Developing the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan

http://www.jsums.edu/~jsuoaa/Assessment/assessment.html

Jackson State University
The Office of Academic Affairs and Student Life
# Table of Contents

**Section 1: Assessment Overview**

- JSU Assessment Coordinators  
  Page 1
- Our Goal  
  Page 2
- Objectives/Roles/Responsibilities  
  Pages 3-5
- Effective Program Assessment  
  Pages 6-8

**Section 2: Student Learning Plan**

- Developing the Assessment Plan  
  Pages 9-11
- The Steps  
  Pages 12-17
- Writing Assessable Goals & Objectives  
  Page 18
- Assessment Approaches & Methods  
  Pages 19-20
- Pros and Cons of Various Methods  
  Pages 21-24

**Section 3: Resources**

- Online Resources  
  Page 25
- Assessment Plan Template  
  Pages 26-27
- Annual Assessment Report Template  
  Pages 28-29
- Assessment Plan Review Instrument  
  Page 30
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLEGE/UNIT</th>
<th>PRIMARY</th>
<th>CONTACT INFO</th>
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OUR GOAL

Create a culture of assessment in Jackson State University academic and student life units.

CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT*

An environment in which continuous improvement through assessment is expected, occurs, and is valued.

ASSESSMENT

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. –Tom Angelo, AAHE Assessment Forum (1995)

*This definition and other assessment-related terms are presented in the JSU Assessment Glossary on the Assessment Web site.
Why Assessment Won’t Go Away

- Pressure to produce evidence of student learning (external mostly)
- Accreditor requests for documentation (external)
- Intermittent Federal interest (external)
- Perceived faculty ambivalence about a process seen as “external” and “administrative” (internal)

OAASL Assessment and Planning Office’s Objectives and Roles

- Coordinate and document the assessment process for academic and student life units.
- Assure that measurable objectives and student learning outcomes are established and appropriately published.
- Assist in identifying relevant assessment tools.
- Develop and document assessment plans and schedules for academic and student life units.
- Serve as a resource for academic and student life units relative to assessment-related matters.
- Facilitate peer review, communication and sharing among academic and student life units relative to assessment-related matters.

Assessment Coordinators’ Roles & Performance Expectations

- Serve as Assessment Team liaison for departments and programs in your college/division.
- Assist in assessing the appropriateness and measurability of current objectives and student learning outcomes in academic/student life units.
- Facilitate the development, coordination and documentation of assessment plans and schedules for units in each respective college/division and for the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Life.
- Assist in identifying assessment instruments for departments and programs in each respective college/division.
- Provide peer review to other members of the Assessment Team.
- Attend and participate in scheduled meetings.
Shared Responsibilities

- Understand and promote the importance of the role of assessment in student learning.
- Periodically inventory current assessment activities.
- Disseminate information to campus constituents about assessment theory, practices, and activities.
- Promote faculty and academic support staff professional development in the area of assessment.
- Advocate for resources to create and maintain a culture of assessment.
- Review annual assessment reports and provide feedback to departments/program.
- Ensure improvement through the appropriate use of assessment results.

Who Is Responsible for Assessing Student Learning at JSU?

Entry-Level Assessment -- Division of Undergraduate Studies; Testing and Assessment Office.

General Education Assessment -- General Education Committee (formerly Core II Committee).

Program Outcomes Assessment -- Faculty members and administrative leaders within each college, school, department, or program.

Assessment of Student & Alumni Satisfaction -- Division of Undergraduate Studies; Office of Institutional Research; Career Services Center; Student Life; and Alumni Affairs.

The assessment of academic and student life units at Jackson State University is the responsibility of the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Life.
Responsibilities of Administrators

Responsibility for assessment is an institution-wide process that is shared by faculty, administration, and staff. While the primary responsibility for classroom and discipline outcomes assessment rests with faculty, administrators’ role in management and delivery of resources makes them central to effective responses to challenges identified through assessment activities:

1) Encourage and support outcomes assessment at all levels including faculty and discipline and program planning and development efforts.
2) Facilitate faculty, discipline, and program changes as designed by faculty in response to classroom and discipline assessment findings.
3) Encourage cross-division dialogues and activities supporting development of assessment efforts and faculty skills across the curriculum.
4) Amplify and support curriculum changes in classrooms, disciplines, or programs where challenges have been identified through institutional assessment activities.

