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Changing the Culture of Assessment at UNC through Program-Level Assessment

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Changing the Culture of Assessment at UNC through Program-Level Assessment

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Institutional Context

- An approaching external accreditation motivated the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) to examine and improve its assessment practices.
- Working with the University Assessment Council, the Director of Assessment appointed six faculty members (one from each college) to help improve academic, program-level assessment practices.
- The Faculty Assessment Fellows conducted listening tours with faculty members to identify needs and challenges associated with program-level assessment.
- From the listening tour, the Faculty Assessment Fellows identified the following needs and challenges:
 1. Faculty needed to increase their knowledge and skills to conduct effective program-level assessment.
 2. Faculty felt that they did not have time to conduct program-level assessment.
 3. Faculty had a negative attitude toward assessment.
- To address the needs and challenges identified through the listening tours, we developed the Assessment Leadership Institute (ALI).

Assessment Leadership Institute

- The Assessment Leadership Institute (ALI) was designed as a two-year professional development program focused on improving faculty knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
- The Year 1 and Year 2 activities are outlined in Table 1. Faculty Assessment Fellows developed and taught seven workshops based on the assessment cycle.
- The model was created following best practices for professional development, including teams, long-term engagement, and embedded within faculty work. Key components of the Institute are in Table 2.
- 25 programs and 70 faculty have completed the Assessment Leadership Institute.

Table 1. Description of ALI Activities.

Year	Participant Activities
Year 1	Participants attend the following 2-hour workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 1: Introduction to Assessment and Institute • Workshop 2: Program Mission Statement • Workshop 3: Program Student Learning Outcomes • Workshop 4: Curriculum Mapping • Workshop 5: Assessment Methods and Performance Criteria • Workshop 6: Data Collection • Workshop 7: Data Analysis and Using Results
Year 2	Participants complete three tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise/create program-level assessment plan and curriculum map • Complete program-level assessment project • Present assessment project at annual institutional Assessment Fair

Table 2. Description of Key ALI Components.

Component	Component Description
Developed by faculty for faculty	Faculty Assessment Fellows created the program, taught the workshops, and mentored the participants.
Assessment for improvement	The importance of understanding student learning as a way to improve teaching and the program was emphasized at each workshop.
Faculty teams	Participating academic programs assigned at least two faculty members as a team to attend all workshops and follow-up activities.
Homework and projects	Each workshop had required homework that faculty teams completed by collaborating with other faculty members and students in their program. Each faculty team also created/revise an assessment plan and conducted an assessment project.
Financial support	Each participating program received a stipend of \$2,500.
Faculty mentoring	Each faculty team was assigned a Faculty Assessment Fellow as a faculty mentor. The Faculty Assessment Fellows worked with the team during the workshops and consulted with the team outside of the workshops.

Was the Institute Effective?

We collected quantitative and qualitative data from ALI participants to investigate how participation in the ALI affected participants' attitudes, skill, and knowledge (Table 3).

Table 3. Study questions.

