



Assessment Unbound 2.0

From Compliance Theater to Faculty-Centered Improvement in an Uncertain Era

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HIGHER EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Today's Journey

What We'll Cover Together

1

Part I

Diagnose the Problem

2

Part II

Reframe the System

3

Part III

Design for Reality

4

Close + Q&A

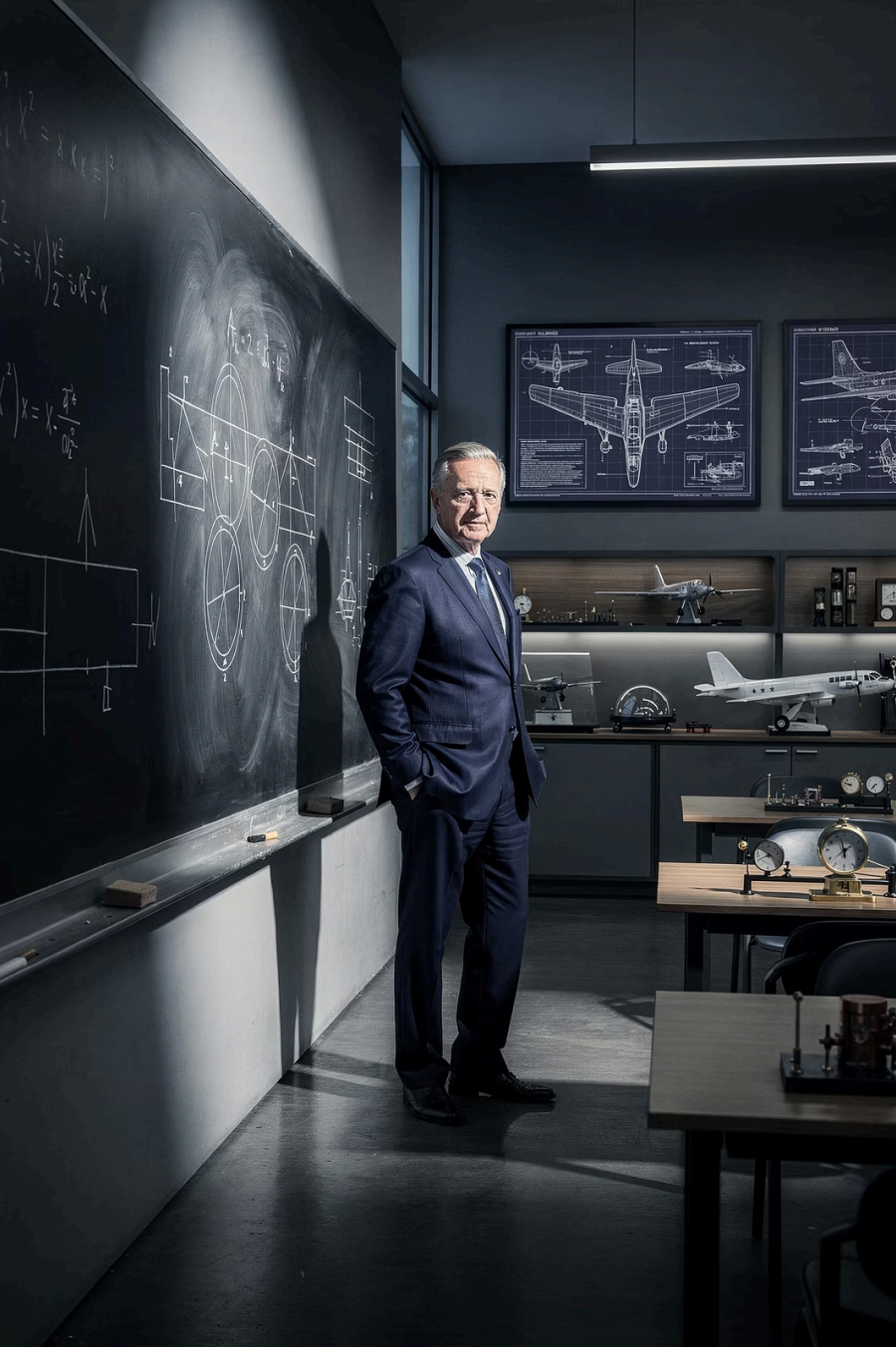
Challenge & Discussion

This session is designed to be uncomfortable in useful ways. We'll name what's broken, explain why it persists, and leave with concrete moves to build something better.