Responsibilities of Full-time Faculty

Since the purposes of assessment are to understand and improve the educational outcomes of our efforts, it is in the interest of faculty to assure quality instruction through professional development and responsible outcomes assessment of their actions. Outcomes assessment is first and foremost a faculty responsibility. In support of these ideals, faculty are to be active in assessment through the following activities:

1) Conduct classroom assessments in order to focus student learning and implement instructional strategies supportive of improving student learning outcomes.
2) Report utilization of classroom assessment in order to share ideas and strategies with colleagues and support institutional documentation and accreditation efforts.
3) Participate in planning and conducting discipline and/or program assessment and then work with colleagues to improve discipline and program outcomes.
4) Cooperate with college-wide assessment efforts through active support of general education (e.g., ACT), transfer, and other college-wide assessments.
5) Support through actions the assessment activities of the Assessment Team and respond to challenges as identified by those efforts.

Responsibilities of Part-time Faculty

Since part-time faculty share professional commitments with full-time faculty, many of the assessment activities are similar. However, in recognition of their limited availability, part-time faculty is not expected to be as active in planning and implementing assessment activities at the discipline, program, and institutional levels. In support of these ideals, part-time faculty is to be active in assessment through the following activities:

1) Conduct classroom assessments in order to focus student learning and implement instructional strategies supportive of improving student learning outcomes.
2) Report utilization of classroom assessment in order to share ideas and strategies with colleagues and support institutional documentation and accreditation efforts.
3) Participate in conducting discipline and/or program assessment and then cooperate with colleagues to improve discipline and program outcomes.
4) Cooperate with college-wide assessment efforts through active support of general education (e.g., ACT), transfer, and other college-wide assessments.
5) Respond to challenges as identified by assessment activities of the Assessment Team as appropriate at the classroom level.
Every JSU degree program, academic support and student service department must have an assessment plan that describes expected student learning outcomes and the methods used to evaluate student achievement of those outcomes.

The Student Learning and Outcomes Assessment Plan: (1) Articulates student knowledge and performance expectations relative to degree completion, professional and personal development (2) Identifies appropriate tools for evaluating the extent to which students are achieving those outcomes; and (3) Describes how faculty and support staff will act on the resulting information. The Plan describes the evaluation process and how the results will be used for continuous program improvement. The Assessment Plan should also include a timeline.

Effective Program Assessment Answers These Questions

☐ What are you trying to accomplish?
☐ How well are you doing it?
☐ How, using the answers to the first two questions, can you improve what you are doing?
☐ What and how does a program contribute to the development and growth of its students and/or the support of its customers?
☐ How can student learning be improved?

10 Characteristics of Successful Assessment Programs

1. The assessment program is driven by values.
2. The unit makes a long-term commitment.
3. Instructional leaders understand and believe in the value of assessment.
4. Faculty and staff lead the program and own the results.
5. Technical expertise and support are provided.
6. Learning outcomes are defined programmatically.
7. Measurement tools align with outcomes.
8. A viable research design and methodology are used.
9. Results are used by faculty & staff to improve learning and/or the learning environment.
10. Assessment is linked to college planning.

Evidence of Program Assessment SUCCESS

Sincerity means people trust the process.
Usefulness means the process helps people.
Clarity means people understand the process.
Commitment means people believe the process works to their advantage and leaders support the process.
Enthusiasm means the people want to do it.
Systemic and Sustainable means everyone is continuing to use it.
Support means people are not on their own.


Some Uses of Assessment Results

1. Changes in course content
2. Addition/deletion of courses or changes in course sequences
3. Changes in degree requirements or degree sheet options
4. Changes in emphasis for new or vacant faculty positions
5. Use of assessment information to facilitate curriculum discussions as faculty meetings, curriculum committee meetings, and faculty retreats
6. Use of assessment information to guide changes in degree programs and development of new degree program options
7. Justification of past curriculum changes and to show program improvement resulting from those changes
8. Changes in the advising process
9. Development of academic services for students
10. Development of new career exploration and career services for students
11. Changes to student academic facilities such as computer labs, science labs, and study areas

12. Development of program-based websites to provide students with academic and program information

13. Sharing assessment information with alumni and industrial review boards

14. Use of assessment information to further refine the assessment methods or to implement new assessment methods

**Should Assessment Be Done Every Year?**

Assessment in academic and support units should be ongoing. The frequency of the assessment should reflect a commitment to the assessment process.

