

Guide to Program and Departmental Assessment

Developed by the University Assessment Committee's
Program Level Assessment Working Group

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Assessment System Diagram	4
Part 1 – Introduction to Assessment in Higher Education	5
What is Assessment?	5
Operational Definitions	5
What is “new” in this process?	6
Part 2 – Assessing Student Learning Outcomes & Academic Programs	8
Describe the Program	8
Create Program-Specific Student Learning Outcomes (Educational Objectives).....	8
Curriculum Mapping	9
Identifying Measures of Student Performance	10
Assessment Cycles & Timelines	11
Part 3 – Assessment Analysis Reporting and Feedback	12
Part 4 – Assessment in Student Affairs and Services	16
Program Assessment vs. Assessing Student Learning.....	16
Student Learning: Determining What to Assess and When.....	17
Linking Assessment to the Institution Mission, Values, Goals and Best Practices ...	19
Goals	19
Creating the Learning Outcome.....	19
Measuring Learning Outcomes.....	21
Analyzing the Data and Making Changes	24
The Final Step: Starting Over	24
References and Resources	25

Introduction

In the pages that follow, the University Assessment Committee's Sub-committee on Program Level Assessment will provide a roadmap for your department to begin or continue to develop its assessment program. With this in mind, we would like to remind you that in numerous ways you are already assessing your courses and programs. We hope this guidebook will enable you to be better formalize that process. Our work here is not exhaustive. To ensure that this work could be useful without being overwhelming we avoid discussing some of minutiae of the assessment process. We have provided several references for those of you looking for more resources, especially work that may be specific to your fields in the final section of this document. As well, the University Assessment Committee and the newly created Assessment Consulting Team (ACT) stand ready to assist in your department's assessment efforts moving forward.

Assessment System Diagram

In beginning to think about the assessment process and your department's work in this effort, this diagram may be helpful in planning your work. At its core, assessment concerns identifying what students should know or be able to do, developing clear measures to assess whether they are achieving those outcomes and establishing a system where you use the data obtained from this process to take actions that will improve student learning in your programs.



Part 1 – Introduction to Assessment in Higher Education

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Although it is unlikely anyone working in Higher Education and at East Stroudsburg hasn't dealt extensively with **Assessment**, discourse regarding the topic often finds individuals working from diverse backgrounds and assumptions on the subject. Therefore, as an introduction to the use of Assessment at ESU, the Program Level Sub-Committee of the University Assessment Committee proposes the adoption of some basic assumptions and definitions to begin the dialogue about "best practice" in assessment of Student Learning and Program Assessments.

What is Assessment?

An *assessment system* is typically defined as the *process* of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid in educational decision making – and assessment is an umbrella term for the comprehensive process of measurement and evaluation. Within an educational system, assessment should be viewed as a systematic collection and analysis of information for the main purpose of improving student learning and performance.

Although many individuals in higher education focus primarily on assessments related to student knowledge and performance, assessment is also critical to evaluating and improving such areas as the learning and living environment, student engagement, student retention, and any area that supports the university mission, goals, and operations. And, regardless of the purpose or area of assessment, the assessment process must begin with a clearly defined list of measurable and specified outcomes and benchmarks that are explicitly tied to the mission and the goals.

Operational Definitions

For the purposes of this booklet, we will use the following definitions.

Test: In the assessment process, *tests* are instruments used to gather information or to measure factors. Tests can be created to measure cognition (knowledge), skill (technical or physical activities), or affect (values, beliefs, emotions, social constructs), and include surveys, protocols, and techniques that are standardized to collect data. (Three terms that are often used interchangeably in assessment literature to measure cognitive knowledge are *test*, *examination*, and *quiz*.)

Tests are typically used to gather information for three distinct purposes: *diagnosis* of current conditions (*diagnostic tests*), *informational feedback* (*formative tests*), or *summary scoring* (*summative tests* - used to determine accomplishment of goals or learning outcomes). *Diagnostic* tests provide the practitioner with information related to the current condition of a patient, teachers with information related to the present level of performance of students, and scientists with a baseline measurement on the variable in question. In each situation, the diagnostic information becomes the starting point for a plan of change. In the learning environment, effective teachers perform diagnostic testing prior to working with their students in order to plan lesson activities that are developmentally appropriate for the readiness of the learner. In settings where physical skills or affective emotions, values and belief are the focus, diagnostic tests are

necessary in order to plan appropriate and safe (physically or emotionally) programs and interventions to guide the client as well as the practitioner in the development of activities and programs that lead to skill acquisition and behavioral change.

Formative assessment is regularly included in quality education to check for understanding, progress toward learning outcomes or goals, and to inform the teacher or practitioner about changes occurring in the students. Without ongoing, regular information, effective teachers are unable to adjust the pace or learning experiences to match the speed at which students are learning.

Summative assessment typically refers to the measurement of learning at the end of a unit of instruction. Summative data has typically been used to assign a final score, rating, ranking, or grade for students. When used in this manner summative assessment leads to the *evaluation phase* of teaching. However, just as diagnostic and formative tests provide information to plan and revise, the summative data is useful to not only evaluate student progress toward desired learning outcomes, but also as a source of information that leads effective teachers to the revision of their practice. Summative test scores may provide data for issuing a grade, but this is not the end of instruction. It is the beginning of a new cycle of reflection used to inform professionals about the future teaching and learning process. Reflective teachers use summative data to make changes in course content, program or curricular offerings, and the improvement of teaching (Praxis).