PART I — DIAGNOSIS

What's Broken and Why

Most assessment in higher education does not improve learning. It proves learning. It documents learning. It satisfies accreditation requirements. But it rarely changes what happens in the classroom on Monday morning.



Let's Start With Something We Don't Usually Say Out Loud

"The gap between doing assessment and improving learning... that's where we're going to spend our time today."

Faculty care. Assessment professionals are trying. The problem isn't effort or intention — it's that we built a system optimized for something else entirely.

A Critical Question

How Many of You Can Point to a Moment Where Assessment Directly Changed How a Course Was Taught?

What We Hope Assessment Does

Generates evidence that flows naturally into instructional decisions — changing syllabi, redesigning assignments, and shifting pedagogical approaches.

What Assessment Often Does Instead

Produces documentation that satisfies external reviewers, gets filed in a shared drive, and has little to no connection to what happens in the next semester's course.

Why This Moment Is Different

Higher education is not just under pressure — it is under continuous, multidirectional evaluation. Every pressure point converges on one demand: **make learning visible**.



Enrollment

Show outcomes or lose students to institutions that do.



Politics

Show value or lose legitimacy — and potentially funding.



AI

Show authenticity or lose trust in credentials and work products.



Students

Show relevance or lose engagement to competing alternatives.

Evidence Is Not the Same as Improvement

"We've built systems that are very good at showing the flight path... but not at helping the pilot adjust mid-flight."

When institutions feel pressure to make something visible, they build systems that produce evidence. The impulse is understandable. But a record of what happened is not the same as the capacity to change what happens next.



THE CORE PROBLEM

A Structural Disconnect Built Into the Design

Institutional Assessment Lives Here

- Program-level aggregation
- Periodic reporting cycles
- Designed for external audiences
- Backward-looking summaries

Faculty Reality Lives Here

- Course- and section-specific
- Continuous and immediate
- Designed for teaching decisions
- Forward-looking and iterative

⚠ We are sampling student learning at the program level... while faculty are living it in full at the course level. These two systems rarely speak to each other.

Two Systems Asking Completely Different Questions

What Faculty Are Asking

"Why didn't students understand this concept in week 3?" and
"What should I actually change next semester to fix this?"

What Assessment Systems Are Asking

"Did students meet Outcome 2 at 80% or higher?" and "Can
we document that this program satisfies Standard 4.3?"

Those are not the same questions. When we conflate them — or force one system to answer both — we lose the nuance, the instructional insight, and the connection between evidence and action.



Aggregate Nuance

Lose Insight

Disconnect Action

Each stage compounds the last. By the time data reaches a faculty member, it has been transformed into something too abstract to act on. The result: a system that explains learning after the fact instead of shaping it while it's happening.



PART I — KEY CONCEPT

Compliance Theater

"We have built systems where the primary outcome is documentation."

When external pressure meets structural misalignment, something very specific emerges: work that looks like assessment but doesn't function like improvement.

What Compliance Theater Looks Like in Practice

The Annual Report

Written once a year, filed with the assessment office, and never revisited. Disconnected from any teaching decision.

Mapped but Not Discussed

Outcomes mapped across the curriculum in spreadsheets that no faculty member uses when designing a syllabus.

Retroactive Loop-Closing

"Closing the loop" written after the fact — a narrative constructed to satisfy the template rather than document real change.

