

Pros and Cons of Assessment Methods

Requiring completion of standardized or professionally published instruments

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy to create• Comparisons to other groups often available• Easy to administer• Professionally designed (high reliability)• More respected for use in publishing than home-developed instrument	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not match learning outcome / goal of assessment study• Expensive• Can have low motivation from students to complete (viewed as artificial)• Temptation to draw unsupported inferences• Comparison groups may be bad / good / unreasonable comparison• Technical quality varies widely (check with an expert and read the technical manual)• Often long and not may not be directly relevant for your department / program

Using existing institutional data

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Already collected• Saves burden of asking demographic questions in other instruments• Often works well to combine with other data collection strategies or other tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not address all of the questions of interest• Data may be gathered using different context or forms of question than desired

Surveys

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy to administer• Inexpensive• Benchmarking available in some areas through CampusLabs contract or other professional organizations• Can customize to exactly the questions you want answered	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficult to develop high-quality items• Response rate is often low or may require effort to get reasonably high response rate• Interpretation of responses can be challenging (see “difficult to develop high-quality items” above)

Papers, projects, portfolios, or written assignments evaluated with rubrics

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excellent way to understand what students are learning or developing in response to programming• National rubrics can be used (benchmarking may be available with shared rubrics)• Rubrics make clear to students what is expected and the goals of the programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficult to get students to create and share unless designed as part of the program or activity• Archiving and storing materials can be challenge• Can take large amount of time to score (depending on the type of project) and train scorers (if using multiple scorers)

Presentations

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaging and good way for participants to share with each other• Allows for question / answer time to dig more deeply as needed• Can include a variety of constituents, such as community members, business representatives, or faculty members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unless built into the program or some other formal strategy, can be difficult to find ways to get students to do presentations• Need to develop scoring guide and allow time for scoring or videotape presentations• May not work well for sensitive topics• Requires considerable effort on behalf of those doing the presenting

Observation or performances

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scenarios or performances can be powerful learning experiences for the participants (such as a fishbowl, or group performance task)• Can be included in other on-going events, such as employee supervision or training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unless scenarios or environment is carefully designed, may not have the opportunity to observe all aspects of performance necessary or desired• Need to develop scoring guide and allow time and space for the observations or performances• Caution that use in employee supervision is not the only measure of employee performance

Focus groups

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Great way to allow open discussion for identification of emerging issues or topics• See p. 69 in Schuh for more discussion on focus groups• Fairly inexpensive and not time-intensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not random sample and not generalizable to broader group• Can be difficult to convince students to participate• Takes some practice to run a focus group effectively• No confidentiality of participants

Self-assessment

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very helpful to use as part of program or event to show progression in change over time or to encourage reflection in participants• High value to the participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not be accurate (e.g., overly optimistic about participant's abilities)• Requires careful prompting so it is completed

Case studies or narratives

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifies the experiences of small number of students• Very powerful when sharing with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not extrapolate to other students• Time-intensive

External reviewers

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide outside perspective on program or service• Bring new and fresh ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expensive and time-intensive• Need guidance and support through the review process• Recommendations can sometimes be off-the-wall

Locally developed exam or quiz

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addresses issues of interest and directly relevant to unit• Good tool for student learning / development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficult to create high quality instrument• Does not fit all programs or structures and can be difficult to get students to complete (like a survey)

Other (fill in):

Pros	Cons