Thus a comprehensive assessment process is actually a cycle – where tests inform practitioners about student progress, and where reflection leads to improved practice. In essence the teacher and student are interdependent, and learning from each other. Effective teaching is a dynamic process, and effective teachers are lifelong learners. Teachers must adjust, based on the assessment process, to the needs and readiness of the learner. The assessment process is never ending, but rather ever acting - leading to better educational outcomes and processes.

For the purposes of this guidebook, the term *assessment* will refer to the entire assessment process; tests will refer to the instruments used to collect data (noun), and the *analysis or evaluation* of the data will refer to the interpretation phase of the assessment process. In other words, the *assessment system* will be defined as the methods used to collect data, processes used to provide feedback to practitioners, and the interpretation and evaluation of information to inform educational decision-making.

What is “new” in this process?

For many years, testing in the cognitive domain served as the primary method to assess student learning. Standardized admission tests such as the ACT or SAT were used to assess the likelihood students could succeed in the academic environment. Grades were calculated based primarily on examinations addressing content knowledge in a subject area. Technical fields often included practical examinations of skills required to complete a protocol or training challenge. And in the performing arts, concerts or performances in front of audiences were required as final examinations.

With advances in assessment and more careful research into the connections between performance and test scores, it became evident that the assessment process was not accurately addressing the many facets of education, nor the different ways that individuals learn. It became increasingly evident that traditional testing methods failed to assess a student's learning on valuable variables and outcomes that influenced productivity in the workplace. Variables that impact job performance include social skills such as interpersonal communication, teamwork, leadership, and empathic understanding which are not good candidates for paper/pencil assessment. Today, the terms *alternative* and *authentic* measurement or testing have become staples in effective teaching practice.

Alternative tests are described as methods for gathering data that use instruments other than standardized paper and pencil tests. Activities, projects, simulations, journals, portfolios, logs, debates, demonstrations, posters, or exhibitions are all used across campus to demonstrate student learning toward identified outcomes. Alternative measurements become *authentic* measurements when the student is observed, measured, or evaluated in real-life situations and environments. *Performance-based assessment* is another alternative type of assessment, and the term is often used interchangeably with authentic assessment. Typically, performance-based assessment processes isolate specific *critical elements* deemed by experts in a profession to be essential to the technical mastery of skills and professions. Performance tests are often scored using *rubrics* that identify specific behaviors, and that both *quantify* the student behaviors as being mastered or not achieved, and identify the levels of *quality* that infer a level of accomplishment or excellence.

For a musician, performance in front of a juried panel is an alternative form of assessment of knowledge and skill, and more authentic than a written test on the names and notation of a musical piece. But to be even more authentic, the music student would perform in front of an audience during a concert. They are now truly being held accountable to their *ability to perform beyond the classroom*. A teacher education major can be evaluated on their ability to write developmentally appropriate lesson plans, but the authenticity is enhanced when they are observed working with children, applying their knowledge, communication skills, and pedagogical behaviors to a classroom of children. So, what is new, for many, is not new at all. Authentic assessment has been used in most of our professional preparation programs during internships, auditions, performances, and application courses for many years.

Many experienced educators and practitioners have been using alternative and authentic tests for years. *What may be different, however, is that effective practice integrates authentic and alternative testing strategies across the scope (breadth) and sequence (progressive depth) of programs in higher education.*

Part 2 – Assessing Student Learning Outcomes & Academic Programs

Primary Author: Adam McGlynn, Ph.D.

Describe the Program

The first step in creating a departmental or program assessment plan should be to provide a succinct statement describing the program. Your program's marketing brochure(s) already contains this statement, but as disciplines change, you should examine whether the existing statement correctly explains the purpose of your program. If it does not, this would be a worthwhile topic to address during a department meeting. You may also want to look to your national organization's website which may discuss the mission of the discipline which you can adapt to your program(s). How well you can succinctly explain the program's purpose will allow both current and potential majors to understand what type of education they are receiving. Further, "Clearly stating the mission of the program ensures that faculty members and students are working effectively toward the same purpose" (Bridgewater State University, 2010).

At the same time, you can use the development of your mission statement to take stock of where your department is and where you want it to go. Are there additional programs you want to add or accreditations you want to obtain? By creating your mission statement and Student Learning Outcome (SLOs) you can begin to assess what your department needs to do to accomplish its future goals.

Create Program-Specific Student Learning Outcomes (Educational Objectives)

Mission statements are general explanations of your program. Establishing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) is a more specific task. To begin to identify SLOs, your department should focus on three questions (Bridgewater State University, 2010):

- 1) What do your students need to know? What is the essential base of knowledge that all graduates must leave the university possessing?
- 2) What do your students need to be able to do? Are there specific tasks or skills that they need to accomplish by the time they graduate?
- 3) Are there values or attitudes you want to instill in your students?

In developing SLOs there should be both collective and individual processes. As a collective you should be able to identify key points of knowledge and vital tasks/skills that are relevant to all areas of your program. From there individual or small groups of faculty should develop SLOs specific to their subfields. For larger departments, it may be beneficial to formalize the process and establish a departmental assessment committee (with the goal of having all subfields represented) to develop these SLOs. Once again, national organization websites as well as accrediting bodies could prove useful here in identifying learning outcomes.