❏ To be fair — this system works. It produces defensible reports and satisfies external expectations. It just doesn't reliably improve learning.

PART II — REFRAME

Why Faculty Behavior Makes Perfect Sense

Before we can redesign the system, we have to stop misdiagnosing the problem. Faculty resistance is the wrong frame. What we're seeing is rational decision-making in a constrained environment.



Rational Choice Theory: The Real Reason Faculty Disengage

Faculty are not resistant to improvement. They are making logical decisions within systems that consistently reward other behaviors. Understanding that distinction changes everything about how we design for change.

"Given those conditions, prioritizing proving over improving is not resistance... it's rational behavior."

The Faculty Decision Filter

Every new initiative — including assessment — gets evaluated through the same four questions. Before any faculty member opens an assessment template, this calculation is already happening.

1

Time Cost

How much time will this actually take, on top of everything else I'm already doing?

2

Teaching Value

Will this meaningfully help me teach better, or is it administrative overhead dressed up as professional development?

3

Career Impact

Will engaging with this help my career — or is it invisible work that doesn't count toward promotion or tenure?

4

Consequences of Opting Out

What actually happens if I don't engage? If the answer is "nothing," the decision is already made.

Why "Proving" Wins Every Time Under Current Conditions

→ Incentives Favor Research

Promotion and tenure systems reward publications and measurable scholarly outputs — not assessment innovation or teaching improvement documentation.

→ Proving Is Faster

Standardized compliance documentation is quicker to produce and easier to delegate than meaningful, reflective inquiry into teaching effectiveness.

→ Innovation Carries Risk

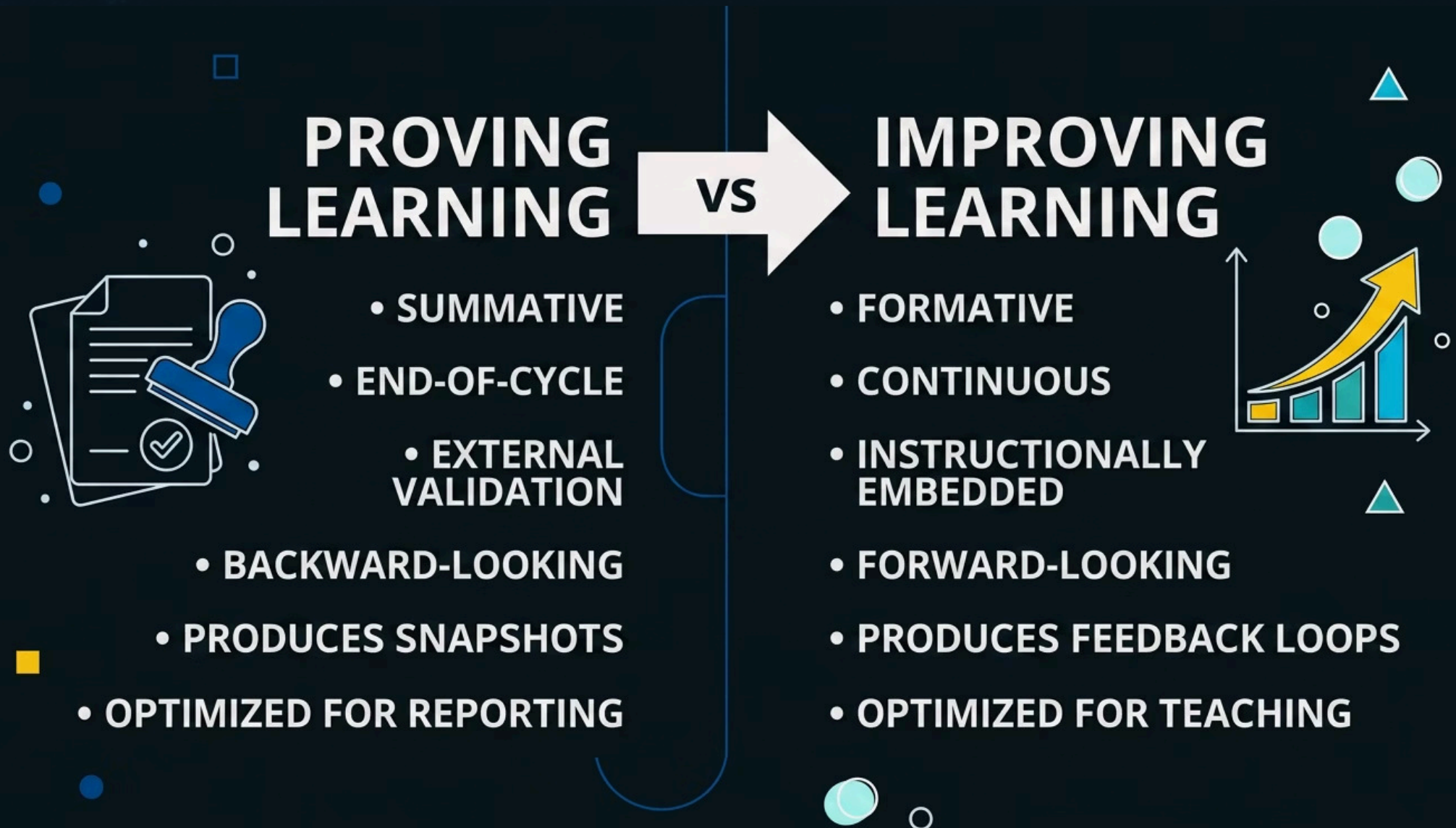
Experimenting with pedagogy can negatively affect student evaluations — the one metric that does influence career outcomes.

