the interest of progress and to honor the distance traveled. This commitment to linear trajectory and steady "progress" is enabled through epistemic categorization that favors the dominant narrative. A train's maintaining course may not always be explained by the reluctance of the engineer, rather the complicated and isolating series of decisions that fogged the engineer's field of view, limiting the realm of possibility. The process of abandoning and even transforming paradigms, given the numerous social hierarchies attached to knowledge and its production, can be a decidedly hairy task of leadership. However, this must be the task student affairs assessment educators introduce so that future professionals can persist when met with complex and challenging questions and situations that cajole them into reifying oppressive systems in the name of "accountability" and "excellence."

Assessment in the Neoliberal University

Discernibly, the priorities of assessment learning in student affairs graduate programs are not driven by individual actors, whether instructors or curriculum committees. However, the priorities of assessment practice in student affairs, and assessment learning as a result, are informed by economic cultures within *and* beyond academe. Predominant audit and evidence cultures are congruent with the demands of the neoliberal university. As practitioners respond to demands for evidence driven by the pursuit of ever increasing profits and efficiencies, the epistemological default

remains unquestioned because positivism is most intelligible to the neoliberal university.

To describe neoliberalism succinctly is to say neoliberalism is the financialization of everything. Neoliberalism is generally understood as a set of Western economic policies since 1970, which support market de-regulation and minimization of taxes and social programs in the interest of individuals and corporations (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal policies divest from structures of institutional permanence, and promote short-term and flexible labor contracts, emerging the ideal disposable worker (Conrad & Poole, 1997). Manifesting in what is commonly referred to as globalization, capital traverses the globe irrespective of national borders in search of cheap labor and weak regulations. On an international scale, neoliberal globalization allows for a sort of U.S. colonization without colonies through an imposition of values and drawing of resources without formal occupation (Harvey, 2005). No entity is unsusceptible.

Within the United States, neoliberal policy has targeted all aspects of the public sphere including education, in addition to health care, social security, and environmental protections. Culturally, neoliberal rationality challenges and informs popular notions of sovereignty and labor including trade unions and working class institutions, social relations, welfare provisions, reproduction, land ownership, norms, and thought. Today, neoliberal market rationality is a prevailing logic, a natural way of life, and the hegemonic discourse through which higher education and public entities are considered and scrutinized.

Contemporary frameworks of assessment in higher education can be understood through this neoliberal framework. Neoliberal rationality values personal responsibility, substituting the former social protections of liberalism. The individual cannot rely on obligations of employers or the state, and must navigate volatile financial markets alone to invest in individual security. Policy makers and corporate interests have moved to redefine higher education as an arm of commerce, and a player in the global marketplace. As such, public funding for higher education is increasingly tied to evidence of economic independence and development (Wall, Hursh, & Rodgers, 2014). Many assessment

practices are the tools of policy makers to establish systems of accountability to hold public institutions accountable to the tax-paying public. These systems demand a translation of institutional effectiveness into digestible outputs represented by quantifiable data. As a result, higher education institutions are cultivated and reproduced in neoliberal cultures of performance, accountability, and fear (Schwandt, 1996).

Student affairs practitioners, like many faculty and administrators in the higher education enterprise, appear to be actively negotiating their work to accommodate the rising demands for measurement and accountability. This shift has not been without dissent. As national, state, and institutional policies have drifted toward austerity and performance-based funding, the lament of faculty and administrators for the growing faith in and preoccupation with numbers is well documented (Giroux, 2002). Nevertheless, policy makers and institutional leaders continue to reposition higher education toward commodification and data-driven decision making. A clear breach is evidenced through the apparent internalization of market rationality in virtually every corner of the academy. All functions of the academy, student affairs included, have come to understand their sustainability as a direct measure of individual worth and economic viability (Giroux, 2002). That said, assessment pressures and practices vary across institutions of higher education.

Within divisions of student affairs, practices are driven by political and economic pressures in the form of evidence of contributions to student learning, contributions to student retention, alignment with regional and national accreditation, and institutional benchmarking. Across units and functions, assessment data concerns domains of student participation, student needs, student satisfaction, learning and business outcomes, and cost effectiveness (Schuh & Associates, 2009). Within these assessment functions, higher education and student affairs subscribes to nuanced standards, still emblematic of surveillance and austerity measures of neoliberal education policy. Values include ongoing, systematic measurement toward public accountability (Bresciani, 2011). All efforts, of course, are to align with the broader institutional mission and vision (Schuh & Gansemer, 2010).

Neoliberal economic policies have manifested in assessment practices which claim to conserve and control higher education resources, in order to regulate external effectiveness and establish the public trust. These practices, which commonly include ranking, accreditation, strategic planning, etc., are a cumulative force, that by their nature lend to standardization and ultimately homogenization. While unpopular, and worthy of critique in many sectors of higher education, contemporary assessment practices have unique impacts on student affairs operations, which neglect outliers, discount variance, and erase particularities embedded within data relative to student experiences.

Declaring Our Future: Recommendations for Future Practice

Broadening exploration of knowledge philosophies for assessment learners has direct implications for amplifying the equity potential of student affairs inquiry. Equipping our practitioners with such an introspective and speculative skill set also has implications for shaping the future of student affairs. In the current assessment climate, these practices seem inevitable as unbridled positivist values that serve to inculcate these traditions. Student affairs practitioners are in a position to imagine and declare new futures, but require a more robust vocabulary to announce values of teaching and learning disentangled from the predominance of positivism.

