



INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Assessment Glossary

A dynamic document created and modified by the Institutional Assessment Committee. In our effort to pursue excellence, it is important that the campus community have knowledge of the meanings of terms that will be used in assessing courses, programs and departments. The intent of this Assessment Glossary is, therefore, to promote consensus in the use of key terms critical to successful implementation of assessment methodologies.

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Alignment

The process of linking content and performance standards to assessment, instruction, and learning.

Analytics

The transformation of raw data into actionable information by analyzing various data points to gain insight and make informed decisions about complex issues.

Assessment

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning and service delivery. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and standards for learning and service quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. (adapted from Tom Angelo, 1995)

Assessment Measure

An assessment measure is a data source or tool used to indicate outcome attainment. While it is desirable to use multiple assessment measures over different points in time, each outcome must have at least one assessment measure. Assessment measures for programmatic outcomes may include survey data (e.g., Graduate, Employer, and Transfer Student Surveys), and other routine data reports posted on the IRPA webpage (e.g., headcounts, FTES, graduates). Assessment measures may include direct and/or indirect measures.

Assessment Tools

Assessment tools are the instruments used to gather data about student learning and service delivery. Tools can be both quantitative and qualitative.

Benchmark

A standard, usually showing the best performance possible at a certain time.

Capstone Project

A project planned and carried out by the student during the final semester as the culmination of the educational experience. These projects typically require higher-level thinking skills, problem-solving, creative thinking, and integration of learning from various sources.

Capstone Assessment

Assessment of outcomes structured into learning experiences occurring at the end of a program. The experiences involve demonstration of a comprehensive range of program outcomes through some type of product or performance. The outcomes may be those of the major and of the general education program or of the major only.

Capstone Course

An upper division class designed to help students integrate their knowledge. For assessment purposes student work needs to be evaluated by faculty members responsible for the program, not just the instructor of the course. Capstone experiences and standardized exams are sometimes part of a capstone course.

Capstone Experience

An activity for graduating seniors that is designed to demonstrate comprehensive learning in the major through some type of product or performance.

Case Studies

Detailed analyses of projects or problems that result in exemplary models.

Competitions/Meets

Experiences during which students demonstrate their expertise and are judged or rated by experts in the field while in competition with other students.

Competency Test

A test intended to establish that a student has met established minimum standards of skills and knowledge and is thus eligible for an acknowledgment of achievement such as graduation, certification, etc.

Course-Embedded Assessment

Data gathering about learning that occurs as part of the course, such as tests, papers, projects, or portfolios; as opposed to data gathering that occurs outside the course, e.g., student placement testing.

Criteria

Statements about the dimensions of competency that will be assessed; they specify important components of the desired knowledge or skill that the student should learn and be able to demonstrate. For example, for oral communication, one criterion could be maintaining eye contact with the audience.

Demonstration

Performance that show how skills have mastered.

Direct Assessment Methods

These methods involve students' displays of knowledge and skills resulting from learning experiences in the class/program.

Direct Assessment of Learning

Direct assessment is when measures of learning are based on performance or demonstrates the learning itself. Scoring performance on tests (academic and non-academic) or the execution of skills, would all be examples of direct assessment of learning.

Embedded Assessment

A means of gathering information about learning that is integrated into the teaching-learning process. Results can be used to assess individual performance or they can be aggregated to provide information about the course or program; can be formative or summative, quantitative or qualitative.

Evaluation

A value judgment about the results of data collected. Evaluation requires that the data collected to a pre-defined outcome expectation in order to determine what was learned and how well; may involve recommendations for changes.

Exam/Examination

The act of looking at something closely and carefully, using oral or written methods, for the purpose of determining progress, knowledge or ability.

External Assessment

Use of criteria or an instrument developed by an individual or organization external to the one being assessed. This kind of assessment is usually summative, quantitative, and often high-stakes, such as the SAT or GRE exams or a fiscal audit.

Focus Groups

A carefully planned group discussions conducted by trained moderators. A small number of questions, developed in advance, is used to generate in-depth consideration of a narrowly defined topic. Focus groups examine perceptions, feelings, attitudes and ideas.

Formal Observation

Involves experts watching and evaluating student performance.

Formative Assessment

Assessment conducted during a performance/course/program with the purpose of providing feedback that can be used to modify, shape, and improve a performance/course/program.

Goals

Express intended results in global terms. A goal might describe such broad learning concepts as clear communication, problem solving, or ethical awareness. Goals are further defined by being broken down into measurable objectives.

Grading

Values placed on varying levels of achievement (e.g., assignments, examinations, projects, performances). Course be used for assessment if it is clearly linked to course/program goals and if the assessment is based on established criteria and standards.

High Stakes Assessment

The decision to use the results of assessment to set a hurdle that needs to be cleared for completing a program of study, receiving certification, or moving to the next level. Most often, the assessment so used is externally developed, based on set standards, carried out in a secure testing situation, and administered at a single point in time.

Holistic Assessment

Making a judgment about a learner using an overall appraisal of their entire performance, rather than by scoring or analyzing separate dimensions of the performance individually. Used in situations where the demonstration of learning is considered to be more than the sum of its parts, and so the complete final product or performance is evaluated as a whole. The evaluator matches his or her overall impressions to pre-defined expectations for learning outcomes and makes a judgment.

Holistic Scoring

A type of grading in which an assignment is given an overall score. Possible scores are described in a rating scale. A high score indicates achievement of all aspects of the assignment, while a low score means few if any of the desired outcomes have been achieved. The score levels need to be specific enough to reveal meaningful, diagnostic information when the scores are aggregated.

