
Infrastructure for Sustainable Assessment
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Assessment is an essential component of learning-centered institutions, but accreditors often find that campus assessment efforts wax and wane with the accreditation cycle.

Learning-Centered Institutions

Academic Program Goals	<p>Students learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concepts, theories, research findings, techniques, and values of the discipline • How to integrate what they learn to solve complex, real-world problems • An array of core learning outcomes, such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, information literacy, and leadership skills
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesive program with systematically-created opportunities to synthesize, practice, and develop increasingly complex ideas, skills, and values—to develop deep and lasting learning
How Students Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students construct knowledge by integrating new learning into what they already know. • Feedback guides student improvement. • Students can learn, clarify ideas, and develop alternative perspectives through reflection and interpersonal interactions.
Course Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students engage in learning experiences to master course learning outcomes. • Grades indicate mastery of course learning outcomes.
Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on engagement of students • Help students be “intentional learners” (AAC&U; greaterexpectations.org)
Course Delivery	<p>Faculty use a repertoire of teaching techniques to meet the needs of diverse students and to promote different types of learning outcomes, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active learning • Collaborative and cooperative learning • Community-service learning • Homework and laboratory assignments • Internships and other fieldwork experiences • Lectures and discussion • Online learning • Problem-based learning
Faculty Instructional Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design learning environments to meet student and program needs • Share interests and enthusiasm with students • Provide students formative feedback on their progress; grade student work • Mentor student development in and out of the classroom • Assess class sessions, courses, and programs to improve their effectiveness

Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative and Student Affairs units support learning and provide an infrastructure for learning to occur. • Program reviews, budgeting, and campus decision-making are conducted within a “culture of evidence” to improve learning. • Recognition and reward systems value contributions to learning and encourage flexibility to uncover new ways to encourage/support learning. • Routine campus conversations about learning
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty use classroom assessment to improve day-to-day learning in courses (Angelo & Cross, <i>Classroom Assessment</i>, Jossey-Bass, 1993). • Faculty use course and program assessment to improve learning throughout the curriculum. • Administrative and Student Affairs staff assess their impact to improve the effectiveness on their contributions.

Academic Program Assessment

Program assessment is an on-going process designed to monitor and improve student learning. Faculty:

- develop explicit statements of the program’s mission and what students should learn (student learning outcomes, SLOs).
- verify that the program is designed to foster this learning (alignment).
- develop a meaningful, manageable, sustainable assessment plan.
- implement the plan; collect empirical data that indicate student attainment (assessment evidence).
- assess the evidence and reach a conclusion (faculty are satisfied or disappointed with the extent of student learning).
- use these findings to improve student learning (close the loop).

Administrative and Student Affairs Assessment

The assessment of student affairs and administrative units is an on-going process designed to monitor and improve the effectiveness of the unit being assessed. Professionals in each unit:

- develop explicit statements of the unit’s mission and objectives.
- verify that the unit’s operations are organized to foster the objectives.
- develop a meaningful, manageable, sustainable assessment plan.
- implement the plan; collect empirical data that indicate how well objectives are being met.
- assess the evidence and reach a conclusion (staff are satisfied or disappointed with the achievement of the objective).
- use these findings to improve the unit’s effectiveness (close the loop).

Sample Outcomes and Objectives

Students who complete our General Education program can:

- Communicate effectively in standard, written English
- Locate, analyze, and summarize published documents
- Use quantitative reasoning
- Work collaboratively
- Engage questions of ethics
- Use concepts from the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences to describe or explain relevant phenomena

Students who complete the Ph.D. in Sociology can:

- Evaluate theoretical contributions to historical and contemporary issues, such as race/ethnic relations; social, political, and economic inequalities; and corrections
- Critically interpret and evaluate published research
- Formulate theory-driven research questions
- Design and execute studies to explore theory-driven research questions
- Communicate knowledge using oral, written, and other technologically-driven mediums

Administrative and Student Affairs Units

1. Students who attend a Career Orientation Workshop can prepare a resume and use our on-line bulletin board to monitor potential employment opportunities.
2. Students who attend orientation will receive email accounts and can use the email system to communicate with students, faculty, and staff.
3. Interlibrary loan materials will be delivered within eight working days.
4. Students report satisfaction with Health Center Services; ratings will average at least 3.80 on a 5-point rating scale.
5. On average, at least 100 students will attend each cultural event sponsored by the ASI.
6. Faculty who attend Blackboard workshops will be able to create and update online course materials.
7. Student government meetings follow procedures defined in the Handbook.
8. Staff who receive training on the enrollment management system can independently add and delete courses, place enrollment restrictions on courses, and monitor course enrollments.

Quotations from the Wise and Experienced

1. “Assessment is an on-going process. We don’t ‘get it done’; we ‘get on with it.’”
Outcomes Assessment, Miami of Ohio
2. “Much of the literature on assessment suggests, and the Task Force agrees, that an institution will benefit from assessment only if faculty and cocurricular professionals see a use for the results and if they take the lead in formulating questions which assessment can help answer.”
Willamette Task Force on Outcomes Assessment

3. "Self-assessment is not the goal. Self-adjustment is the goal. That's what makes Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan great. That's what makes Socrates so impressive. That's what our best students and teachers do. They self-adjust, with minimal effort and optimal effect."
Grant Wiggins
4. "Assessment per se guarantees nothing by way of improvement, no more than a thermometer cures a fever."
T. J. Marchese
5. "While in the process of developing new outcomes/objectives, the department or administrative unit can easily identify assessment procedures that will be so time- and resource-consuming that they will become an end in themselves and not a means of determining whether a specific outcome/objective has been achieved. If this occurs, the long-term result is likely to be abandonment of the process."
James O. Nichols
6. ". . . institutional evaluation should use objective data where available and purposeful but make no apologies for using subjective data. Or, it is better to be generally right than precisely wrong."
R. L. Miller

