“Assessment 101”

Presented by Committee for the Assessment Of Institutional Effectiveness (CAIE) and the Center for Teaching and Learning
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Workshop Objectives

• Provide an overview of what assessment is and describe the parts of an assessment plan
• Provide a framework for thinking about assessment in your department
• Discuss some very basic approaches to assessment
What I Won’t Do Today

• Provide a one-size-fits-all formula for assessment plans/reports
• Talk about the nuts and bolts of assessment
Outline of Material

I. Assessment---what is it, why do it?
II. Elements of an Assessment Plan
III. Types of Assessment Outcomes
IV. Closing the Loop and Other Final Thoughts
What is Assessment?

• Establishing measureable departmental goals, objectives, and outcomes

• Devising a plan to systematically measure specific outcomes

• Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the measurements you have taken
What is Assessment?

• Using data to inform departmental improvements (curricular, programmatic, procedural, etc.) → the effects of which you will then assess in the next round!

Assessment is a process!
What is Assessment *Not*?

- Grades
- Evaluation of individual employees or instructors
- Anecdotal evidence
- A list of things done by the department
- Based on a single measure of learning, productivity or effectiveness
Why do assessment?

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations

Extrinsic:

Because we said so!
(accreditators, fed and state govt., the College); often how assessment is perceived, with some justification
Why do assessment?

• Intrinsic motivators:
  – Are people who come to our offices satisfied with our services?
  – How do we make our processes more efficient?
  – Why are our students having problems learning this concept?
  – How does our students’ learning compare with those at peer institutions?
Why do assessment?

Bottom line:

We do have to do it. So, if you’re going to do it, make it about something that YOU care about!!!
Outcomes assessment plan
(from Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education, Allen.)

Mission

Goals

Objectives

Outcomes

Measurement Methods
Assessment Criteria

Results/Analysis

Action

Program Improvements

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A great quote to remember!

“An assessment plan avoids the futility of collecting volumes of random data, by clearly defining what it is we are looking for and why.”

---Robin Huntingdon Shores, Swarthmore College IR Director, *Assessment 101*
One Caution…

The language of assessment is not always consistent and there is disagreement about what terms mean; at different times, you will see the terms “goals,” “objectives,” and “outcomes” used in different ways.
“OK, so where do I start?”

With your mission statement!
- What is your *raison d'être*?
- How do you fit in with the mission of the college?
- How well does your mission statement mesh with the strategic plan?
- How well does it summarize what you think is important about your department?
Mission statements

• Can be concise or highly detailed
  - “The Women’s Studies Program is committed to providing a curriculum, co-curricular programming, community activities and program governance that are feminist. We understand feminist efforts to be those that critically analyze the conditions of women’s lives and that intentionally and consistently promote the flourishing of girls and women of all abilities, ages, classes, ethnicities, nationalities, races, religions and sexualities.”
Mission statements

• “The Agnes Scott sports medicine staff is responsible for the health and welfare of its student athletes. The staff is responsible for patient education in regard to injury prevention and injury care, along with nutrition and other matters pertaining to wellness and general health. While working in conjunction with the team physician and other allied professionals, the staff's goal is to return the athlete to participation.”

• DOC: “To provide for the efficient functioning and supportive services for the academic area of the college in a professional and personable manner.”
Goals

• Derived from the mission statement
• Ways in which you hope to fulfill your mission
• Somewhat broad and general, but less so than the mission statement
Goals

Examples:

Institutional Research:
Prioritizing data requests and streamlining data reporting.