We offer ruminations on steps forward to maximize the equity potential of student affairs inquiry, specific to the assessment learning. These suggestions, in the form of a semester course plan, are aimed at elevating the quality and content of epistemological exploration in assessment learning. We advocate for quality epistemological exploration in student affairs assessment learning that is voluminous—that is, it demonstrates breadth, depth, and fervor. Breadth refers to teaching about the range of epistemological perspectives and inquiry paradigms that exist. Depth in this voluminous model speaks to the ways in which educators delve into substantive dialogue about the spectrum of paradigms and epistemologies so that students might apply and visualize concepts in action. Lastly, the fervor required in this voluminous framework for epistemology curriculum speaks to the

passion, gusto, and experience educators bring to their teaching through shared experiences, storytelling, and conversations in class about the meaning making process involved in conducting assessment. The dimensions of breadth, depth, and fervor comprise a robust commitment from graduate educators to the cultivation of epistemological insight and congruence in developing student affairs professionals. We believe a voluminous pedagogy to explore a *breadth* of traditions, examine the assumptions and values of various philosophies with *depth*, and for the value and import of epistemological exploration to be delivered with *fervor*. Table 1 illustrates a course plan that could be used in tandem with a previously arranged assessment, evaluation, or inquiry-focused course for student affairs graduate students. This course plan includes desired outcomes (related to literacy, self-awareness, and application), a description of activities, and readings designed to facilitate student learning around assessment and epistemology.

	Outcome	Activity	Description	Readings
Section 1: Understanding Foundational Concepts & Vocabulary	To define assessment and epistemology-related terms	Vocabulary 101	Students match terms with definitions and discuss answers as a class.	Broido, E. M., & Manning, K. (2002). <i>Philosophical foundations and current theoretical perspectives in qualitative research.</i> Culp, M. M., & Dungy, G. J. (2012). <i>Building a culture of evidence in student affairs: A guide for leaders and practitioners.</i> Paul, J. L. (2005). <i>Introduction to the philosophies of research and criticism in education and the social sciences.</i>
	To differentiate between various epistemological perspectives	Table of Concepts	Students learn concepts like interpretivism and objectivism through a table that describes each concept. Students draw connections and differentiate between epistemological perspectives.	
	To recognize the presence and roles of multiple epistemological perspectives in student affairs practice	Assessment Design Walk-Throughs	Instructors descriptively tell stories of various types of assessment projects and allow students to discern where epistemological perspectives emerge in the assessment cycle.	
Section 2: Personal Awareness & Epistemological Dispositions	To examine epistemological disposition	Epistemological Self-Assessment	Students take a quiz that allows them to examine and discuss their own epistemological dispositions.	Takacs, D. (2003). <i>How does your positionality bias your epistemology?</i>
	To identify epistemological dispositions within empirical literature	Article Analysis	Students choose an empirical article tied to student affairs assessment and identify the epistemological viewpoints present.	
	To compose an epistemology positionality statement	Positionality Statement	Students author a statement that describes their epistemological positionality.	
Section 3: Connecting Epistemology & Practice	To apply understanding of epistemology to ethical and equitable decision-making	Assessment & Ethics Case Study	Students discuss and debate the ethical issues tied to student affairs assessment decision-making.	Suskie, L. (2010). <i>Assessing student learning: A common sense guide.</i> Sharing assessment results with internal and external audiences.
	To construct a report written from a specific epistemological point of view	Epistemological Point of View Report Write-Up	In teams, students construct a written report from a specific epistemological point of view and present to the class.	
	To discuss the team dynamics present in assessment decision-making when multiple epistemological perspectives exist	Fish Bowl Exercise	Students come to class prepared to engage in a fish bowl activity in which students perform in ways congruent with specific epistemological dispositions and work through key assessment decisions related to methods, data analysis, and dissemination of results.	

Table 1 (Image)

Course Plan for a Voluminous Epistemology Curriculum

We advocate for instructional approaches which begin by establishing a comprehensive and shared vocabulary which discerns various epistemological traditions. We also assert the importance of facilitating debate which reveals the underlying ontological and ethical commitments of the various frameworks. And lastly, we advocate constant reflection upon the congruence of various epistemological commitments in student affairs practice through iterations of exploration, application, reflection, and refinement.

Of course, more is to be understood regarding the state and trajectory of assessment learning in student affairs. As previously mentioned, our speculations are confined by our experience and consideration of the literature. More insightful recommendations and contentions will be empowered by inquiry into assessment learning which may include inventories and content analyses of

student affairs assessment syllabi, attitudinal surveys, narrative research concerning the training, values, and priorities of entry level professionals, and Delphi studies of expert practitioners and scholars on issues of student affairs inquiry.

About the authors:

Robin Phelps-Ward, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor within the Department of Educational and Organizational Leadership and Development at Clemson University. Jeff Kenney is a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at Clemson University. His research interests include critical pedagogy, educational research ethics, and faculty development. Jimmy L. Howard is a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Clemson University. His research interests include the intersection of race and gender, racializing sexual violence, and doctoral scholar-activism in higher education.

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Figures, Tables, and Supplementary Materials

Table 1 (XLSX)

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