Assessment reports are requested every year, but the timetable for doing assessments should be established in the academic and support units' STUDENT LEARNING AND OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN. The Assessment Plan may be established so that some assessment methods are conducted in alternate years or some assessment methods take several years to complete. Academic and support programs with very small enrollments may benefit from assessment plans that are established with alternate- or multiple-year timetables for implementation.

**Assessment Annual Report**

The Annual Report describes the program outcomes assessment(s) that have been conducted during the academic year and how the resulting information has been or will be used. *(See Appendices and the JSU Assessment Web site for a copy of the template.)*
Section 2
Student Learning Assessment Plan

Jackson State University
The Office of Academic Affairs and Student Life
WHERE DO I BEGIN?

**Begin by . . .**
- Defining learning expectations.
- Taking inventory of what you already do.
- Defining the measurement selection process.
- Procuring and/or developing instrumentation and approaches.
- Pilot testing and refining.
- Implementing.
- Reflecting on results, reconsidering and changing current approaches as necessary, and starting the next assessment cycle.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Student Learning Outcomes encompass a wide range of student attributes and abilities, both cognitive and affective, which are a measure of how their college experiences have supported their development as individuals. **Cognitive outcomes** include demonstrable acquisition of specific knowledge and skills, as in a major; what do students know that they didn’t know before, and what can they do that they couldn’t do before? **Affective outcomes** are also of considerable interest; how has their college experience impacted students’ values, goals, attitudes, self-concepts, world views, and behaviors? Has it developed their potential? How has it enhanced their values to themselves, their families, and their communities? (Fry, 20-21)
What is Assessment of Student Learning?

Faculty members are asked to describe explicitly the knowledge, skills, and values that a student should have to graduate from the program. Assessment efforts are directed toward answering three questions:

1. What do we want students to learn?
2. How well are they learning what they need?
3. How can we help them learn more effectively?

The third question exemplifies the ongoing nature of the assessment process; it does not involve assessing an outcome but rather the progress being made toward intended objectives. The most important step in assessment is the use of the results to create and implement a plan for improving student learning.

The term “assessment” is used to describe evaluation of student learning at the program level, rather than the evaluation of individual students at the class level. Faculty members evaluate students through testing and grading; however, these evaluations are restricted to learning that occurs within a single course. The curriculum of an academic program consists of numerous courses as well as other learning opportunities such as field experiences, internships, or service learning projects. Students are expected to develop knowledge, skills, and values as a result of this combination of experiences. Thus the assessment of student learning focuses on this “macro” level rather than the “micro” level of an individual student. [Adapted from Eastern Illinois website] Because student learning assessment is so closely linked to the curriculum, faculty must play a principal role in the assessment process. That is,

- Faculty establish the student learning objectives for the department/program;
- Faculty select the methods and measures for evaluating the objectives;
- Faculty determine appropriate performance standards; and
- Faculty develop and implement program changes based on assessment data.

Building a Culture of Evidence

Each academic discipline establishes principles of evidence, which are used to evaluate the quality of scholarly work. As scholars, it is known that evidence is used to assert that a conclusion is valid.

What is Evidence? (Adapted from Peter Ewell, NCHMS; WASC Evidence Guide)

The following five characteristics define evidence:

- Evidence is intentional and purposeful. It is used to answer deliberately posed questions of interest to the department or program.
- Evidence involves interpretation and reflection to support a conclusion. Data by themselves are not useful; it is their interpretation and the resulting actions that shape the direction of the department or program that are meaningful.
- Evidence is integrated and holistic. This means that multiple pieces of evidence are used and evaluated for common themes to support a conclusion.
- Evidence can be both quantitative and qualitative. Each department/program is in the best position to select what it deems to be the most appropriate forms of evidence.
Evidence can be either *direct* or *indirect*. Direct evidence is performance-based, while indirect evidence looks at student satisfaction, perceptions, and values. Both kinds of evidence are necessary and important. Each department/program should carefully examine existing sources of evidence as well as consider new approaches and how they can be used to assess student learning.