Steps in a Campus Assessment Program*

Denial:	It's a fad. If I ignore it, it will go away.
Acceptance:	OK, I guess we have to do it.
Resistance:	I feel threatened. My department feels threatened. My campus feels threatened. Can I subvert it by not participating in the process or in some other way?
Understanding:	Maybe we can learn something useful. Can we use what we've already been doing?
Campaign:	We have a plan. Maybe it's not perfect, but let's get moving!
Collaboration:	We have a plan with long-range objectives that are clearly defined, and, based on our experience with assessment, we believe it works.
Institutionalization:	We can't imagine working without assessment. It's a permanent part of our institutional culture.

*Roughly based on Wehlburg, C. (1999, May). How to get the ball rolling: Beginning an assessment program on your campus. *AAHE Bulletin*, 51(9), 7 - 9.

Infrastructure for Sustainable Assessment: Planning Levels

- Institution
 - School or College or Broad Administrative/Student Affairs Units, e.g., the College of Engineering or the Student Affairs Division
 - Program, Department, or Individual Administrative/Student Affairs Units, e.g., the GE program, the AA in English, the Ph.D. in Economics, the Financial Aids Office
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Institutionalizing Assessment

While there are many reasons why some institutions are engaged in assessment and others are not, assessment practitioners and scholars have found that one factor predominates. If campus leaders are committed to assessment, assessment gets done and it gets done well. If campus leaders—especially the chief academic officer (vice president for academic affairs, provost, or dean) and the chief executive officer (president or chancellor)—aren't onboard, there may be pockets of assessment efforts across campus but assessment doesn't permeate campus culture. (Suskie, 2004, p. 36)

- Ensure leaders' understanding of assessment and the time and resources it takes to do assessment well
- Leaders provide public, vocal support of assessment; they are “visibly committed to creating and sustaining a ‘culture of evidence’ in planning at all levels” (WASC)
- Ensure that assessment is integrated into “self-reflection, decision making, budgeting, and long- and short-range planning” (Maki, p. 6) within the institution
- Support the dissemination of assessment findings, such as local Assessment forums
- Work with search committees to hire and retain faculty, administrators, and staff who are dedicated to student development
- Integrate assessment into program review for academic and non-academic units
- Integrate assessment into personnel job descriptions and review guidelines
- Develop budgets to support assessment
- Develop an infrastructure to support assessment training and consultation
- Develop (annual) assessment report guidelines and feedback mechanisms
- Ensure that institutional and General Education learning outcomes and assessment plans are developed

Faculty and Staff Development Professionals, Assessment Personnel, and/or Institutional Research Staff (Allen, 2004, 2006)

- Provide training for faculty and staff in assessment planning, the design of specific assessment studies, and the analysis of assessment results

- May provide direct support, themselves, or may train and supervise student assistants or others who support assessment work, such as drafting or reviewing surveys, conducting interviews, or collecting and analyzing data
- Provide developmental opportunities to faculty and staff in learning-centered approaches to teaching and supporting student development
- Provide ideas and support closing the loop in response to assessment findings

Quality Assurance and Overall Coordination

Some individual or group:

- Monitors the quality of assessment to ensure that findings are valid, reliable, and actionable
- Identifies assessment findings with implications that go beyond single units and initiates collaborative responses
- Monitors, documents, and ensures the impact of assessment
- Ensures that learning outcomes and objectives are achieved regardless of the mode or location of instruction/support (e.g., online vs. face-to-face, main vs. remote campus)

School or College or Broad Administrative/Student Affairs Units

- Possible development of school or college or broad administrative/student affairs outcomes or objectives
- Possible development of specialized training, consultation, and feedback mechanisms
- Possible development of budgets to support assessment
- Possible sponsorship of forums for the exchange of assessment ideas or findings

Program/Department Faculty (Allen, 2004, 2006)

- Develop explicit learning outcomes for their programs and courses
- Systematically align courses and curricula with these outcomes
- Use pedagogy that supports the outcomes and that effectively engages individual learners
- Base grades on the appropriate level of information (surface vs. deep learning)
- Monitor and improve the day-to-day operation of their courses (classroom assessment)
- Develop meaningful, manageable, sustainable assessment plans for their programs
- Routinely collect, assess, and reflect on assessment results and close the loop
- Collaborate with student affairs professionals to promote institutional support of their students' learning

Other Campus Professionals (Allen, 2004, 2006)

- Develop mission statements, objectives, and assessment plans for their units
- Align their efforts with their mission and objectives
- Assess their impact on those whom they support, and close the loop
- Collaborate with faculty to promote outcomes
- Be aware of relevant academic program outcomes and provide support for student learning (e.g., advisors, librarians, tutors)
- Provide a co-curricular environment that offers enriching activities that promote program- and institution-wide outcomes
- Provide an infrastructure that allows students to concentrate on learning

Institutionalizing Assessment

- Requires the collaboration and contributions of administrators, faculty, and staff
- Integrates assessment into normal campus procedures
- Focuses on outcomes and objectives that campus professionals are passionate about
- Involves the development of meaningful, manageable, sustainable assessment plans
- Requires support and training
- Involves moving away from compliance with accreditation requirements to using assessment to improve.
- Campus professionals routinely use assessment to monitor and improve their impact. They could not imagine working without it.

References

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