While your departmental SLOs are specific to your discipline, as a department/program within East Stroudsburg University and one that may offer courses as a part of the university's General Education Program, you should also examine the university-wide SLOs that were adopted in

2010. These SLOs could aid in the development of your departmental SLOs in two ways, first by helping to identify skills you may want your majors to possess but also in helping you to identify what role your department/program plays in helping the university achieve its mission and its students achieve the desired level of student learning. Identifying what your department “brings to the table” in helping non-majors achieve the university SLOs could aid in departmental planning and resource allocation. Regardless of how useful they are to your department’s SLO development, you should be aware of the university-wide SLOs which are listed below.

- I. Demonstrate an understanding of their role as citizens of a diverse, global society.
- II. Utilize critical thinking skills.
- III. Communicate orally, in writing, and through other formats.
- IV. Demonstrate information literacy and technological skills.
- V. Apply scientific reasoning to solve problems.
- VI. Create and Critique various forms of artistic expression.
- VII. Understand various models for the healthy development of the whole person.

Your department should work to achieve a consensus on the set of SLOs that are established. You may want to create a pool of SLOs and have department members rank order them to identify those learning outcomes which the department deems most important. There is no set rule for the number of SLOs or how they are organized, but they should all be adopted based on the premise of the three questions above. When adopting SLOs also consider two factors; first all of the outcomes chosen must be clear and measurable and second, the outcomes “should focus on what students in the major can demonstrate rather than on what faculty members teach” (Bridgewater State University, 2010).

Curriculum Mapping

One potential pitfall of developing these SLOs are outcomes which can fall through the cracks and wind up not getting addressed in the curriculum given the belief among faculty that specific SLOs are being covered in other courses. Again, many of your SLOs (especially those you deem most important) will be covered in multiple courses, but some may not. Therefore, one important task to undertake is to examine the curriculum and identify which courses will cover each SLO. Again some courses may cover three another may only cover one. However, this activity will allow you to conduct a self-assessment of two key questions:

- 1) Do the required courses in our program to ensure that students can meet all SLOs?
- 2) Do we need to change our course offerings to ensure the curriculum reflects the SLOs we have adopted?

Based on the answers to these questions you may find it necessary to change your program requirements and/or adopt new courses for your curriculum. This serves to ensure your SLOs are being achieved but also provides the useful opportunity to review and revise and your curriculum. It may be helpful to map your curriculum graphically as done below. Based on the hypothetical depiction below, a department may ask how they can get an additional course(s) to address Outcome E or whether Course 4 should be changed to address more of the outcomes.

Table 1-Curriculum Mapping Example

SLO*	Course 1	Course 2	Course 2	Course 4	Course 5
Outcome A		X			
Outcome B	X	X	X		
Outcome C					
Outcome D			X		X
Outcome E					

*Adapted from Bridgewater State University Assessment Manual.

Identifying Measures of Student Performance

The data obtained for assessing your SLOs should come from both direct and indirect measures. Direct measures can consist of coursework including exams, student portfolios (both professional e.g. for prospective teachers or summative e.g. portfolios of a student’s coursework, including projects and/or papers). Additional examples include the achievement of professional licenses or certifications and pre-test/post-test evaluations to assess baseline knowledge and the value added of a course or program (see table below for more examples). Indirect measures do not directly assess student work but examine measures indicative of the quality of the education a student has received. These can include student surveys which ask students how well their course of study prepared them for their current job or how well specific skills were developed through their education. Note that East Stroudsburg University already conducts university wide indirect assessments such as the Proficiency Profile and the National Survey of Student Engagement. Your department should consult with the Office of Academic and Institutional Effectiveness to gauge whether data from these studies could be useful for your department.

Your department should strive to collect data from both indirect and direct measures. This data can be both qualitative and quantitative. Faculty should work to ensure all measures chosen demonstrate validity in that they truly assess that students possess the knowledge, skills and/or attitudes you want them to have. While ensuring the validity of department created assessments shouldn’t be difficult, standardized tests or other non-departmental measures should be examined for validity in relation the department’s SLOs.

Table 2- Sample of Direct and Indirect Learning Outcomes Measures

<u>Direct Measures</u>	<u>Indirect Measures</u>
Certifications/Licensure exams	Student surveys
Capstone experience	Exit interviews
Portfolio assessment	Retention and transfer rates
Standardized tests	Graduation rates
Locally developed (validated) exams	Job placement
Essay exams blind scored by multiple scorers	Graduate school acceptance rate
Juried review of student performances and projects	
External evaluation of student performance in internships	

In choosing these measures, your department must also discuss what levels of performance are deemed satisfactory and unsatisfactory. Simply put, a decision needs to be made on “What’s good enough?” There are no easy answers for what the accepted levels of performance should be. In some fields, such as nursing there are clear indicators for what skills a student must possess to be able to graduate but for faculty in the social sciences or humanities the process may be more subjective. As discussed in the previous section, this may be a good time to examine what your graduates will need to do in their profession and try to match your accepted performance levels to their ability to succeed in the workplace. As well, if your program has a significant population of students continuing their education in graduate school, you can align your accepted levels of performance to what a student would need to know or be able to do to be prepared for graduate school in your discipline. Again, while this discussion of standards is somewhat vague, deciding “What’s Good Enough?” is in many ways idiosyncratic to your discipline. However, it is a necessary conversation for every program.

