

HELP!

★ I want to reach for the stars,
but I'm under this microscope.

AGENDA

Friday, January 29

10:30 - 13:00 **REGISTRATION**

13:10 – 13:30 **WELCOME**

A word on the politics of quality

It is a curious paradox that higher education, one of our most self-consciously meritocratic institutions, should provoke such anxiety over issues of "quality" and "excellence." This conference invites us to explore the objectives and effects of assessment practices within the academy. How has academic assessment evolved? What have been its results? And, are there more productive ways for us to stimulate academic productivity?

Hon. Howard R. Pawley, President, Harry Crowe Foundation. Assistant Professor Emeritus, University of Windsor. Premier of Manitoba (1981-1988).

13:30 – 14:30 **KEYNOTE**

From inputs to outcomes: how assessment changed the way we look at education

Although higher educational institutions are largely shaped and defined by their national and regional contexts, the rise of outcomes-based assessment practices in the academy is clearly an international phenomenon. How should we understand assessment as a global process? What are the underlying pressures responsible for the changing terrain? This keynote will consider, in the broadest terms, the trajectory of the contemporary discourse on institutional quality and its shift away from questions of resources and expenditures towards "harmonization" and demonstrable "outcomes."

Susan Robertson, Professor of Sociology of Education and Coordinator of the Centre for Globalisation, Education, and Societies, University of Bristol.

14:30 – 14:45 **Refreshment break**

14:45 – 17:00 **PANEL**

Testing the waters: what can we learn from the early adopters?

The emergence of outcomes-based assessment practices may be ubiquitous, but their penetration in the educational sector has been less than consistent. This panel brings together scholars from a range of jurisdictions to discuss particular manifestations of the outcomes-assessment impulse: the No Child Left Behind initiative in the United States, the Research Assessment Exercises in the United Kingdom, and the Fraser Institute's school report cards in Canada.

***Paul Shaker**, Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Education,
Simon Fraser University.*

***Lisa Lucas**, Senior Lecturer in Education, Graduate School
of Education, University of Bristol.*

***Sherman Dorn**, Professor, College of Education, University
of South Florida.*

17:00 **Cash Bar Reception**

Saturday, January 30

09:00 – 10:30 **PANEL**

Continuous improvement or bureaucratic continua?

Underpinning any quality assurance initiative (one hopes) is an assumption that the resources devoted to the task of measuring a particular enterprise will stimulate a greater return than would be the case if comparable resources were simply added to the enterprise, itself. Whether or not this article of faith is warranted in higher education is open to question. Certainly, enormous amounts of time and energy are invested in assessment exercises by faculty members and administrators alike and entire administrative lines are devoted to such activities. Additionally, there is a sense in which assessment measures push institutional leaders to substitute measurement for judgment. This session explores the tension between the bureaucratic processes involved in the assessment of higher education and the professional lives of academics.

***Deborah Poff**, President and Vice-Chancellor, Brandon
University.*

***F. King Alexander**, President, California State University,
Long Beach.*

10:30 – 10:45 **Refreshment break**

10:45 – 12:15 **PANEL**

Unmetrical metrics: problematic quantification in academic life

Efforts to assess quality, establish benchmarks, or compare institutions, necessarily, imply the existence of meaningful measures to serve such purposes. The appropriateness and relevance of such measures can, however, generate considerable controversy, especially when considered in the light of more "qualitative" assumptions about the role and functioning of the academy. This session will address the [in]appropriateness of academic "metrics" and "measurables" at both the departmental and institutional level. How does outcomes-based assessment fare in the humanities and liberal arts? Do outcomes-based quality assurance practices fit with academia's traditional methods of recognizing and rewarding "excellence"?

***Thomas Docherty**, Professor of English and of Comparative Literature, University of Warwick.*

***James F. Pontuso**, Charles Patterson Professor of Government and Foreign Affairs, Hampden-Sydney College.*

12:15 – 13:45 **Lunch** (*on one's own*)

13:45 – 15:15 **PANEL**

Neither carrots nor sticks: professional motivation and behaviour in the Academy

For many faculty members, assessment practices constitute a departure from their typical work routine, a departure that could itself be measured. One might for instance track the amount of time spent on assessment exercises, or measure the volume of material read, or written, specifically for such processes. Less demonstrable, however, are the myriad of *unintended*, perhaps unanticipated, consequences of outcomes-based assessment practices. Do assessment initiatives influence such things as research plans, publication decisions, or the sharing of data? Are there links between assessment and grade inflation? Do assessment practices affect faculty members' career decision, professional identity, and/or morale?

***Janet Atkinson-Grosjean**, Senior Research Associate, Centre for Applied Ethics, University of British Columbia.*

***Jesús Francisco Galaz Fontes**, Professor of Education at the Faculty of Human Sciences and at the Engineering Institute, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California.*

and

***Manuel Gil-Antón**, Professor of Sociology at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City.*

15:15 – 15:30 **Refreshment break**

15:30 – 17:00 FACILITATED DISCUSSION**What is at stake for the stakeholders?**

A great deal of lip service has been paid to the notion that Higher Education must be accountable to its "stakeholders." Although the list varies, there is general agreement that these stakeholders include students, parents, faculty, administrators, board members, the business community, as well as the broader society. Of these, however, it is students and faculty members who lie at the heart of the educational project and so their myriad of issues and concerns ought to be central to any future discussions of academic quality.

***Katherine Giroux-Bougard**, National Chairperson,
Canadian Federation of Students.*

***Peter H. Sawchuk**, Associate Professor, Department of
Sociology & Equity Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for
Studies in Education.*

***Penni Stewart**, President of the Canadian Association of
University Teachers. Associate Professor of Sociology, York
University.*

17:00 - 17:15 Break**17:15 – 18:30 OPTIONAL PLENARY DISCUSSION****Views from the Ground**

The language of outcomes assessment is now commonplace in the Academy. This new accountability framework manifests itself in a wide variety of local assumptions and policies. This session provides an opportunity to discuss campus-specific issues and experiences as they relate to the implementation of outcomes-based assessment practices in particular institutional contexts. No speakers have been scheduled for this session: rather it will be an opportunity for participants to share local experiences with outcomes-based assessment.

18:30 Recess

Sunday, January 31**9:00 – 12:15 FACILITATED PLENARY DISCUSSION****Zen and the art of university maintenance**

Contemporary approaches to ensuring academic "quality" may be criticized on the one hand for being counterproductively intrusive and, on the other hand, for ignoring important components of the higher education enterprise. How might an optimal system of assessment -- one entirely appropriate to higher education -- look? What would we discard, what would we retain, and what might we borrow in making our systems more effective? How do we ensure that our institutions are sufficiently transparent and accountable? How might assessment practices address such things as the climate for academic freedom and collegial governance, the environmental impact of our institutions, equity concerns, the promotion of basic research, and issues of academic integrity?

***Gary Rhoades**, General Secretary, American Association of University Professors (on leave as a Professor of Higher Education, Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona).*

***James Turk**, Executive Director, Canadian Association of University Teachers.*

12:15 Adjournment