The assessment plan provides the framework to implement an evidence-based examination of student learning. It serves as the tool that guides the department in building a culture of evidence from which informed decision-making, planning, and improvement can take place.
Student Learning Assessment Plan
(See the Appendices and the JSU Assessment Web site for the template.)

Student learning assessment is a continuous and dynamic process consisting of a series of steps, each of which is dependent on the information gathered from the previous step. The process is recursive; as one cycle of steps is completed, another cycle begins. Regardless of the program or department being assessed, the process includes the following steps:

1. Define the mission statement of the department or program.
2. Define the goals and student learning objectives for the department or program.
3. Identify and describe methods used to assess student learning.
4. Establish a timeline.
5. Analyze, summarize, and report the assessment data.
6. Describe how the results will be used to improve student learning.

Once the cycle has been completed, the process begins again. Student learning goals and objectives and assessment methods are reviewed and revised, if necessary. New data are collected and analyzed and changes are implemented to improve student learning. The remaining pages describe the elements of an Assessment Plan and are presented to assist departments/programs in developing their plans. While each department may select a format for presenting its plan, it must contain all the elements described below.

Step 1. Define the mission statement of the department or program.

The mission statement is a brief statement of the values and philosophy of the department/program. It should guide decision-making about the curriculum and provides a framework for setting goals. It should also be aligned with the University mission.

Example 1: The mission of the Department of Biology is to prepare its graduates to engage in scientific inquiry, to communicate scientific information clearly, and to acquire basic biology knowledge and skills that prepare them for employment and/or continuing education in the life sciences. [Adapted from Department of Biological Sciences, Rutgers University, Campus at Newark]

Example 2: The mission of the College of Agriculture is to provide students with the educational experiences and environment that promote discipline competence; the capacity to attain career success in agriculture, food, or related professions; and a sense of civic responsibility. [University of Minnesota, from Diamond, 1998; Designing & Assessing Courses and Curricula: A Practical Guide, p. 72]

Step 2. Define the goals and student learning objectives for the department or program.

Goals are statements of broad, long range intended outcomes of the program and the curriculum. They describe the knowledge, skills, and values expected of graduates. Goals flow from the mission statement and provide a framework for the objectives. It is suggested that from three to five goals be written for a department or program, although there is nothing
special about this number. Limiting the number of goals will assist with writing overarching statements and creating an assessment plan that is both meaningful and feasible to implement.

Effective goals are:

- Broad statements of meaningful expectations
- Clearly written
- Achievable
- Assessable through related objectives
- The framework for writing objectives
- Consistent with the mission statement

**Objectives** are brief, clear statements of learning outcomes that flow from the goals. They should be written using action words that specify observable and measurable behaviors.

Effective objectives:

- Tell us how we know when a goal has been achieved
- Use action words that specify observable behavior
- Are realistic and achievable
- Are measurable
- Use simple language


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Two examples of a clearly stated goal with its associated objectives:

**Example 1:**

**Goal 1.** Be familiar with major writers, periods and genres of English and American Literature and be able to place important work and genres in their historical context. [Taken from CSU San Bernardino]

**Objective 1.1.** Compare two or more works and authors in English and/or American Literature, for example, analyze the character of Satan in Milton’s “Paradise Lost” and compare it to other satanic characters in literature.

**Objective 1.2.** Analyze a novel, short story, poem, play or significant piece of prose showing familiarity with the techniques and literary contexts of the particular genre being examined.
Objective 1.3. Describe the historical context or literary period of the work or author being examined, for example, a discussion of Crane’s *Maggie* as an example of American Naturalism.

**Example 2:**

Goal 1. Use concepts and principles of ecology to explain the interactions of organisms with their environments and with each other. [Adapted from Department of Biological Sciences, Rutgers University, Campus at Newark]

Objective 1.1. Describe ecosystems as consisting of populations of organisms plus abiotic inputs, nutrient cycles, energy cycles, and limiting factors.