One other topic of note when it comes to choosing measures, especially if standardized testing is being employed is whether your measures (tests) are **criterion-referenced** or **norm-referenced**. Many of us employ criterion-referenced tests in that we are trying to assess what students know whether that is the process for how a bill becomes a law or Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. Our tests are designed to assess whether students have specific knowledge or possess certain skills. Norm-referenced measures on the other hand allow us to know how students are performing relative to their peers, whether those peers are in the same program or different universities throughout the country. It allows us to identify whether our students are high achievers or low achievers relative to their peers (Huit 1996). Norm-referenced measures therefore can be useful in assessing how your program’s students are prepared for graduate school or the workforce compared to students at other universities. There may widely-accepted criterion-referenced or norm-referenced tests available in your field published by your professional associations or testing companies. In deciding whether to adopt such a test keep in mind what these tests are designed to do and the information you can obtain from them.

Assessment Cycles & Timelines

After choosing the assessment measures your department will employ, you should develop a timeline for the collection and reporting of this data. Many pieces of data lend themselves to be collected yearly such as pre-test/post-test data for incoming freshman and graduating seniors or results from capstone courses. However, some indirect measures such as job placement information or student surveys are better assessed at three year intervals. Overall, you should ensure that every three years data is collected on all assessment measures for every SLO. Your departmental assessment plan should then layout how data for each SLO will be obtained, when that data will be collected and how it should be analyzed and presented to the program’s faculty. It is to this latter requirement that we will turn to in the next section.

On a final note, your department should attempt to find existing mechanisms that can be used to obtain your data without dedicating significant departmental resources to this effort. Further, before collecting any new information, take an inventory of existing program, departmental and institutional data. Again, assessments already in use by ESU may prove useful in assessing your SLOs and thus negate the need to increase faculty workloads.

Part 3 – Assessment Analysis Reporting and Feedback

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Assessment Analysis Reporting and Feedback

At this point, the members of your academic program or department have developed good program goals and meaningful student learning outcomes. Through various direct and indirect measures, you have collected data on how well your program is enabling students to achieve those goals and outcomes. The question now becomes, "What should we do with all of this data?" Note that the main purpose the collected assessment data should serve is to inform the program on how to improve. There may exist additional purposes, for example, to fulfill institutional, statutory or accreditation body requirements, but at the program level, this sort of assessment activity exists to facilitate continuous improvement for the program itself. Note further, that program assessment is not, nor should it be, an appropriate forum for the evaluation of individual faculty member's teaching ability (other methods exist solely for these purposes). Program assessment is a reflection on how well the program is meeting the specified student learning goals and outcomes.

This last phase of the assessment cycle, to analyze and report assessment findings, provides feedback that can be used to adjust the curriculum, improve course content, or perhaps, improve the assessment process itself. This feedback "closes the loop" on the assessment cycle. Without thoughtful analysis and reporting of the assessment results, the entirety of the assessment process is a practice in futility. Thus, the results from the assessment cycle should drive potential changes to curriculum, courses, teaching, assignments, program goals, student learning objectives, and even methods of assessment & the tools/techniques to collect, process, and analyze assessment data.

What follows are a few pointers to guide the analysis of your assessment data (UMASS, 2012):

- Present data in relation to the identified goals and objectives for your program.
- Select and use appropriate procedures for data analysis.
- Use qualitative and quantitative methods to present a well-balanced picture of the program.
- Keep in mind the audiences who will access and use the data, and vary your analysis and reporting procedures according to the identified audience.
- Prepare written statements that identify and elaborate on the pros and cons of the academic program.
- Develop recommendations based on the analysis of data, and use the identified goals as a framework within which to accomplish these changes.

Ultimately, your analysis should help you to answer the following questions (SMSU, 2012):

- 1) What do the data say about your students' mastery of subject matter, of research skills, or of writing and speaking?
- 2) What do the data say about your students' preparation for taking the next step in their careers?

- 3) Are there areas where your students are outstanding? Are there areas where your students are consistently weak?
- 4) Are graduates of your program getting good jobs, accepted into reputable graduate schools, reporting satisfaction with their undergraduate education?
- 5) Do you see indications in student performance that point to weakness in any particular skills, such as research, writing, or critical thinking skills?
- 6) Do you see areas where performance is okay, but not outstanding, and where you would like to see a higher level of performance?

To facilitate the analysis process, you may find it helpful (during the outcome and goal development process) to link program goals to student learning outcomes. As discussed in the previous section, student learning outcomes can be mapped to individual courses and perhaps even individual assignments (depending on how far down your program wants/needs to go with assessment, or how far down your assessment/accreditation governing body requires). Mapping these goals/outcomes will enable data aggregation, thus one form of direct assessment, student performance on a specific assignment or problem, can be used to show direct impact on student learning outcomes and program goals. Indirect measures (e.g., questionnaires) may also be linked to specific student learning outcomes and program goals. No matter how the data is produced and gathered, at some point the department is faced with a collection of data and the question becomes "What to do with it?"

You may want to consider forming a department/program assessment committee that reviews annual assessment data. This committee could aggregate the program assessment data, conduct the appropriate analysis of the data, and then make recommendations to the faculty for consideration on program changes. This information can be very helpful while deliberating over program curriculum changes. The discussion during the analysis of the assessment data could follow the themes in the questions listed above. The final outcome of the analysis should be a written summation of the assessment data, providing a picture of where the program stands, and possible recommendations for future improvement.

