

PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT SUCCESS!

College of Humanities
and Social Sciences,
October 2004



Assessment Will:



- Enable us to effectively answer for ourselves and external constituencies:
- What are we trying to do?
- How well are we doing it? and
- How are we using these answers to help us improve what we do?

Why Now?

- Accrediting agencies recognize assessment as a strong tool for improving educational outcomes (not inputs or processes)
 - Middle States Association
 - NCATE
 - AASCB
- Our Middle States Periodic Review Report is due 2006

What is Assessment?

Assessment is:

- an *ongoing* process aimed at understanding and *improving student learning*. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning 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.

When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education. Source: Thomas A. Angelo, AAHE Bulletin, November 1995, p.7

Some Other Definitions

- ***Outcomes*** are desired ends or objectives. Usually, they are written statements defining what students should know, care about, and be able to do after they have completed a program of instruction. They can be labeled as cognitive (what students know), affective (what they care about; also called attitudinal or value-based outcomes), or skill-based (what they can do; sometimes called behavioral/performance outcomes). Student learning includes the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal development attained through curricular, co-curricular, and out-of-class learning experiences. (Towson University)
- Outcomes are distinguished from inputs and processes. ***Inputs*** are program and constituent attributes that are accepted as givens at the start of the learning process. Student inputs include academic preparation, expectations. Faculty inputs include their training and teaching abilities. The University inputs include technology equipment and classroom space.
- ***Process variables*** are aspects of the educational experience that occur between student entry and exit from a program. They include the opportunities that college affords students as well as the demands and requests made of them. Examples include curricular offerings, assigned readings, and the experience of living in a residence hall.

Critical Distinctions

- **These distinctions between outcomes, inputs, and processes are critical to outcomes assessment. Historically academic excellence has been defined by inputs and processes. While, most people agree that these input and processes variables influence excellence, few people would agree large endowments, high CSAT scores, thousands of books in the library guarantee an excellent education.**
- **From an outcome assessment (OA) perspective, the proof is in the qualities of the graduate, not in these inputs. Rather, outcome assessment is interested in knowing that students graduate with the ability to use the library effectively as part of the information literacy skills they developed while attending the university. When used this way, OA can be thought of as a means of improving programs so that, when they are subject to external evaluation, these programs will receive excellent reviews.**

Two More Common Terms

- *Formative assessment* is ongoing assessment designed to improve an individual student's performance, student learning outcomes at the course or program level, or overall institutional effectiveness. This form of assessment gives professors and other involved persons the opportunity to change and improve along the way.
- *Summative assessment* occurs at the end of a unit, course, or program. The purposes of this type of assessment are to determine whether or not overall goals have been achieved and to provide information on performance for an individual student or statistics about a course or program for internal or external accountability purposes. (Middle States)

Levels Of Assessment

Assessment takes place at the course, program, and institutional levels

- Course level SLOOS
- At the institutional level administrative and student development offices implement assessment activities sometimes called effectiveness
- Program level Student learning outcomes that reflect the department's program (s) goals and in turn reflect the University's goals (Student Success Plan) and are tied to the University outcomes.

WPUNJ Student Learning Outcomes

Faculty developed and implements the following learning outcomes to “insure that all students have the tools fundamental for success after graduation.”

Upon graduation students will be able to:

- Effectively express themselves in written and oral form
- Demonstrate ability to think critically
- Locate and use information
- Demonstrate ability to integrate knowledge and ideas in a coherent and meaningful manner
- Work effectively with others

Program Level Assessment Will:

- Increase awareness of what programs are accomplishing
- Provide feedback that can be used to modify, shape and improve programs
- Link the major with general education by building on general education outcomes

and ...

Learning occurs in and out of the classroom. Experiential experiences are an important and distinguishing part of the William Paterson experience. Internships should be part of the assessment plan.

What is “Good” Assessment?

- Clear goals and learning outcomes that meet student and employer needs
- Clear strategies to achieve goals
- Valid, appropriate assessment tools
- Results/findings that are used to strengthen the program

An Example of Well Formulated Program Goals and Objectives

A departmental assessment plan that has an explicit acknowledgment of the student role, links the various levels of assessment, and has well formulated goals and objectives is California State University, Sacramento's Sociology department's plan, found at:

www.csus.edu/acaf/socasmt.htm

First

At CSU, a letter about assessment is sent to new majors explaining to them what assessment is and how they will participate in the department plan before they graduate. The letter tells students that we (faculty) “have identified several program goals in the sociology curriculum. These goals represent what the faculty believes you should be learning, studying, and reflecting upon, as sociology majors. You may want to note these and to refer to them as you progress through the major.”

Goals and Objectives

The program includes 11 program learning goals with related outcomes but only a few are included here as illustrations.

PROGRAM GOAL 3: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, and reflect on the role of evidence and quantitative and qualitative research methods in sociology.

Student expectations of goal # 3. The student should be able to:

- identify basic methodological approaches and describe the general role of methods in building sociological knowledge;
- compare and contrast basic methodological approaches for gathering data;
- design and complete a research study;
- critically assess a published research report;
- and understand and apply basic statistical tests sociologists often use.

and ...

PROGRAM GOAL 11: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to have writing skills necessary to communicate effectively with persons whom they encounter in their work, civil obligations, and personal life.

Student expectations for goal # 11. The student should be able to;

- a) write a clear and concise report of the findings from sociological data analysis;**
- b) write a clear and concise sociological analysis and account of a social event, topic, issue or problem.**

and ...

PROGRAM GOAL 4: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to have the computer skills necessary to find, communicate, create, and apply sociological knowledge as information.

Student expectations of goal # 4. The student should have the ability:

- to use computerized and on-line data bases to find published research;
- to use the internet, e-mail, and Web pages to communicate to others and to find information;
- and to use standard software packages, such as SPSS, to analyze data.

and ...

PROGRAM GOAL 8: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, and reflect on the internal diversity of American society.

Student expectations for goal # 8. The student should be able to:

- describe the significance of variations by race, gender, class and age; and**
- understand appropriately how to generalize or resist generalization across groups.**

Meeting Stated Goals and Objectives

The major assessment tools used by the department are:

- the department's curriculum matrix. The matrix lists each course and what it covers with respect to the department's goals and student expectations
- several department developed surveys
- a "collective departmental portfolio of student work".
- The department's assessment committee oversees the collection and analysis of the assessment information. "Periodically, all members of the department receive the results to discuss them, and look collectively at the "performance" papers/work (the collective portfolio) in order to review what students perceive, do, and learn from the department's curriculum."

What are Some Other Assessment Tools Available as Evidence for Success?

- Is there information already available to use?
 - One year out alumni survey
- Can Internship supervisor reports be structured in such a way as to help document successful attainment of learning outcomes?
- Can assessment be embedded into already existing activities – developing a rubric for scoring capstone courses?

Other Tools ...

- Department developed surveys
- ETS major test
- Collective departmental portfolio
- Scoring rubrics

Closing the Assessment Loop: Using the Findings

- The Psychology Department as an example of how assessment findings improved learning and teaching

What Makes a Good Outcome Statement?

- Poor -- Students should know the historically important systems of psychology
- Better -- Students should understand the psychoanalytical, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology
- Best -- Students should be able to recognize and articulate the fundamental assumptions, central ideas, and dominant criticisms of the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.

another

- Poor -- Students should be able to independently design and carry out research
- Better -- Students should be able to independently design and carry out experimental and correlational research
- Best -- Students should be able to independently design and carry out experimental and correlational research that yields valid results