Math:
Provide coursework that is demanding enough to prepare talented students for graduate school.
Objectives

- What you are going to do in order to accomplish the goal
- More detailed than the goal
- May be seen as sub goals---all relate back to the goal
Objectives

• Describe what students must be able to do
• Describe how processes must function
• Describes user satisfaction levels
• A good objective should also provide a target (often quantitative)
Objectives

Examples:

- “Students will understand the implications of group dynamics and what role the individual plays in the group.”
- “The college will complete a successful and timely audit, with an unqualified opinion.”
- “Physics majors will show a basic level of understanding of fundamental physics principles and perform on par with the national pool of undergraduates.”
Objectives

Needs to be something measureable/provable---something you can demonstrate with some sort of evidence!
Outcome

Some measure that tells you if you have achieved an objective

A good assessment outcome has three parts:

- A measurable action
- The conditions you plan to measure it under
- What you will measure the action against
Some Types of Outcomes

Ideally, you should have a mixture of types of outcomes…

…but, some types of outcomes are better than others, especially in the eyes of accreditors.
Classification of Types of Outcomes

Quantitative vs. Qualitative
Direct vs. Indirect
Traditional vs.
   Performance/Authentic
Objective vs. Subjective
Quantitative vs. Qualitative

- Accreditors and other outside agencies tend to prefer quantitative.
- Quantitative may involve statistical analysis (but sometimes this analysis is merely descriptive statistics).
- Qualitative analysis can be useful when you don’t know what the answer to a problem is.
- Most qualitative measures can be quantified in some way.
Quantitative vs. Qualitative Examples

Quantitative
- Surveys
- Multiple choice tests
- Evaluation of performance against a rubric

Qualitative
- Focus groups
- Open-ended survey questions
Direct vs. Indirect Outcomes

- Direct is usually the preferred method.
- Examples of direct measures are pass rates on licensing exams, portfolios of student work, and passing an audit.
- Sometimes it isn’t possible to measure something directly.
Direct vs. Indirect Outcomes

- Indirect measures can also be supplementary evidence to something you also have direct evidence for.
- Examples of indirect measures are job and graduate placement rates, grades, student self-ratings of learning, scholarships and honors.
- Satisfaction measures are usually considered indirect measures of student learning, but they may be direct measures where a desired outcome *is* client satisfaction.
Traditional vs. Performance

- These relate more to student learning outcomes
- Traditional are objective tests, essays, oral exams given in a controlled setting
- Performance are those that involve the demonstration of skills that can’t be measured in a traditional exam setting---a jury in the arts, a student portfolio, an internship or field experience, performing a procedure in a clinical program
Authentic Assessment Outcomes

If a performance measure is a real-life situation, it is called “authentic”---for example, being in a play is an authentic learning outcome in theatre.
Objective vs. Subjective

• In objective measures there a pre-determined “right” or “wrong” response, as in a multiple choice exam—don’t need an expert to evaluate results

• Subjective requires expert evaluation to assess; oral exams, juries are subjective
Don’t forget to close the loop!

- Present and analyze your results
- Discuss and reflect on your results---what happened? What does it mean?
- Next steps---could be changes to program, could be you realize the need for more focused assessment
Benchmarking

- Comparing your results against a pre-established standards (your own, or someone else’s)
- Very powerful assessment for re-accreditation efforts
Tips for Getting Started

• What is important to your department?
• What can you actually improve?
• What data are you already collecting (on campus, not just in your department) that might be useful?
Tips for Getting Started

• Start small with the resources you have
• Get student, faculty and staff input
• Find people who have enthusiasm about what you’re doing, and then use your successes to involve those that aren’t
• Balance being ambitious with being realistic about how much you can do
Reminders and Cautions

• Just because you measure something already doesn’t mean it’s a good outcome!
• Avoid having *all* your measures be just “counting” something---workshops given, number of people attending concerts---have some measures address the issue of program quality
• Don’t collect so much data that you don’t have time to analyze it
• Don’t forget to close the loop---how will what you know change what you do?
Reminders and Cautions

• Don’t try to get it perfect--just get started and be ready to be flexible
• Don’t get disappointed if you don’t always meet your benchmarks
Sources

- University of Connecticut
  *UConn Assessment Primer,*
  http://assessment.uconn.edu/primer.htm
- Virginia Assessment Group, *Assessment Primer* by Dr. Barbara Boothe, and *Administrative Assessment,* by Dr. Ephraim Schecter
- Oregon State University, *Assessment 101,* by Dr. Rebecca Sanderson
- Swarthmore University, *Assessment 101,* Dr. Robin Huntington Shores
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