The focus during this final step should be on closing the feedback loop. By this we mean acting upon the recommended changes suggested through the analysis of our assessment data. Again, we remind you that in many ways you are already doing this. One hypothetical example: in a department meeting several faculty discuss the declining quality of students' research papers and come to find that their students' research skills are lacking. In response, the department decides to have a university librarian give a presentation to all students in the program's mandatory introductory class about the library's services and resources. When documented as part of an assessment report, this demonstrates the assessment process. We have these types of conversations on a daily basis, so we reiterate that much of the assessment process is already in place, it just needs to be formalized. Additionally, some other possible outcomes as a result of program-level assessment feedback could be:

- Change in program curriculum (these may be at the course or program level)
- Change in program assessment plan
- Change collection methods, analysis of data, or metrics
- Change student learning outcomes

- Change in program administrative operations
- Addition of new instructors
- New technology or support for program use

The most important message from these possible outcomes is that one of the goals of assessment is to drive continuous improvement. A program that fails to incorporate thoughtful consideration and analysis of the assessment data into the decision process for future program changes, risks making poorly informed decisions that may ultimately weaken the program. At the very least, the program will not have the means to support decisions for change, or proof that outcomes and goals are being met. Finally, one way to make this process easier is map out the assessment process from SLO identification to implementing program changes as done in the table below.

Table 3 – Tabular Depiction of the Assessment Process*

Learning Goal: Students will...	Direct and Indirect Measures	Outcome	Possible Reason or Hypothesis	Action Taken
Be prepared for graduate and professional degree programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Departmental survey of graduating seniors and recent alumni -Data from benchmark institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student admittance rates to graduate and professional programs are low, compared to similar institutions' rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students are not being "coached" about the graduate school application process. -Students have not been exposed to experiences (e.g. undergraduate research) that enhance their chances of graduate school admissions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Enlist junior school "track."
Communicate competently in the major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Scores on faculty-developed rubrics for final oral exam and final report in capstone course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student performance in capstone courses is poor, as measured by rubrics for oral presentations and written reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students are not receiving enough experience in communication in prerequisite major courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Revamp experiences.
Integrate competently knowledge and skills acquired in the major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Departmental survey of graduating seniors -Grade distribution analysis of senior capstone course grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Survey results reveal that students think the capstone course is an "easy A." -Grade distribution reveals inflation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Capstone course is "watered-down" to account for a variety of previous course experience. -Capstone course does not demand true integration of previous learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Change capstone course content.

*Taken from the 2nd edition of "Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources" published by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Part 4 – Assessment in Student Affairs and Services

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Creating learning outcomes and assessment plans in Student Affairs follows the same basic structure and process as those found in academic programs (See page 5 of the “Guide to Program and Departmental Assessment”), but may be wider in scope. For example, the audience may be larger and more diverse (not just students), and the linkage back to best practices, mission and goals may be more broad. The process--determining what is to be assessed, the methods to be used to gather the data, gathering the data to support that process, reviewing the data, and implementing changes based on data analysis with the ultimate goals of continued improvement--is the same in Student Affairs as it is in the academic realm.

It is important to note that this overview is not specific to East Stroudsburg University, but to Student Affairs in general. Student Affairs as a field often encompasses many areas that may be housed in other divisions at ESU due to historical, political, legislative, logistical, or practical reasons. As reporting lines are fluid at any institution, for the context of this document, Student Affairs will be looked at very broadly. For example, at many institutions, diverse areas such as the Registrar, Campus Police, International Student Services, and Enrollment Services, to name a few, may fall under the purview of Student Affairs, but at the time of this writing, do not report via the division of Student Affairs at ESU. What falls within the division of Student Affairs at ESU is an institutional, system, or state decision, so there is no right or wrong organizational structure. When looking at assessment, a broad swath of anything that might constitute a “student service” will be included in the following overview and subsequent examples, not only because reporting lines will most likely change in the future, but more importantly, all programs regardless of administrative organization need to be assessed if they involve student learning and service. Thus, departments such as Campus Police, the Registrar, Enrollment Services, Academic Advising, etc. all need to have robust assessment plans regardless of institutional organizational structure at the time of this writing.

Program Assessment vs. Assessing Student Learning

In the academic realm, assessment activities focus very clearly and specifically on student learning: what students know and what they can do as a result of curricular activities. In Student Affairs, however, we are concerned with both student learning (what they know and can do as a result of their co-curricular experiences) and with the effectiveness of our administrative operations. John Schuh offers a useful framework for program assessment and notes that, in addition to identifying student learning, we can assess:

- Participation – the number of people who engage in an activity, the number of phone calls about a particular topic, counts of website “hits,” residence hall occupancy and so forth
- Needs – determine what students need from the college experience and student services

- Satisfaction – identify the extent to which students are satisfied with the services we provide, including residence hall facilities, late-night program offerings, hours of operation, meal plan options, and campus safety
- Cost effectiveness – determining how various costs compare from our university to our competitors as well as identifying if off-campus/vendor services might be more (or less) cost effective

Comprehensive assessment of a department addresses all of these areas, as well as student learning. Although students are the focus of the examples noted above, it may be important—depending on the focus of the program or department—to consider a variety of constituencies. This is discussed in more detail later in this Addendum. There is a tendency of Student Affairs staff to focus on satisfaction or effectiveness. After a program or process, we often ask “did this work?” “what should be changed so it’s a smoother process?,” “were students satisfied?,” and “did students like it?” These questions—while important—focus on effectiveness and satisfaction, rather than student learning. Student learning, therefore, is the focus of this Addendum.

