

Outcomes Assessment for Law Schools

By Gregory S. Munro. Spokane, WA: Institute for Law School Teaching (2000), 246 pages, ISBN: 0967990106.

Greg Munro came to the assessments game early, when he published *Outcomes Assessment for Law Schools* in 2000. Reading his book today, in 2017, Munro's explanation of and subsequent argument for implementation of outcomes assessment in law schools, seems outdated and repetitive. But Munro's book predates the creation of the ABA's Special Committee on Output Measures by seven years and the ABA's adoption of standards requiring law schools to create learning objectives and assessment measures by fourteen years. The book, then, must be read within its historical context, as a pioneer for law school assessment.

Those familiar with (or without the time to become familiar with) assessment generally and the reasons for its adoption should skip the first five chapters. Those who will be part of their law school's learning outcomes and assessment committees should focus on chapters six and seven, which describe what a general law school assessment program should contain. Those who teach should consider reading the meat of Munro's book in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters, when he finally narrows his focus to specific assessment methods and how to design and implement an assessment-focused course.

Although these three meaty chapters contain much good, general information, they lack specificity and sufficient detail to implement an assessment program simply by referring to those pages. Of course, this partially can be explained by the fact that Munro himself pioneered the assessment movement in law schools and himself acknowledges that, at the time of publication, "assessment scholarship is almost nonexistent in the legal academy." (p. 7). Munro thus relies heavily on assessment scholarship from other realms, and of necessity makes generalizations. For example, Chapter 9, on means of assessment, provides eleven different possible assessments in just seventeen pages—five of which are taken up with an even broader discussion of assessment methodology. That leaves one page per assessment, not nearly the amount needed to fully explain how the assessment works and should be implemented.

Additionally, Munro's eleven suggestions for assessment in the classroom effectively boil down to one: hire an independent facilitator to discuss with students their perceptions of the class and report those findings back to the instructor. While student feedback comprises a critical aspect of classroom assessment, the reality of finding the money and time for Munro's suggestions effectively negate this chapter as useful to most teachers.

To get the most out of this book as a teacher, read Chapter 10, on Course Design and Instruction. This chapter provides several suggestions for professors to incorporate into their courses, such as collaborative learning, student involvement, explicit criteria, and varied forms of assessment. Then browse through the Appendices, which provide examples of much of what Munro discusses throughout the book and give much meat to the generalizations in the book.

RIPS-SIS Legal Research Text Review

For those hoping for guidance on implementing the new ABA standards, this book will disappoint. Others who wish to read one of the first analyses of law school outcomes assessment may enjoy this book for its historical context and pioneering ideas.

Reviewed by Taryn Marks, Faculty Services & Reference Librarian, University of Florida Legal Information Center, in 2017.