Indicator

An indicator is a piece of information about the performance of a learner/course/program.

Indirect Assessment Methods

These methods provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning experiences and inform the reviewers of their perceptions of their learning experience (e.g. alumni surveys, employer surveys, exit interviews).

Indirect Assessment of Learning

Indirect assessment is when measures of learning are based on looking at indicators of learning other than student work output. This assessment approach is intended to find out about the quality of the learning process by getting feedback from the student or other persons who may provide relevant information. It may use surveys of employers, exit interviews of graduates, focus groups, or any number of Classroom Assessment Techniques (e.g. minute papers, muddiest point papers or one sentence summaries).

Individual Assessment

Uses the individual's learning as the level of analysis. Can be quantitative or qualitative, formative or summative, standards-based or value added (in any combination) to be used for improvement.

Institutional Assessment

Uses the institution as the level of analysis. The assessment can be quantitative or qualitative, formative or summative, standards-based or value added (in any combination) and used for improvement or for accountability.

Institutional Effectiveness

Consists of a set of ongoing and systematic institutional processes and practices that include planning, the evaluation of programs and services (including administration), the definition of institutional outcomes and their measurements across all units and the use of data and assessment results to inform decision-making and improve programs and services. The systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring performance against mission in all aspects of an institution.

Internship

An experience that allows the student to apply what has been learned to a professional situation within a close mentoring relationship. The mentor evaluates student performance. That evaluation is used as the assessment tool.

Interviews

Conversations beginning with a predetermined set of questions to ascertain students' reflections on their learning experiences. Interviews can be structured or open-ended. A carefully constructed data collection instrument is necessary.

Journal

A written record made by a student on a regular basis, for example, daily or weekly. It may also be called a log, notebook, diary, or progress sheet. It may be a collection of facts, an account of experiences, and/or reflective comments on facts or experiences. May be kept on paper or by computer.

Juried Activities

Performances that are evaluated by experts in the profession. Recitals, art shows and conference presentations are examples of juried activities.

Local Assessment

Means and methods that are developed by an institution's faculty based on their teaching approaches, students, and learning goals. An example would be an English Department's construction and use of a writing rubric to assess incoming freshmen's writing samples, which might then be used assign students to appropriate writing courses, or might be compared to senior writing samples to get a measure of value-added.

Methods of Assessment

Methods of assessment are selected procedures used to gather data on learning. These methods are selected in relation to the specified learning outcome to be assessed; the type of evidence of learning available; the type of performance to be observed; and the agreed-upon scoring procedures. Methods may involve paper-and-pencil tests; alternative methods are often referred to as performance based, authentic, or complex-generated.

Metrics

Standards of measurement by which efficiency, performance, progress, or quality of a plan, process or product can be assessed. A set of measurements that quantify results.

Objectives

Brief statements that describe specific action taken to achieve an associated goal.

Oral Presentations

An address delivered to an audience, including experts who evaluate the work presented. Theses or senior project defenses are examples of oral presentations.

Outcome

Statements that describe qualitatively or quantitatively measurable results of the activity assessed.

Performance Measure

Assessment methods based on student activities or products, as opposed to tests or surveys, to evaluate students' knowledge, skill and development.

Portfolio

Systematic collection of work that are evaluated by set standards for evidence of learning and development.

Primary Trait Analysis

Factors or characteristics that are considered in scoring an activity generally stated in a hierarchical scale of three to five incremental levels of achievement quality. For each level on the scale there is a specific statement that describes expected behavior (criterion) at that level.

Program Assessment

An ongoing process for understanding and improving learning and performance. It involves making expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and standards; systematically gathering, analyzing and interpreting evidence to determine whether those expectations and standards are met, and using the resulting information for improvement.

Progression Based Funding

Appropriations issued based on level of achievement toward predetermined metrics.

Qualitative Assessment

Collects data that does not lend itself to quantitative methods but rather to interpretive criteria.

Quantitative Assessment

The collection of data that can be analyzed with systematically defined criteria using numbers, statistical analysis and computational technologies.

Reliability

The production of consistent results over time using the same assessment instrument. With a reliable instrument, differences in results among subjects will be due to differences in knowledge or opinions, rather than as a result of measurement error. In performance-based assessment, a participant should receive similar scores from the evaluators.

Rubric/Scoring Guide

A holistic or primary trait scoring instrument in which detailed criteria are delineated and defined to distinguish among levels of achievement in assignments, performances, products and/or activities.

Self-Assessment

A process in which an individual or program engages in a systematic review of performance or learning, usually for the purpose of improving in the future.

S.M.A.R.T.

An acronym that stands for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely, represents a guiding standard for writing outcomes.

Standard

A description of the expected level of performance.

Standardized Test

A measure of student learning (or other ability) that has been widely used with other students. Standardized scores (e.g., mean, standard deviation, percentiles) have been developed so that a student taking the test can compare his or her score to the historical data. These are also sometimes called achievement tests. Examples are the SAT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT, MCAT, etc.

Survey

A method of collecting information from people about their characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, or perceptions.

Summative Assessment

Assessment conducted after a program has been implemented and completed to make judgments about its quality or worth compared to previously defined standards.

Target

Numerical value assigned to quantify level of achievement towards a goal.

Validity

The extent to which an instrument's content is representative of the actual skills learned and whether the instrument can allow accurate conclusions concerning achievement.

Value Added

The increase in learning that occurs during a course/program/activity.