→ We Reward What's Measurable

Institutional culture consistently rewards what can be counted and reported, not what is meaningful but harder to quantify.

Proving vs. Improving: The Philosophical Core

This entire conversation ultimately comes down to one distinction. Both have value — but only one reliably changes what happens in the classroom.



What Happens When Proving Dominates

Impact on Faculty

- Teaching narrows toward what can be measured
- Pedagogical innovation declines
- Feedback loops become delayed or absent
- Assessment becomes a burden, not a tool

Impact on Students

- Reduced development of critical thinking
- Surface-level learning strategies dominate
- Transactional mindset toward education
- Better at passing assessments, not at learning

⊗ "Students become better at passing assessments... not better at learning." This is the hidden cost of a system optimized for evidence production over instructional growth.

PART III — DESIGN

Building Systems Faculty Would Actually Choose

If faculty behavior is rational and proving currently dominates, the real question becomes structural: how do we redesign the system so that improving learning becomes the path of least resistance?



Stop Treating Faculty as a Single Group

"We cannot design effective assessment systems until we stop treating faculty as a single group."

A one-size-fits-all approach to assessment engagement is a design failure before it starts. Effective systems differentiate — meeting faculty where they actually are, not where we wish they were.

The Faculty Engagement Typology

Two axes define the landscape: **time availability** and **willingness to engage**. Understanding where your faculty live on this matrix determines which strategies will actually work.

Time-Strapped Skeptic

Overloaded and burned out. Views assessment as yet another add-on. **Don't try to persuade — reduce friction.** Respect their time and make engagement simple.

Willing Explorer

Curious and motivated but time-constrained. Your early adopters — but only if you remove barriers and make the first step easy to take.

Cautious Contemplator

Has capacity but lacks belief. Waiting for proof that this is real and worth their effort. Show them evidence from peers they trust.

Assessment Advocate

Engaged and influential. Your greatest cultural asset — but only if you empower them with visibility, resources, and institutional backing.

Design Principle: If Your System Doesn't Differentiate, It Will Disengage



Concrete Move A

Start With Pilots, Not Programs

Why Pilots Work

Low stakes. High learning. Pilots create the evidence base that cautious faculty need and the success stories that build institutional momentum.