Objective 1.2. Explain how species and populations interact in a dynamic fashion in communities.

Objective 1.3. Propose one or more hypotheses that plausibly suggest how different species can occupy the same ecological niche.

### Step 3. Identify and describe the methods to be used to assess student learning.

Departments may find it useful to create an Objective by Course matrix to determine where in the curriculum each objective is being met before beginning to identify methods for assessing student learning. This process of curriculum mapping ensures alignment of goals and objectives with the curriculum. The table below is one example of a matrix. [Adapted from PACT Handbook, January, 2001; CSU Bakersfield]

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I = Introduce; P = Practiced; R = Reinforced

**Note.** This matrix indicates that the program did not include Objective 2 in the curriculum. Thus, the faculty must discuss whether Objective 2 is important to the program and embed it in several courses in the curriculum. Objective 5 is only introduced; thus graduates may not master it. Student learning should be measured using both direct (e.g., portfolios, papers, projects, internships, performances, standardized tests) and indirect (surveys, focus groups, interviews) evidence. Multiple measures should be employed and assessment should take place throughout the students’ program. It is suggested that at least two assessment methods be used for each objective, at least one of which must provide direct evidence of student learning. To increase feasibility of assessment, consider using methods that can evaluate more than one objective. Specify where in the curriculum the assessment will take place.

**Examples:**

1. Completion of Senior Project in Comparative Lit XXX consisting of a portfolio of four papers and a reflective essay indicative of competence in several knowledge and skill objectives of the department. A departmental committee will review and evaluate the portfolios using a 5-point scoring rubric developed and approved by department faculty. [Direct Evidence]
2. A graduating senior survey will be used to examine students’ perception of competence regarding all department goals/objectives. [Indirect Evidence]

3. A national field test in Psychology will be given to students in PsychXXX and PsychYYY to examine pre/post changes in knowledge of several cognate areas of psychology. [Direct Evidence]

Assessment Methods

The table below describes several methods of assessment. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. While this list is not exhaustive, it represents a variety of approaches to assessment. Select the methods that are most appropriate for the assessment of departmental student learning goals/objectives, faculty time, and faculty resources. In the case of a very large department, samples of student work might be selected to represent the larger student population. Remember that assessment should be meaningful, manageable, and sustainable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Direct or Indirect Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capstone Course</td>
<td>Assessments take place in a capstone course that can be program-based or required of all students. Assignments are directly related to student learning objectives.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded Questions</td>
<td>Questions related to program learning objectives are embedded within an exam taken by all students. Faculty member grades exams as usual for course grades, but responses to the embedded question are aggregated and scored with a common rubric.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Interviews</td>
<td>Graduating seniors are interviewed to obtain feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the program in regard to student learning objectives.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>A series of planned discussions for 6-10 students who are asked a series of open-ended questions related to student learning objectives.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>A compilation of a student’s work throughout the program. Evaluated by a team of faculty using a common scoring rubric.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoring Rubrics</td>
<td>A numerical range used to evaluate the quality of a project, paper, etc. in relation to student learning objectives.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Standardized Test | Department administers a national test to all students. [Be certain that test items measure student learning objectives for department.] | Direct
Survey [of students, alumni, employers] | National or locally-developed survey to measure student’s satisfaction, perceptions, values in relation to student learning objectives. | Indirect

### Step 4. Establish a timeline for the assessment plan.

The development and implementation of student learning assessment is a process that takes time, particularly if the intent is to conduct meaningful, manageable, and sustainable plans for improvement of student learning. To achieve “best practices” in student learning assessment departments/programs should “start small, but think big”. Good assessment should focus on things that matter. Begin the process by developing measurable objectives for one or two goals faculty deem most important to student learning. Then develop the methods for measuring these objectives. Build on assessment successes by gradually examining other goals. Remember that all goals do not have to be assessed each year.

### Step 5. Analyze and summarize the assessment results.

Describe the timeline and process used to analyze and summarize the results.

**Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Method</th>
<th>Time Line</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Project</td>
<td>Each semester</td>
<td>A faculty committee will meet each semester to evaluate the portfolios using a department approved scoring rubric. A summary report of Senior Projects for fall and spring semesters will be submitted to the department chair each June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduating Senior Survey</td>
<td>Bi-Yearly</td>
<td>Data will be analyzed and a summary report will be submitted to the department chair in June of the data collection year. Responsibility for this task will be assumed by the department assessment coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Test</td>
<td>Yearly</td>
<td>Data will be analyzed and a summary report will be submitted to the department chair each June. Responsibility for this task will be assigned to a faculty member (on a rotating basis).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Step 6. Describe how the results will be disseminated and used for program improvement.
Example 1: [Description of a plan to examine evidence, when no assessment has yet taken place.]

A faculty retreat will be held in the week prior to the beginning of classes for the fall semester. The department chair will send the summary assessment reports to the faculty prior to the retreat for their review. Discussions of the results regarding implications for curricular change or assessment plan adjustments will be used to guide the assessment activities for the next academic year.

Example 2: [Description of a plan for curricular change that is based on interpretation of assessment evidence.]

A faculty retreat was held on August 28, 2002 to discuss the assessment results obtained during Academic Year 2001-2002. Student writing was evaluated using both direct [senior project] and indirect [senior survey] evidence. These assessment methods indicated that students’ actual and perceived ability to organize their thoughts clearly and coherently was less than adequate. The faculty decided to implement three strategies for improvement of student writing. First, staff from the Center for Teaching and Learning will be asked to provide a department workshop on feasible strategies for increasing student writing in classes. Second, additional student writing will be required in two core courses. Third, an assessment of student writing will take place in Course XXX, a gateway course required in the junior year. In Academic Year 2003-2004, student writing will be examined using both the senior project and the graduating senior survey to determine the effectiveness of these strategies in improving student writing.

Summary of Assessment Plan Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define mission, goals, objectives</td>
<td>Describe the knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes expected of department graduates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Methods</td>
<td>How you will know that goals and objectives have been met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Where in the curriculum, how, and by whom the assessment will take place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Description and interpretation of evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions, Recommendations, Plans</td>
<td>Based on what was learned, a description of departmental plans for the next year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This document is adapted from the website of San Diego State University’s Division of Undergraduate Studies. *These guidelines have been adopted for use by Academic and Student Life units at Jackson State University. Modifications in phraseology and terminology should be made as appropriate.*
**Avoid Weasel Words and Phrases:**

Be aware of  
Have an awareness of  
Be conversant with  
Be familiar with  
Display a broad and full grasp of  
Develop awareness (understanding)

Have a (firm) grasp of  
Have a (an in-depth) knowledge of  
Be prepared for a variety of  
Have a (good) sense of  
Understand  
Have an (a broad) understanding of

**Use Action Verbs:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>List</th>
<th>Restate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add</td>
<td>Advance</td>
<td>Alter</td>
<td>Analyze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determine</td>
<td>Differentiate</td>
<td>Discriminate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make</td>
<td>Manipulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When considering how to assess student learning (i.e. How do we know that our students have learned what we expect them to?), you may wish to consider the following:

1. **What particular learning objectives are addressed?**
   - Courses
   - Programs
   - Services
   - Internships
   - Community service projects
   - Work experience
   - Independent study
   - Undergraduate research

2. **What approaches are you going to use to assess learning outcomes?**
   - Exams – major field exams, GRE, LSAT, MAT
   - Embedded classroom assessment
   - In-class writing sample
   - In-class analysis of a problem
   - In-class collaborative problem solving project
   - Portfolio
   - Performance
   - Simulation
   - Focus group
   - Capstone course

3. **Are you using direct or indirect measures to assess learning outcomes?**
   **Are you using qualitative and/or quantitative measures?**

   DIRECT methods of evaluating student learning are those that provide evidence of whether or not a student has command of a specific subject or content area, can perform a certain task, exhibits a particular skill, demonstrates a certain quality in his/her work (e.g. creativity, analysis, synthesis, or objectivity), or holds a particular value. [“Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources,” Middle States Commission on Higher Education]
   - Comprehensive exam
   - Writing proficiency exam
   - National exam
   - GRE subject test
   - Major Field test
   - Certification exam
   - Licensure exam
   - Local pretest and post-test
   - Performance assessment
   - Video/audio tape evaluation
   - Senior thesis/major project
   - Portfolio evaluation
Capstone courses designed to evaluate performance in program