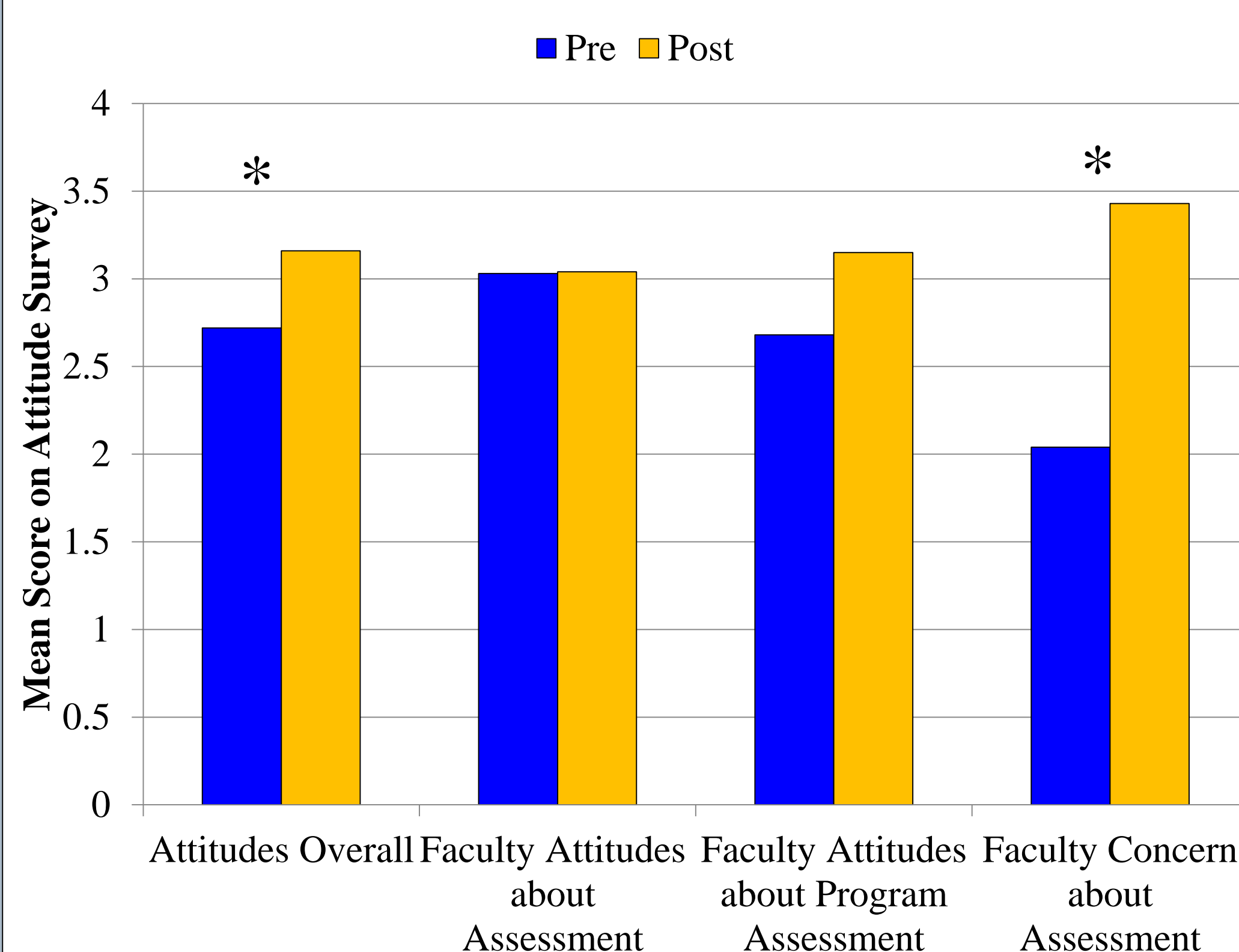
Focus	Study Question
Attitude	Is there a difference in faculty participants' attitudes before and after participation in the Assessment Leadership Institute?
Skill	What is the quality of faculty participants' assessment plans before and after participation in the Assessment Leadership Institute?
Knowledge	How do faculty participants describe the characteristics of effective student learning and assessment plans before and after participation in the Assessment Leadership Institute?

How Attitudes Changed

Faculty members have more positive attitudes toward assessment.

- Based on mean scores on an attitude survey, faculty had more positive attitudes about assessment after participation in ALI (Figure 1).
- Of particular note, faculty were less fearful or concerned that assessment 1) limits academic freedom, 2) distracts from other more important work, and 3) will be used punitively against them.
- 97% of faculty participants (36 out of 37) also reported an increase in their confidence to assess program-level student learning as a result of their participation in the ALI.

Figure 1. Pre and Post Mean Scores. N = 17. * indicates statistically significant differences between pre and post means. Four-point scale. Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, Strongly Agree = 4. Higher mean scores indicate more positive attitudes. Faculty Fear/Concern about Assessment is reverse coded; higher mean scores for this concept indicates faculty have less fear/concern about assessment.



