

Forget GPAs And Test Scores: Performance Assessment Can Predict Who Gets Accepted and Who Gets Hired

MAR 1, 2018

[Aviva Legatt](#), CONTRIBUTOR *cover issues in higher education that affect millennials*. Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

Can you imagine a world where your GPA and test scores don't matter in admissions? There's a seismic shift at leading universities that signals a move in this direction.

This shift is called performance assessments, a method of evaluation that emphasizes demonstrated learning and acquired skills.

Rubrics for evaluating performance are already in place at leading institutions like University of Michigan Ross School of Business and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). In addition, performance-based assessments are supported through policy initiatives in 17 states and in more than 100 countries.

These facts are according to [a report published by the Learning Policy Institute \(LPI\)](#) in January 2018. President of the LPI, Linda Darling-Hammond, says that the spread of performance assessments is due to the demand for "higher-order thinking and complex communication" skills and the need to prepare students "for the non-routine nature of work."

Darling-Hammond, who is also a Stanford Professor Emeritus and former team lead campaign advisor to Barack Obama, says that enhancing the role of performance assessments has potential to enhance diversity on campus and beyond. Moving away from traditional measures of student learning, GPA and test scores, will allow a wider swath of applicants to stand out.

Darling-Hammond points out that over 900 higher education institutions now have test-optional admissions. The move away from numbers-focused evaluation shows that test scores neither predict success nor demonstrate knowledge.

This also means that with exceptional experience, such as starting a successful business or overcoming adversity, you may be able to stand out despite having lower scores. Blaire Moody Rideout, University of Michigan Ross's Director of Admissions, who oversees evaluation and selection, says unequivocally that performance-based materials are far more helpful to evaluating students than other materials because they provide "a unique presentation of self that demonstrates learning."

In addition to being more helpful in applicant evaluation, infusing performance-based activities into traditional curricula may better prepare industry hires. Darling-Hammond points to The National Academies Foundation (NAF) as one avenue for top companies to find new talent. The NAF uses university-industry partnerships to roll out "industry-specific curricula and work-based learning experience," preparing the future workforce with requisite skills.

The move toward performance assessments also mirrors the hiring practices of leading companies like design thinking firm IDEO and Google. According to the official company blog, when applying to work at IDEO, "a standard-issue résumé and cover letter won't turn heads." Instead, candidates have put together video portraits, custom apps or "in one case, brought turntables connected to a dancing robot for an impromptu DJ set." This clue on what IDEO appreciates in applicants shows their desire to hire those who can perform.

In a similar vein, Google has moved away from using brain-teaser questions in interviews and toward performance-based evaluation. In Google's interviews with engineers, candidates complete specific coding tasks

and activities like improving an algorithm and coding in their favorite programming language. Like IDEO, Google's hiring process emphasizes tasks that can predict on-the-job performance.

In addition to supporting the pipeline for traditional hires, the advent of performance assessments across higher education and industry presents a market opportunity for tech entrepreneurs. Darling-Hammond notes that new startups are popping up in response to the demand for performance assessments, developing platforms to "capture the complexities" of applicant work.

Altogether, performance-based evaluation provides a new opportunity for applicants to stand out when applying for universities and to jobs. In addition, higher education institutions and companies that use performance assessments are likely to have a more accurate measure of a person's capabilities. There is also a market opportunity for young entrepreneurs to capitalize on the proliferation of performance assessments by providing new media platforms that enable applicants to demonstrate their history of impact and learning.