INDIRECT methods of evaluating student learning involve data that are related to the act of learning, such as factors that predict or mediate learning or perceptions about learning but do not reflect learning itself. [“Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources,” Middle States Commission on Higher Education]

- Comparison with peer institution
- Job placement
- Employer survey
- Graduate school acceptance rates
- Performance in graduate school
- Graduation/retention rates
- Exit interviews
- Student satisfaction survey
- Student course evaluation
- Internship evaluation
- Focus group evaluation
- Alumni survey
- Tracking alumni honors/awards

Assessment methods should reflect the type of learning to be measured. The student learning outcomes must govern the choice of measures. A combination of assessment approaches can be the most effective way to measure student learning. Assessment tools should be chosen so that students are given multiple ways to demonstrate their learning. Visit www.apa.org/ed/eval_strategies.html or see page ___ for a list of the pros and cons of using specific assessment measures.

4. Who are you going to assess?
- All students
- Student cohorts, such as:
  - At risk students
  - Students with ACTs over 18
  - Juniors
  - Graduating seniors
  - Random sample

5. What is your schedule for assessing learning outcomes?
- Upon matriculation
- At the end of a specific semester
- At the completion of a required set of courses
- Upon program completion
- Upon graduation
- Upon employment
- A number of years after graduation

Adapted from materials provided by Kent State University.
## Sources of Information about Student Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Information/Example Assessment Methods</th>
<th>Pros of Method</th>
<th>Cons of Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| From course work (embedded, course-based)        | • In general, students take embedded course work seriously; therefore, work has a good chance of reflecting actual abilities.  
  (direct assessment methods)                      | • In general, biases of the data over years, instructor or departmental differences can influence the results.  
  • Reluctance of faculty to share results with entire faculty membership.                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                |
| • Tests, including pre-post, entry and exits      | • Inexpensive  
• Comprehensive  
• Pre-post testing allows for “value added” assessment                                                                                     | • Developing appropriate test questions that reflect learning outcomes and complex levels of learning takes time and skill.  
  • For pre-post testing: difficult to design tests that are comparable at different times.                                                   |                                                                                                                                                |
<p>| • Graded Homework                                 | • Reflects students’ ability when they have access to resources                                                                                 | • Does not assess students’ ability or overall learning as typically defined.                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Method</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ratings or Rubrics judging quality of papers, reports, projects</td>
<td>Can be used by others besides instructor, to assess quality</td>
<td>Developing accurate rubric dimensions that reflect learning outcomes and levels of learning takes time and skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests, rubrics on paper, projects from capstone course experience</td>
<td>Allows for assessment of higher cognitive abilities such as synthesis and evaluation of knowledge</td>
<td>Labor intensive for both faculty and students&lt;br&gt;Because course and project are high-stakes, it may produce student anxiety that may result in assessment reflecting lesser ability than actual ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept mapping or knowledge mapping</td>
<td>Unique technique to understand connections of concepts within students’ knowledge-base&lt;br&gt;Assessment of complex relationships</td>
<td>Difficult to compare across students&lt;br&gt;Difficult to obtain objective judgment on abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert’s judgment of performance (e.g., art, drama, healthcare)</td>
<td>Improves face validity of assessment activities</td>
<td>Obtaining appropriate experts’ time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria, rating, rubrics judging thesis, dissertation work</td>
<td>Allows for judgment about overall graduate program across several students</td>
<td>Difficult to define rubric dimensions that relate to multiple theses or dissertations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifying exams for graduate work</td>
<td>Developing exam questions across several graduates allows for better assessment of the graduate program</td>
<td>Oral presentations may be a challenge for those with language difficulties&lt;br&gt;Difficult to define questions that relate to several students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From longitudinal, cross-sectional or cross-course comparisons including student portfolios (direct assessment methods)</td>
<td>In general, shows longitudinal trends with rich detail&lt;br&gt;Assessment becomes an integral part of students’ learning process</td>
