

Metaphors Faculty Use to Describe Assessment

Results from the Faculty Survey of Assessment Culture

Faculty were asked to "please provide any metaphors you have heard used to describe your institution's culture of assessment." A total of 619 out of 852 faculty offered open ended responses out of the 3,292 faculty invited from 39 institutions. Data were analyzed using classical content analysis methods. The following categories are offered as a means of representing faculty concepts of assessment culture. Please note that comments will not add up to 619 as most faculty offered multiple metaphors or a few metaphors could be categorized in two themes. A total of 1,149 discrete metaphors were offered. The average number of metaphors offered was 3.31 per participant.

Vehement Metaphors

(A.K.A. Curse words)

"Assessment on this campus is bullshit!" ($n= 32$)

"You can't spell assessment without spelling asses." ($n= 5$)

"Its the A-word on campus" ($n= 31$)

"A clusterf___" ($n=9$)

Recognition of assessment as a "pile of deification" ($n= 34$)

Burden and Pressure Metaphors

Burden ($n= 29$)

Yoke ($n= 22$)

Constant pressure ($n= 21$)

Constant improvement leads to constant pressure ($n= 3$)

Always present/ omnipresent pressure ($n= 6$)

A chore ($n= 4$)

Motion Metaphors

On track ($n= 19$)

Off track ($n= 24$)

Train or locomotive metaphors ($n= 14$)

Train wreck/ derailed ($n= 7$)

Can't stop this train ($n= 7$)

Two steps forward, one step back ($n= 2$)

Building a bus/plane while driving/flying it ($n= 6$)

Running off road/ crashing ($n= 6$)

Driving a car ($n= 7$)

Bouncing around whichever way the wind blows ($n= 3$)

Tangible Item Metaphors

Hollow/ empty vessel ($n= 6$)

Basket for carrying eggs [or not] ($n= 3$)

Gears/ cogs ($n= 9$)

Toolbox ($n= 15$)

Tool ($n= 17$)

Hats that are worn ($n= 7$)

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Oil in a machine ($n= 4$)
The Titanic ($n= 2$)
Red Tape ($n= 6$)
Smoke and Mirrors ($n= 3$)
Accreditation as a "stick" used to beat or threaten people to do assessment ($n= 9$)

Movie References

Yoda/Jedi's from Star Wars ($n= 2$)
Indiana Jones running from the rolling ball and the angry natives ($n= 4$)

Traditional or Mythological Metaphors

($n=9$)
Potemkin ($n=2$)
Byzantine Empire ($n= 3$)
Plato's cave ($n= 2$)
Dog and pony show ($n= 5$)
Dotting i's and crossing t's ($n= 7$)
Carrot and stick ($n= 23$)
An albatross around learning's neck ($n= 3$)

Agriculture Metaphors

Feeding a pig and weighing it ($n= 22$)
Fertilizer for student learning ($n= 11$)
Like feeding a horse (and what comes after that) ($n= 3$)
Placing the cart before the horse ($n= 5$)

Technology Metaphors

Dashboard ($n= 6$)
Scorecard ($n= 8$)
Data collection software becomes the prominent symbol of assessment on campus ($n= 9$)

Meaning and Value Metaphors

Buy in ($n= 31$)
Done to get accreditors "off our backs" ($n= 7$)
Empty gesture ($n= 3$)
Lacks teeth ($n= 9$)
Buzzword ($n= 14$)
Fad ($n= 12$)
Waste of time ($n= 11$)
Joke ($n= 19$)

Bureaucratic Metaphors

Top heavy/ Too many administrators ($n= 9$)
"Too many chefs" ($n= 5$)
"Too many chiefs and not enough Indians" ($n= 3$)
Bean counting ($n= 7$)
Cycle ($n= 23$)
Job security for administrators ($n= 19$)

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Process Metaphors

Quality Enhancement Plan ($n= 16$)
Continuous Improvement Plan ($n= 13$)
Lockstep process/ process without flexibility ($n= 9$)
Popularity Contest ($n= 3$)

Torture or Espionage Metaphors

Torture ($n= 19$)
Brainwashing ($n= 12$)
Waterboarding with data ($n= 12$)
Shackled/ Weighed down ($n= 9$)
Done by brute force/ any means necessary ($n= 7$)
Facism/ Led by facists ($n= 6$)
Locked in a cage/jail ($n= 5$)
Spying ($n= 11$)
Monitoring ($n= 9$)
Big brother is watching ($n= 9$)
Being held hostage ($n= 12$)