Student Learning: Determining What to Assess and When

One of the biggest challenges for Student Affairs professionals is determining *what* to assess. In a given academic year, there might be hundreds or thousands of programs, events, and processes which could be assessed. When developing an assessment process, start with large events, programs and processes that will provide the greatest impact on student learning – or at least what is believed will provide the greatest impact. It is also important to note that not every activity, event, or process has to be assessed. In fact, an assessment plan that attempts to measure all possibilities is likely to fail due to the large scope and amount of work involved. Instead, your assessment plan should seek to explore the various settings and events that may promote learning in a particular area. For example, student leaders may make learning gains through pre-service training, in-service activities, individual and group supervision, and the implementation of their position responsibilities. Your assessment plan may involve comprehensive examination of one of these events (for instance, gathering data about several SLOs within pre-service training) or one SLO across multiple facets of the student leader experience.

Determining what to assess can be complicated. Student Affairs has such a wide variety of programs, events and activities such as trainings, orientation, food service, social events, educational programs, athletics, recreation, community service, spiritual events, and so on. This list is endless. In order not to get overwhelmed, it is best to break down assessment into logical and manageable categories. Often these categories can mirror departments and programs. For example, the broadest level might be career services, residential services, food service, student activities, etc. Secondary levels could include:

- Career Services: Career day, resume review, mock interviews, employer relations, etc.
- Residential Services: RA training, emergency preparedness training, community development programming, orientation, etc.
- Food Service: International food night, nutritional awareness programs, etc.

- Student Activities: Greek life, student senate, student award ceremonies, recreational sports, etc.

In some instances, such as in student activities, it may be necessary to break down the categories even further into specific events or programs to ensure the assessment process is manageable.

Target audience:

The next step is to determine the target audience. Often it is assumed that Student Affairs programs are always student targeted and thus only student learning would be assessed. Generally this is the case, but not always. Aside from students, target audiences may include:

1. Parents and family members or guardians (family orientation, family day, etc.)
2. Alumni (homecoming, alumni events, alumni day, fundraising events, etc.)
3. Faculty and staff (FERPA training, how to manage disruptive students workshops, etc.)
4. Community Members (town / gown programming and events)
5. Colleagues (training programs, staff development events, conferences)
6. Multiple (commencement, homecoming, fundraising events, awards ceremonies, etc.)

This is a short list of the various target audience which Student Affairs programs might possibly assess.

Since the learning outcomes and possibly the assessment modalities may be different based on the target audience, determining the target audience is essential to developing a good assessment plan.

In the end however, regardless of the target audience, the goal should relate back to students and service to students. Thus, even if an assessment process focuses on what might appear to be a “non-student activity,” students should benefit from the data revealed through the assessment process, even if others may benefit as well. For example, open house events and summer new student orientation certainly focus on prospective or admitted students and their family members. However, current undergraduate students are involved in the implementation of these events. Thus, an assessment effort might involve identifying the learning the undergraduates gained from a training session on how to interact with upset visitors, presentation skills, and leadership. Although the open house and orientation is ostensibly for prospective or admitted but not matriculated students and family members, the assessment process concerns the learning of current students.

Finally, determining an assessment cycle is essential. Assessing on a schedule, (for example, every other year, three years, or five years) is fine as long as the cycle is reasonable for the event, program or process and the cycle can be justified—through assessment. The Curriculum Mapping process outlined in the “Guide to Program and Departmental Assessment” is articulated primarily with curricular efforts in mind; however, this framework is also applicable to the work

of Student Affairs departments. You can extend this framework to a three, four, or five year cycle as appropriate to your department and functions.

Linking Assessment to the Institution Mission, Values, Goals and Best Practices

All assessment processes within an institution should be linked back to some institutional value or goal. Student Affairs assessment is no different. Institutional values are articulated in a variety of formal statements, including the institutional mission, values statement, goals statement, strategic plans, or general education requirements. An assessment plan may also be linked through departmental, divisional, or programmatic missions, values, goals, or strategic plans, which by their very nature should already have a strong relationship to the institution's, thus creating a linkage pyramid which ultimately leads back to the institutional level.

In addition, an assessment plan should be connected to best practices in the field. For example, learning outcomes should link the CAS Standards (Counsel on the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education), or standards and best practices established by a relevant professional organization (e.g., AACRAO, AHEAD, NASPA, ACPA, NAFSA, ACUHO-I)

Linking an assessment plan to institutional foundations and field-specific standards accomplishes two things. First, demonstrating that what you plan to assess (e.g., program, event, practice) has a relationship to the mission, values, or goals of the university suggests that this element is important; it has value. And that it is valuable enough to invest time and human resources on its assessment. (Of course, if you are unable to explain the relationship of your program, event, or practice to institutional foundations, then perhaps it should be stopped.) Secondly, field-specific standards are generally developed based on current research and evidence of positive impact on student life. Thus, establishing a relationship to these standards further bolsters the importance of your program, event, or practice.