<td>In general, validity depends on how work is collected&lt;br&gt;Can overload assessment committees with too much information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubrics judging quality of work across time, sections or courses</td>
<td>Highlights students’ strengths and weaknesses in comprehensive manner</td>
<td>Developing accurate rubric dimension that reflects learning outcomes and levels of learning takes time and skill&lt;br&gt;Content may vary widely by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison of best examples of student learning</td>
<td>Students do the work of providing the assessment “data” by supplying their best examples</td>
<td>Students’ judgment of “best examples” may not actually reflect faculty’s judgment of “best examples”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From internships/coop experiences</td>
<td>From employers/potential employers</td>
<td>From outside evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflections by students about their learning</td>
<td>• Surveys completed by intern/coop advisors/faculty about student’s abilities (direct assessment method)</td>
<td>• Surveys to employers about student’s abilities (direct assessment methods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides opportunity for students to synthesis own work; • Identifies strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>• Supervisors typically provide feedback to students anyway</td>
<td>• Provide information about student’s abilities needed by employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficult to judge objectively</td>
<td>• Ratings and criteria of supervisor may not reflect program outcomes</td>
<td>• Difficult to get direct supervisors to respond to surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Surveys completed by intern/coop advisors/faculty about student’s abilities (direct assessment method)</td>
<td>• Based on actual work experience that may reflect future career</td>
<td>• Survey of those who interview for employment purposes about perceived students’ abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides information about other outcomes besides competencies such as attitude</td>
<td>• May obtain information only on a small number of outcomes • Limited observation time</td>
<td>• Best person to compare quality of one institution’s graduates to other institutions’ graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Survey, interview, focus groups about satisfaction with student’s performance (indirect assessment method)</td>
<td>• Satisfaction with performance may not be reflective of student’s ability</td>
<td>• May only be able to assess a small number of general outcomes such as communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In general, improves face validity of assessment activities</td>
<td>• Difficult to identify where alumni are employed • Sensitive information for both employer and program/department</td>
<td>From outside evaluations Experts judge overall major/program quality of students’ abilities (direct assessment methods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information about student’s satisfaction, attitudes (indirect assessment method)</td>
<td>• Improves face validity of assessment activities</td>
<td>• Obtaining appropriate experts’ time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Important to hear from student’s viewpoint • Conduct comparison of different groups of students on same outcomes/questions</td>
<td>• In general, students’ perception of their ability may not relate to their actual ability • In general, alumni are more satisfied than graduating seniors who tend to be more satisfied than sophomores, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Surveys about satisfaction with learning environment, faculty, courses, curriculum, their learning, equipment/tools from prospective, current, graduating, withdrawn students and alumni | Easy to administer  
- Low cost  
- Nationally or commercial surveys have reliability and validity information | Usefulness is based on good design of survey questions |
|---|---|---|
| Interviews or focus groups about satisfaction with learning environment, faculty, courses, curriculum, their learning, equipment/tools from prospective, current, graduating, withdrawn students and alumni | Can provide rich data, personal perspectives; can go into depth about a particular aspect or factor  
- Other factors may arise that relate to academics such as pedagogy, class size, etc. which are not expected or asked about. | Those who participate tend to have either very positive or very negative opinions which is a selection bias  
- Fear of retributions may bias respondents’ answers |
| Inventories about students’ attitudes; monitor attitude changes over time | Commercially available instruments provide reliability and validity information | Usefulness depends on how related to program outcomes. |
| Information about Faculty’s satisfaction (indirect assessment method) through survey, interviews or focus groups | Important to hear from faculty’s view  
- Factors may arise that relate to academics such as pedagogy, class size, etc. | Usefulness is based on good design of questions |

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Prepared by Joni E. Spurlin, Ph.D., University Director of Assessment, NC State University Updated: August 2006
Section 3
Assessment Resources
1. JSU Assessment Information
   http://www.jsums.edu/~jsuoa/Assessment/assessment.html

2. ETS Major Field Test
   http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem

3. Four-Year College Surveys
   www.act.org/ess/fouryear.html

4. Designing Viable Assessment Plans

5. Inventory of Higher Education Assessment Instruments