What Makes a Good Pilot

- Embedded directly in existing courses — no new infrastructure
- Includes diverse faculty types to test across contexts
- Explicitly designed to learn what works, not to prove success
- Short enough to produce usable data within one semester

✔ "The goal is not to prove success. The goal is to learn what works." That reframe changes how faculty enter the work — and how they sustain it.

Concrete Move B

Build the Leadership Triad

Sustainable assessment improvement requires three roles working in concert. Missing any one creates a structural vulnerability that initiative fatigue will eventually exploit.



Faculty Champion

Credibility with peers. Willing to model vulnerability. Speaks the language of teaching, not administration.



Assessment Expert

Capability to design instruments, interpret data, and translate evidence into instructional insight faculty can use.



Administrative Support

Cover and resources. Protects the work from institutional churn, provides time, and signals that this matters beyond the assessment office.

Concrete Move C

Redesign Reporting From Compliance to Reflection

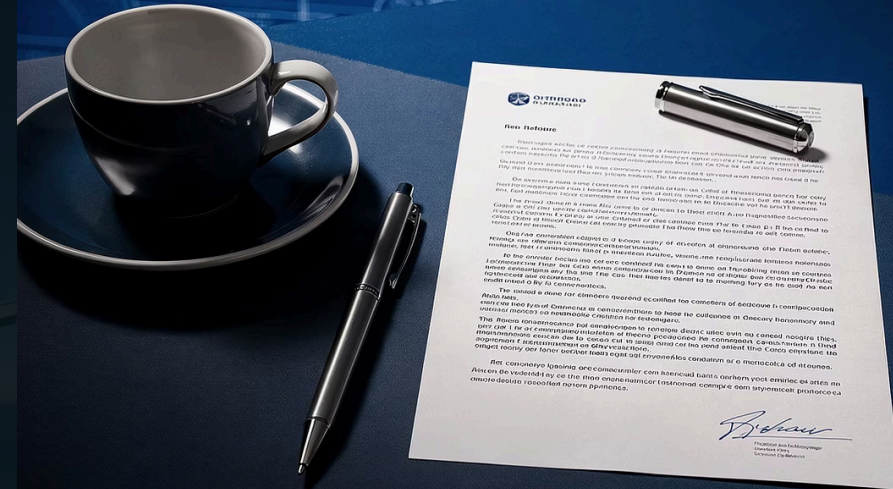
The Old Model

- Long, template-driven forms
- Compliance language and checkboxes
- Written to satisfy reviewers, not to inform teaching
- Retrospective documentation of what was done

The New Model: A 1-Page Reflective Narrative

- What did students genuinely struggle with?
- What specific change did you make in response?
- What happened next — what did you observe?

i "If reporting feels like paperwork, it will be treated like paperwork."
The format of the report sends a signal about what you actually value.



Concrete Move D

Build Feedback Infrastructure That's Actually Usable

Faculty don't need more data. They need **usable data** — delivered at the right moment, in the right format, connected to decisions they're already making.

01

Leverage LMS Insights

Surface engagement patterns, assignment completion trends, and early warning signals already available in existing course management systems.

02

Enable Real-Time Data Access

Move from annual reporting to dashboards that faculty can consult mid-semester — when there's still time to act on what they see.

03

Simplify Outcome Tagging

Make connecting assignments to outcomes a one-click action within existing workflows — not a separate administrative step that adds time.

Concrete Move E

Align Incentives — Improvement Cannot Depend on Goodwill Alone

Where Incentive Alignment Can Happen

- **Recognition:** Public acknowledgment of faculty who engage meaningfully with assessment improvement
- **Promotion criteria:** Explicitly include teaching inquiry and assessment innovation in review documents
- **Visibility:** Showcase evidence-informed teaching changes in department meetings and institutional communications
- **Protected time:** Build assessment work into course releases or professional development allocations

The Core Principle

Systems that rely solely on individual motivation are fragile. Durable change requires structural alignment between what institutions say they value and what they actually reward.