Goals

Setting goals is the key to creating a successful assessment plan in Student Affairs. Student Affairs assessment outcomes often fail for lack of a well-defined goal. Although a program may be well planned, executed, and attended, the desired outcome may be vague. For example, what is the goal of having a dance? Is it to provide students an alternative to drinking on a Saturday night, to create community, or to have fun? Perhaps all. Perhaps there are other goals that have not been mentioned. If the goal is not properly defined from the onset, trying to measure the outcomes will be difficult if not impossible. The goal should follow basic goal setting principles of SMART goals. Thus, they should be Specific, Measurable, Action Oriented, Realistic, and Time based. The setting of SMART goals for each program or event is the basis for developing well developed and achievable learning outcomes.

Creating the Learning Outcome

Once the goal or goals are properly defined, the learning outcomes should more easily be determined since the reason for having a program or activity should be clear. In order to create the learning outcome for a particular program, the various stakeholders must agree on the intended learning outcome. This may seem simple, but in fact it can be rather complicated.

Providing examples is the best way to explain how learning outcomes may vary widely depending upon the constituent and the program.

Example 1:

Community Service Program: Butts Out Day – A program which has students, faculty and staff picking up cigarette butts around campus.

- Goals:
1. To provide awareness of the numbers of cigarette butts around campus
 2. To create an awareness of the dangers of smoking
 3. To clean up the campus of cigarette butts
 4. To provide awareness of the biodegradability of cigarette butts

Although there might be other goals, these provide good starting points. One could create a learning outcome for each goal; however that might be an onerous task. Through buy-in of the various stakeholders, one or two of the goals might be used to measure learning outcomes. Although all four goals would remain in place, in any given year (assuming this is a yearly event) only one or two learning outcomes should be measured. How one measures and determines if the learning outcome is achieved is quite different depending on the goal used. If the goal of cleaning up the campus is used, the learning outcome measures will be very different than if “to create an awareness of the dangers of smoking” is used. Thus it is important to determine which learning outcome(s) will be measured based on the goal or goals selected.

Example 2:

Constitution Day – A federally mandated program that requires schools that receive Title IV funds to celebrate Constitution Day.

- Goals:
1. To provide students with a better understanding of the US Constitution in today’s society
 2. To provide students a better understanding of the history of the US Constitution
 3. To comply to Federal Law

As in the previous example, each of the goals for Constitution Day could have a learning outcome; however, I would argue that Goal 3 would not make a good learning outcome. Although there are schools that will do the minimal programming necessary in order to achieve the compliance piece of Constitution Day, doing the minimum will also ensure that little or no learning will occur. If the learning outcome is compliance only, without regard to the spirit of the law and student learning, then the way in which one measures success will be very different, and probably much easier, than if goal one or two is used. For many institutions, goal three will never be a learning outcome, but will always be a goal, since

compliance, although the initial impetus for the program, is not an educational goal of the program.

Example 3:

FAFSA Form Completion – An online web based program which helps students and parents understand and properly complete the FAFSA form.

- Goals:
1. To provide students and parents a step by step, easily understood, online tutorial showing how to complete the FAFSA form
 2. To provide an understanding of the consequences of not completing the FAFSA correctly
 3. To have 80% of FAFSA forms completed correctly
 4. To have 75% of current students who require financial aid to complete the FAFSA within 30 days of the first day the FAFSA can be submitted in any given year

In this example, all four goals have good learning outcome possibilities. However, the learning outcomes differ for each goal and the audiences are different as well. In goal one, the audience is actually staff who will be creating the program, although the data may arise from the end user's experience with the product. Thus once the online program has been completed, the feedback about the "step by step" and "easily understood" nature of the product is as much for the benefit of the staff creating the program as for the parents and students who will be using the program.

Goals two, three, and four may be sub-measures of goal one. Thus, by creating a dynamic, easy to use, step by step online program, parents and students will show an understanding of the FAFSA form through an 80% accurate completion rate and 75% submission rate within the first 30 days. In this example, the goals, learning outcomes, and measures all link back to one another even though the target audiences may be different. Ultimately even though the target audience is not students, the ultimate outcome of the program is to help students be more successful.

Measuring Learning Outcomes

As in the academic side of the house, measures may be either indirect or direct (See page 10 of the Guide to Program and Departmental Assessment) and each of these comes in two forms, qualitative and quantitative. As both have been adequately defined elsewhere in this document, they will not be repeated. In Student Affairs, both qualitative and quantitative measures can be used when assessing programs. There is not a right or wrong answer as to what percentage of qualitative and quantitative measures should be used; that determination should be based on the goals and learning outcomes of the program. For example, if the primary goal is to increase attendance, compliance, understanding of a process, retention, etc. then it is likely a more quantitative measure would be used because the goal specifically relates to increase and thus counting, which is quantitative. However, if the program is more social or artistic in nature, for

example a play, musical performance, or social event, the measures might tend to more qualitative and use such measures as focus groups, interviews, observations, or other forms of non-numerical feedback. However, just because the measured used is non-numerical does not necessarily mean it is qualitative and vice versa. Each measure used needs to be evaluated on a program by program basis.