Metaphors of Futility and Ridicule

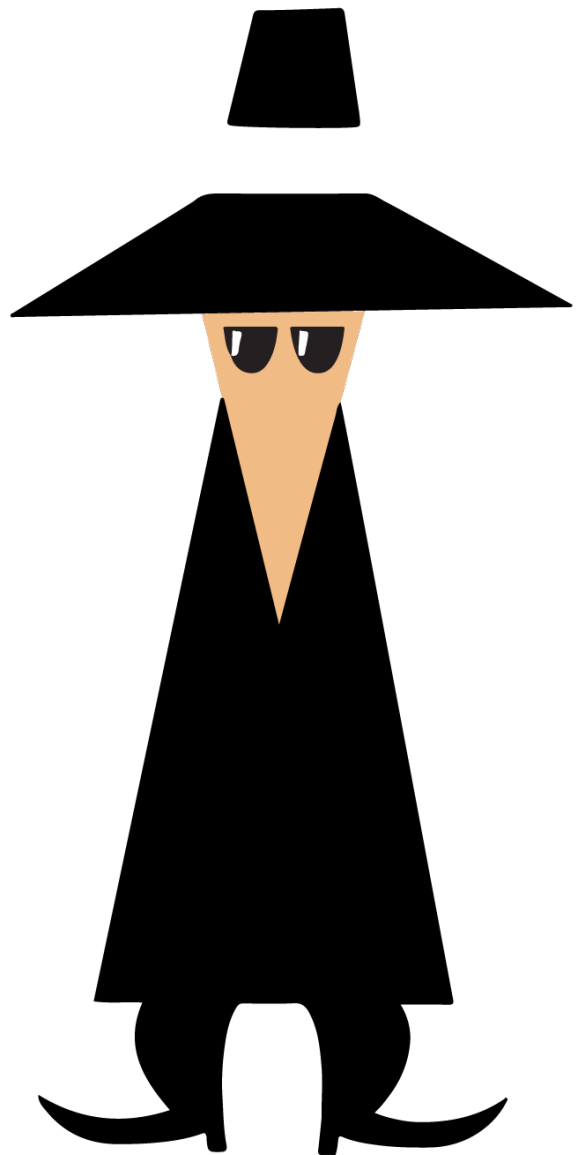
Pushing a rope ($n= 2$)
Bee watcher watching ($n= 1$)
Brick walls/ Hitting your head against a brick wall ($n= 9$)
Jumping through hoops ($n= 24$)
Tail wagging the dog ($n= 30$)
Herding cats ($n= 21$)
The emperor has no clothes ($n= 31$)
Blind leading the blind ($n= 5$)

Health, Wellness, or Medical Metaphors

"Bitter pill we must take" ($n= 9$)
Root canal ($n= 9$)
Pulling teeth ($n= 11$)
Like brushing your teeth ($n= 2$)
Sick ($n= 2$)
Healthy ($n= 5$)

Pain Metaphors

Easier to pluck out your eyeball ($n= 1$)
Pain in various body parts and to varying degrees ($n= 14$)
Painful ($n= 12$)
Thorn in our sides ($n= 6$)



Requirement Metaphors

Required to do it ($n= 5$)
External requirement ($n= 7$)
Like taxes/ Like death and taxes ($n= 9$)
Necessary evil ($n= 12$)
Do it, or else ($n= 8$)
No college left behind ($n= 3$)

Fad Metaphors

Fad ($n= 6$)
Today's trend ($n= 18$)
Jargon/ form de jure ($n= 2$)
Flavor of the month ($n= 6$)
"Its not going away." ($n= 11$)

Easiness metaphors

Easy as pie ($n= 9$)
"Just do it." ($n= 6$)
"All the accreditors want is X, Y, or Z" ($n= 11$) (Emphasis on all)
"Though it would be easy...turned out not to be" ($n= 8$)

Country or regime metaphors

Russia, Soviet Union ($n= 6$)
Putin's regime ($n= 4$) (Specific to Putin, not just Russia or U.S.S.R.)
Radical Islam ($n= 7$)
Nazi Germany ($n= 14$)