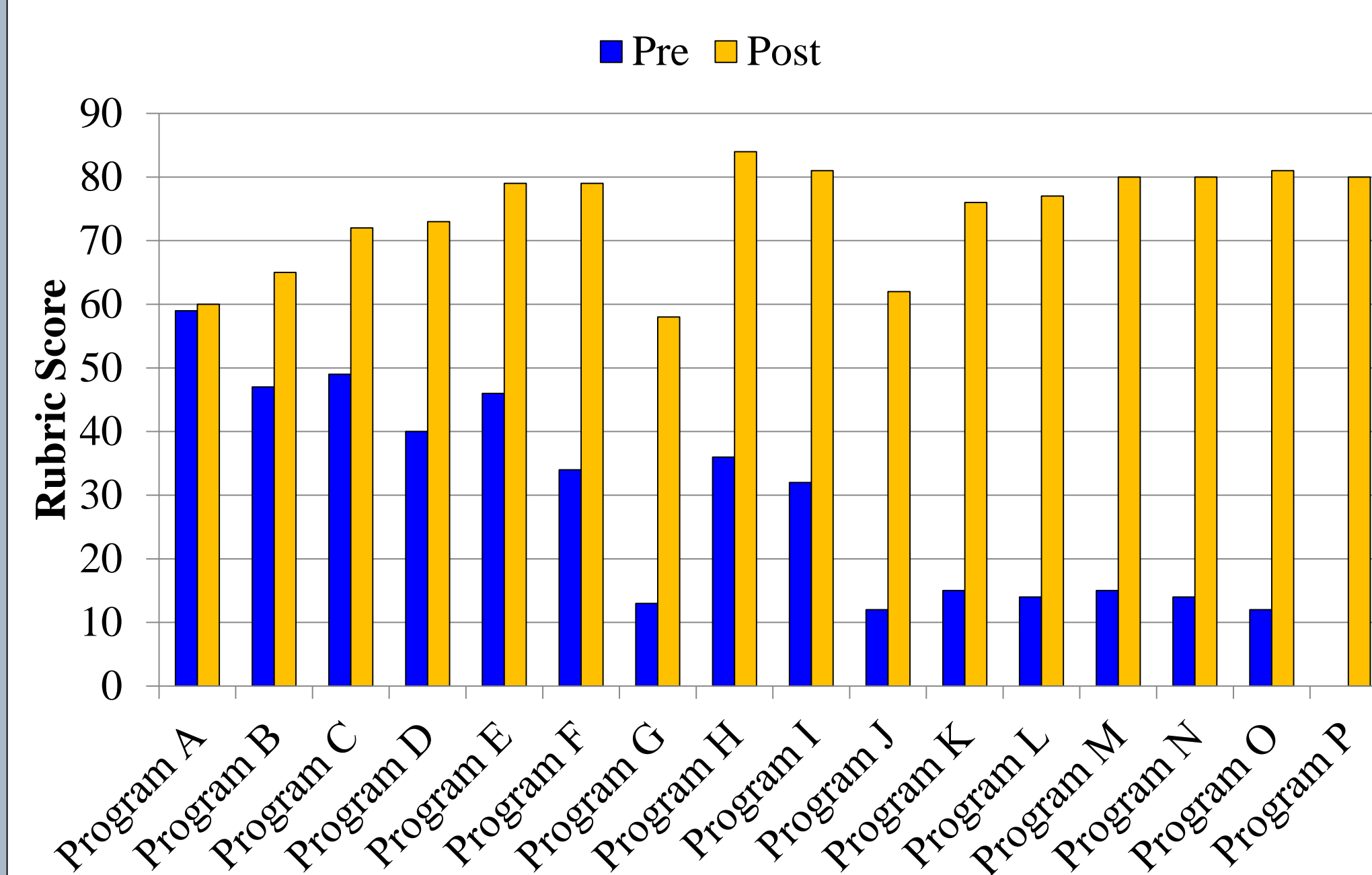
How Skills Changed

Program assessment plans improved and faculty skills in conducting assessment increased.

- 81% of faculty reported that they gained skills in leading their program's assessment activities.
- 59% of faculty reported that their participation in the ALI lead to an improvement in how their programs assessed student learning.
- 100% programs (16 out of 16) had improved assessment plans (Figure 2).

How Skills Changed (Continued)

Figure 2. Pre and post scores on rubric measuring quality of program-level assessment plans. The rubric evaluated mission, student learning outcomes, curriculum map, methods, criteria, data collection and analysis plans, and feedback loop plan. The highest rubric score possible is 84. Program P had a score of 0 on the pre.