As the types of quantitative measures have been discussed earlier in this document, they won't be discussed further. Within Student Affairs, it is perfectly acceptable to use a wide range of measures. When possible, staff are encouraged to use both qualitative and quantitative measures to show reliability of results. In addition, it is important to clearly note when the learning objective has been achieved. This must be clearly defined from the onset to ensure continual improvements. As noted previously (in the goal section), the goal must be measurable, including the starting point and a pre-determined point at which the outcome is considered to have been achieved. For example, if the goal is to increase attendance in a resume workshop, the attendance of previous resume workshops must be known from the outset in order to determine if an increase has been achieved. (As a suggestion, it is good practice to note actual numbers as well as percentages in your outcomes statement and final analysis to save time in the future when the re-assessment process begins.) In a second example, let's consider student learning from the resume workshop where the intended outcome is: Students will identify the standard components of a resume. Early in your assessment process, you must determine what constitutes a "correct" answer. Has the student learned to identify the components if he or she can list seven of eight components that are taught in the workshop? Or six? Must the student score a 100%? As you can see, SMART goals are essential to the results of your assessment process.

Any assumptions made about the data, outcomes or goals need to be noted as well. Information that might be specific to a particular department, that might not be commonly understood--or worse misunderstood--by those not in the field, should be clearly defined.

For example, a conduct office may have a goal of decreased student disciplinary violations. Within the department it may be assumed that means total number of students accused of violations, but it could be interpreted as total number of violated policies, the number of students present at the time of an alleged violation, or the number of individual incidents. Students often violate multiple policies during one incident, thus it is imperative to be clear as to whether the goal involves the total number of incidents, total number of students violating, or number of policies.

Examples of possible and common qualitative measures in Student Affairs include:

- Positive vs. Negative Tweets
- Evaluations (completed by program participants, student staff performance, etc...)
- Focus group feedback
- Video recordings (both of the individual or group being assessed but also of audience members)
- Open-ended comment sections in Surveys
- Audience reaction
- Q & A of program participants

- Small group discussions

Example 1:

Goal: To ensure that at least 80% of students who attend the career fair have researched companies at which they are interviewing.

Learning Outcomes:

1. A student will have adequately researched a company at which they wish to interview at the career fair by being able show an understanding of the companies mission, an understanding of the available job(s), and the product or service the companies provides.

Measures:

2. Student will be able to correctly answer 80% of the questions on a test concerning each company at which they are interviewing (Quantitative)
3. Feedback forms from employers noted that 80% of employers felt students were prepared for their interviews (Qualitative & Quantitative)
4. Student exit surveys noted that 80% of the students noted they felt prepared (Qualitative)

In order for a student to secure an interview with a particular company a student would have to correctly answer 80% of the questions concerning that company before being allowed to engage in an interview. If the student did not wish to interview with a particular company, they did not have to take that portion of the test. After the completion of career day, interviewers were asked specific questions about student preparedness. Although the answers were qualitative in nature, it was felt that the best gauge of preparedness was the feedback from company interviewers, thus it served as both a qualitative (their opinion on preparedness) and quantitative measure (the percentage of students the interviewers felt were prepared.) Student's self-perception of their own preparedness is an indirect measure and more subjective. It was used as an indicator, but was not used as the lone measure of the learning outcome.

Example 2: Student ABC Theater Club production of "Pippin"

Goals:

1. To provide alternative programing on Friday and Saturday nights
2. To provide an enjoyable and entertaining experience for members of the College community
3. To develop a sense of teamwork among the students in the production company
4. To develop an alternative form of revenue for the theatre company

Similar to Constitution Day, some goals might not make good learning outcomes. For example, because goal number four is purely monetary, it would seem to have no connection

to student learning. However, altering the goal to include balancing budgets, revenue generation, or marketing can potentially transform it into a strong learning outcome.

As for the other goals in this theatre example, possible measures include:

1. Number of people attending vs. the campus population
2. Audience reaction as noted via video recording of the audience and video recording of the performance to assess quality, entertainment value, etc.
3. Evaluation of the performance by audience members
4. Number of disciplinary incidents during the time of performance measured against other dates / times when no such activity was being offered

There are many ways to measure the outcomes of Student Affairs efforts. The key is to identify what you are measuring, how you wish to measure it, and determining if your goal or goals have been met based on the data arising from the measure. Finally, as noted previously, make sure that both quantitative and qualitative measures are used.

Analyzing the Data and Making Changes

Data analysis is often complicated and task specific and, as a result is frequently the most difficult task in assessing if learning, therefore this chapter will not discuss this topic in any depth. However, like all assessment plans, the data must be analyzed based on the goals, anticipated learning outcomes, and measures used. If the goals and outcomes were not met based on the identified measures then either new learning outcomes need to be created, new measures set, or the goals need to be redeveloped. In a nutshell, if the goal was not met, a strategy needs to be put into place to achieve the goal in the future. This may include eliminating or changing the program in the future, but such decisions should be made thoughtfully through an analysis of the data. Alternatively, analysis of your data may suggest changing parts of the program if some outcomes were achieved but others were not. Data analysis could also lead to whole new areas of programming based on needs identified through the analysis. The goal, of course, is to provide evidence that we are doing what we say we are doing (i.e., promoting student learning and development).

The Final Step: Starting Over

Assessment never stops. Even if a program fulfills all of its learning outcomes and goals, assuming it is not a one-time event, it will need to be assessed again on a pre-determined cycle. Each assessment cycle should result in changes to our efforts (in order to improve student learning gains) and those changes must then be assessed. In other words, the processes start all over again! Even programs that may be a one-time event can provide valuable insight for new programs, student needs, and learning. Every event and program in Student Affairs should be seen as an opportunity to learn and to improve our product and service.

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