This Doesn't Conflict With Accreditation — It Strengthens It

The Old Framing

"Here is our data. These numbers meet the standard. Please renew our accreditation."

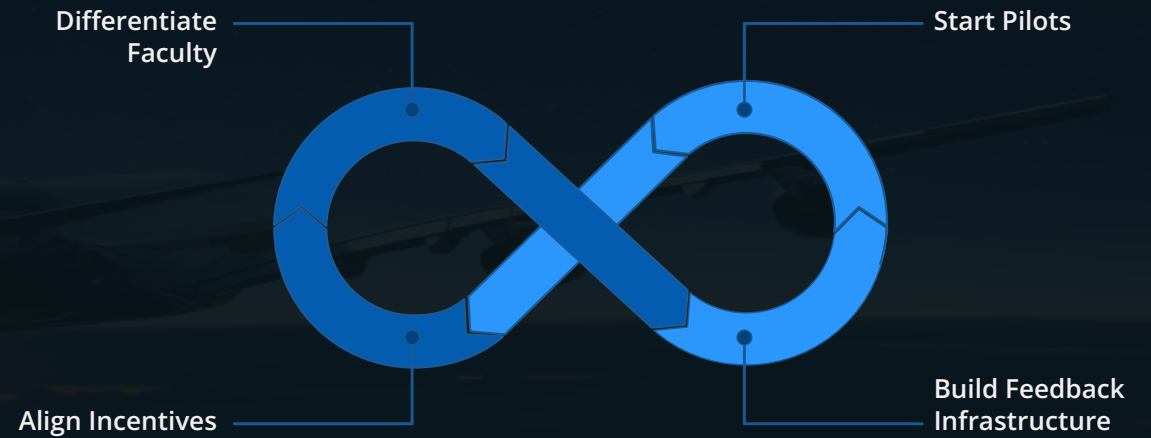
The Better Framing

"Here is evidence. Here is how that evidence led to a specific change. Here is what happened in student learning as a result."

- ✔ "Improvement is the most credible form of compliance." Accreditors are not looking for perfect scores — they are looking for evidence of a functioning improvement culture. That's exactly what this approach produces.



From Compliance to Culture: What the Full System Looks Like



None of these moves works in isolation. Together, they shift the institutional default from compliance documentation to genuine learning improvement — one department, one course, one honest conversation at a time.

CLOSING

The Better Question

We have spent years asking how to get faculty to comply with assessment. That question has produced compliance theater. It's time to ask something different.

"What would assessment look like if faculty actually chose to engage with it?"

If assessment is extra work, it will always lose.

It will compete with teaching, research, and service — and finish last every time.

If assessment is the work, it becomes unavoidable.

Embedded in courses, connected to teaching decisions, it stops feeling like overhead and starts feeling like professional practice.

Build Systems That Make Better Teaching Inevitable.

Don't build systems faculty have to survive. Build systems they would choose — because those systems make them better at the work they already care deeply about.



Q&A — Questions Worth Sitting With

These are the questions most likely to generate the most productive conversation. There are no easy answers — but there are good starting points.

1

Where Should Institutions Start?

Identify one department with a willing faculty champion and a sympathetic chair. Design a one-semester embedded pilot. Document honestly — including what doesn't work. Use that story to build the next one.

2

How Do You Shift Incentives Realistically?

Start with visibility before policy. Recognize early adopters publicly. Then work with faculty governance to include teaching inquiry in promotion criteria. Policy follows culture — but culture needs a nudge.

3

What's the Smallest Change That Matters?

Replace one compliance report with a one-page reflective narrative. Ask three questions: What did students struggle with? What did you change? What happened? That single shift — at scale — transforms the system.