Common Language of Assessment at Meredith College

The Council on Institutional Effectiveness (CIE) recognizes the need to have a shared language of assessment across the Meredith campus. There is no one, common definition of assessment terms across campuses but there are some common uses of assessment terms. The following glossary is intended to be consistent both with common uses of assessment terms and with the culture of assessment at Meredith College.

**Mission**: A brief statement of a unit’s fundamental purpose. A mission statement answers the question, “Why do we exist?”

**Goals**: Goals are very broad, general statements of what the program/department wants to happen in order to meet outcomes. Goals may be stated from either the perspective of faculty/staff or students/other constituents. Goals should align with mission statements and provide a layer of program intent between the mission statement and the outcomes.

**Objectives**: Refers to the specific knowledge, skills, or attitudes that are expected to be achieved through some activity, such as what it is expected that students will attain through college experiences [expected or intended outcomes – looking ahead]. Objectives can be phrase as follows: At the end of (insert program/department/activity), the (insert constituents) will be able to ...

**Outcomes**: Refers to the specific knowledge, skills, or developmental attributes that are developed as a result of or by the end of some experience [actual results and outcomes – looking back at what happened]. Outcome statements can be put in the following framework, As a result of (insert program/department/activity), the (insert constituents/who) are able to...

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**: SLOs represent what students will know or be able to do, or what attitudes and dispositions they will develop as a result of the program/department. SLOs are appropriate for both learning in academic programs, and learning and development in college programs. SLOs may be cognitive, behavioral or affective (emotional/dispositional).

**Indicators**: Indicators are criteria that indicate that the outcomes are being met. Indicators are more specific than outcomes. Indicators may be captured in a rubric including standards or levels, and are more closely tied to specific measures than outcomes.

**Performance Standards**: Specification of where the program wants to be in terms of a specific indicator or measure (e.g., 95% of students; 85th percentile of normative data). Meeting or not meeting specific performance standards is not enough information to specify what program enhancements are needed to better meet outcomes. [They are also sometimes called performance indicators or benchmarks.]

**Activities/Strategies**: Program or instructional activities/strategies that specify how outcomes are being met in that program. For academic programs these will be instructional strategies or pedagogical approaches that most often occur within the curriculum, whereas for administrative services and college programs these will be the major services or program activities of the department.

**Methods**: Methods for measuring outcomes. Multiple methods are often needed to make meaningful program enhancements.
Indirect Methods & Evidence: Indirect methods ask participants to reflect on their learning, rather than to demonstrate it. They are used to gather perceptions about the extent of and/or value of learning experiences. Such methods include interviews and surveys and provide indirect evidence of student learning.

Direct Methods & Evidence: Direct methods require participants to demonstrate their learning through completing a performance task, such as taking a test, writing a research paper, making a presentation, completing a project, etc., and are assessed against measurable learning outcomes. Performance tasks provide direct evidence of what students know and are able to do.

Performance task: A performance task is designed to measure particular outcomes by providing a learner the opportunity to demonstrate and/or apply knowledge and skills. It is accompanied by an explicit scoring system, like a checklist or rubric.

Rubric: Specific sets of criteria, indicators and scoring procedures that are used to clearly define what acceptable and unacceptable performances look like.

Value-added: The effects on students as a result of their program of study, over and above that which would have occurred through maturation. It is normally measured over time.

Triangulation: Involves using different methods and/or sources to gather data, e.g. direct observation of a classroom, an interview with the teacher, and a survey of students, in order to gather different points of view on the same topic.

Results: The results of the data collected using the methods specified. Results may be quantitative or qualitative.

Qualitative Data: Data in which variables differ in quality and not quantity, such as interview, open response survey questions.

Quantitative Data: Data in which variables differ in quantity and not quality, such as grades, scores, standardized tests.

Program Enhancements: Improvements made to the program based on assessment data. There should be a clear, logical relationship between reported results and the program enhancements.

Continuous Improvement: Using assessment data for program enhancement & continuous improvement is sometimes referred to as “closing the loop” in assessment discussions and it is an iterative process.

Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP): This is the annual assessment plan in which programs outline what they plan to assess each academic year.

Continuous Improvement Report (CIR): This is the annual assessment report in which programs document and interpret results for the year, and make recommendations for program enhancements.

Accountability: Being accountable includes both effectively discharging an obligation and being answerable in that regard. Thus, the concept of accountability embraces issues of both performance and communication. To achieve better results, accountability in higher education must be a democratic process through which shared goals are explicitly established, progress is measured, and work to improve performance is motivated and guided. It is a public-oriented process that seeks to assure public constituents of the value, effectiveness, and quality of higher education.