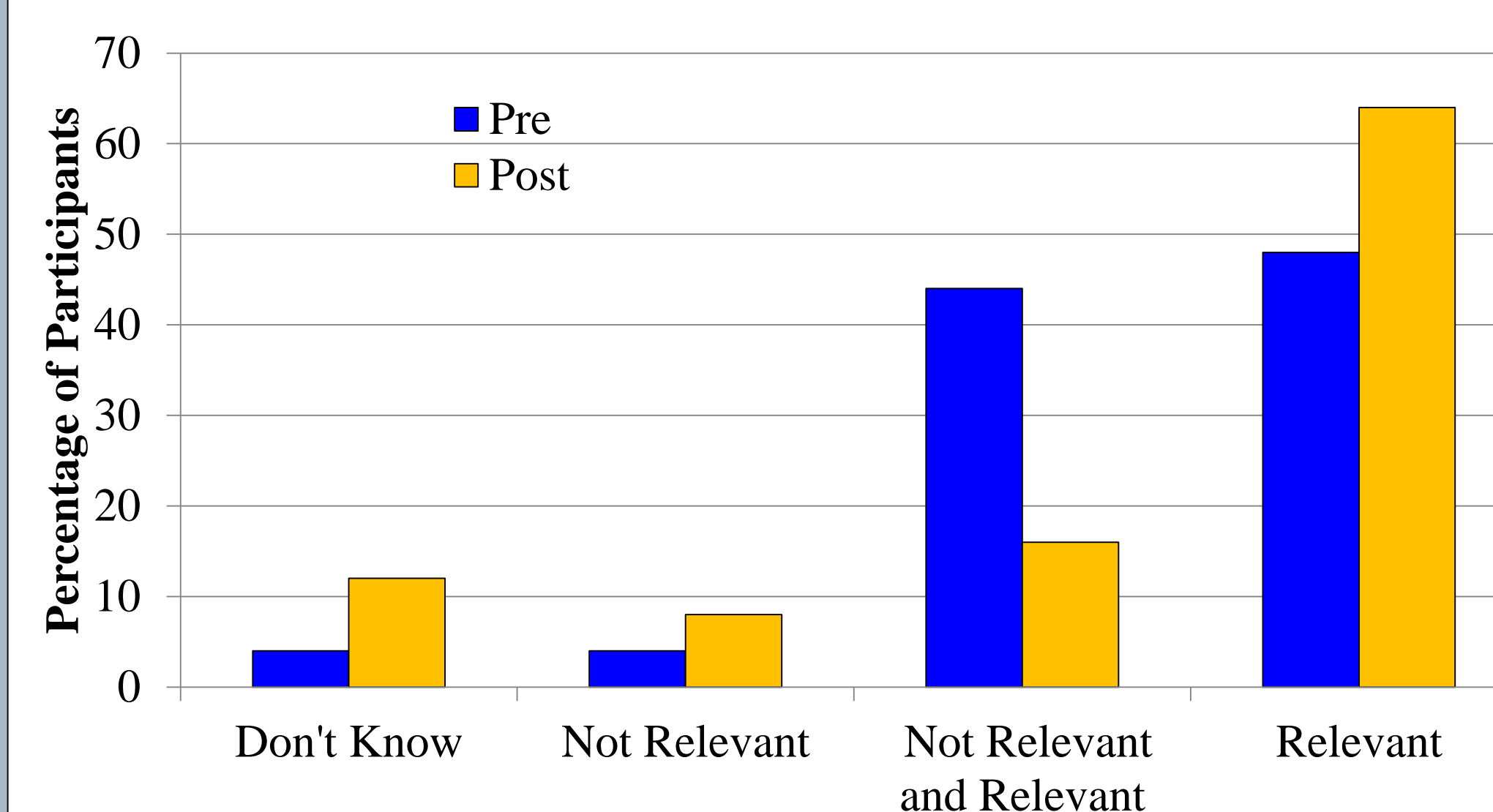


How Knowledge Changed

Faculty knowledge about assessment plans increased.

In a pretest, 48% of participants described relevant characteristics. In a posttest, 64% of participants described relevant characteristics (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of participants in rubric categories. Rubric scored participants' responses on a pretest and posttest to the question: "What are the characteristics of an effective assessment plan." N = 25.



Yes, the Institute Was Effective!

The ALI improved faculty attitudes, skills, and knowledge.

- The ALI serves as a model for other institutions aiming to improve faculty attitudes, skills, and knowledge about program-level assessment.
- Aspects of the Institute that other institutions may consider adopting:
 - Enlist faculty to develop and teach assessment workshops
 - Encourage faculty from the same program to participate in teams
 - Provide recognition or reward for participation
 - Avoid stand-alone workshops in favor of a cohesive curriculum delivered over time
 - Incorporate homework and other applied learning opportunities that encourage collaboration of faculty within programs.

More Information

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