

Academic Planning Meeting: Presentation on Assessment

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This session will provide an overview of assessment as it relates to new program authorization proposals. What is an effective process for assessing student learning? What constitutes compelling program assessment data? How is the data evaluated and used to improve programs? Examples of strong assessment plans as articulated in recent authorizations will be distributed.

What is Assessment?

- ◆ It is “the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning.” (Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, 2004).
- ◆ Assessment means basing decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, advising, and student support upon data about student learning.
- ◆ **Classroom Assessment** occurs when faculty teaching a specific course, evaluate students’ projects, assign grades, and use the information for their own improvement thereby engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).
- ◆ **Program Assessment** occurs when faculty use data to report annually to the department (or program), outlining strengths and weaknesses of the student’s work in relation to departmental (or program) learning goals. The Department/program uses data from direct and indirect measures. For approval of new academic programs, UW System requires a *Program Assessment Plan*.

What are the benefits of program assessment? How is it meaningful?

Assessment can provide a basis for wiser planning, budgeting, and change in curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, programming, and student support.

Assessment done well creates a climate of engagement that supports a student’s commitment to learning, and it empowers faculty and academic staff to better understand student learning and thereby improve their teaching. (Assessment should NOT be confused with faculty evaluation; it is unrelated).

How is assessment done?

The Three Steps of Program Assessment:

1. *Articulating program goals.* What are the goals of your program and how do they relate to your institution’s goals or to accreditation goal standards? Example: : “*Upon completion of the program, students will be able to...*”

2. *Gather data* directly related to your goals. This can be done by using direct and indirect measures. (For the purposes of Authorization proposals, 4-5 measures are sufficient).
3. *Use the information for improvement.* Form a dept or program committee to systematically review the data (on an annual or bi-annual basis) and determine if you are meeting your goals. Indicate how you plan to proceed, e.g. how you will strengthen or change certain aspects of the program, if needed.

What Constitutes Data? (Direct and Indirect Measures)

1. *Direct Measures* include student work that is directly evaluated, e.g. exams, papers, projects, computer programs, interaction with a client, musical performance, portfolios.
 - Individually assigned grades *do NOT* constitute data for program assessment.
 - Department/program faculty may want to link specific goals to specific required courses, facilitating the collection of data.
 - For example, if the capstone seminar is the target course for say, Program Goal #3 in which students must demonstrate the ability to apply a theoretical approach to a text or problem; then a written assignment specific to that goal might be randomly collected over a period of 3-4 semesters to be reviewed at a later time by the program assessment committee. The committee would look over the random sampling of that assignment to see if students were meeting Program Goal #3. If not, they might consider adjusting the curriculum.
2. *Indirect Measures* “include asking students or alumni how well they thought they learned, tracking their graduate school or job placement rates, and so on.” (Walvoord). Examples include exit interviews, focus interviews, alumni surveys, senior surveys etc.

What is the Process for Collecting & Analyzing Data?

- Department or program faculty choose 4-5 methods of data collections (e.g. capstone project, pre/post-test tool, student exit interviews, alumni surveys).
- Department or program faculty decide how often to collect data.
- Program assessment committee meets annually or bi-annually to look at data in relation to learning goals.
- Program assessment committee shares evaluation with full department.
- Department faculty update the curriculum & other aspects of the program accordingly.

Samples of strong Assessment Plans (See attached.)

Resources: Barbara Walvoord. *Assessment Plain and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. San Francisco: Wiley 2004.

Academic Affairs website: <http://www.uwsa.edu/acss/planning/index.htm>

UW-Madison Assessment website: <http://www.provost.wisc.edu/assessment/manual/>