Division of Student Affairs

Division Assessment Master Plan and Assessment Guide

Office of Assessment

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Volume 1

"...good practice in student affairs occurs when student affairs personnel ask, 'what are students learning from our programs and services, and how can their learning be enhanced?'..." ACPA and NASPA Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs, 1997

Indiana State University
Mission Statement

As a publicly-assisted institution of higher learning, Indiana State University embraces its mission to educate students to be productive citizens and enhance the quality of life of the citizens of Indiana by making the knowledge and expertise of its faculty available and accessible. These purposes are served when the University disseminates knowledge through instruction and extends and applies knowledge through research, creative and scholarly activities and public service.

The University fulfills its mission statewide; however, its influence is also national and international in scope. Given its location, Indiana State University responds with particular sensitivity to the needs and interests of the citizens of west central Indiana.

In serving its mission, the University provides quality, affordable academic programs and educational environments to foster holistic student growth and development. Undergraduate programs and specialized fields of study are comprehensive in scope while graduate programs are selective as appropriate to the needs of society and the expertise of the faculty.

In its role as a public institution, the University is expected to be an inclusive academic community reflective of the greater society, serving a student body diverse in academic interests, age, gender, economic status, and ethnicity. To remain vital in carrying out its institutional purposes, Indiana State University is committed to the ongoing assessment and improvement of its primary activities.

Vision

Indiana State University strives to be known and admired as Indiana's most Progressive Public University by:

· Providing opportunities that enrich and transform the lives of its students through the distinctiveness of its undergraduate experience and the prominence of its graduate programs;

· Fostering innovation and excellence in teaching and learning;

· Enriching the State, nation, and world through the quality of its research, creative activity, and public service;

· Creating partnerships with external publics that build upon and extend the University's ability to serve the State and nation; and

· Providing a caring and civil academic community characterized by unusually supportive relationships among its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends.

Core Values

Service

Access

Success

Innovation

Excellence

Assessment in Contemporary Higher Education

Assessment is no longer an option in higher education settings. Beyond students themselves, vested constituents as well as legislative bodies and accrediting agencies are demanding proof of institutional effectiveness in promoting and supporting student growth, learning and development.

Constructing a unit-level assessment plan is an "act of will," necessitating in many cases that established policies and procedures be updated in such a way as to introduce assessment into functional units to ultimately impact the culture itself. With an effective assessment plan, the unit's strategic planning, budgeting, programming, and staffing decisions can be data-supported with a high degree of confidence that those decisions are reflective of what best supports the unit, division and institutional mission, and ultimately, our students themselves.

The American Association for Higher Education (1992) established a body of principles for good practice in assessment as;

The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive now only *what* we choose to assess but also *how* we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.

Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations- these derive from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.

Assessment requires attention to outcomes and to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experiences along the way- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic. Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the progress of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights

Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved. Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty plays an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the

campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about. Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.

Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation – to ourselves, our students, and society – is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

Defining Student Learning Outcomes

Defining exactly what is meant by "student learning outcomes" might best be approached in a comprehensive sense. Imagine a student receiving a college diploma. What characteristics, attributes, experiences, knowledge, and qualities would the ideal graduate possess? The answer to that question is in fact, the definition of overall student learning outcomes. When considered within "domains" of learning, assessors typically categorize learning outcomes in the following, broad general areas;

Technical (content) Knowledge: The knowledge gained in the specific content/specialty area of the academic field of study (i.e., an accounting student entry level knowledge of accounting)

Skills Proficiency: The development of specific skills required for learning, such as computer applications, time management, multitasking, writing and speaking, leadership, etc

Values and ethics: The development of professional, personal, and social values consistent with the broader society and an understanding of ethical behavior that compliments the student's personal and professional environment both in school and after graduation.

Richard Frye provides the following understanding of student learning and outcomes.

"*Sharpening the focus of higher education onto student learning outcomes goes beyond mere tinkering with traditional structures and methods; it really constitutes a paradigm shift in educational philosophy and practice. An increasingly accepted view among educational scholars is that traditional structures are dysfunctional and overdue for change (Miller, 1998). To remedy this, "students and their learning should become the focus of everything we do. . .from the instruction that we provide, to the intellectual climate that we create, to the policy decisions that we make" (Cross, 1998).*

At this point, it is useful to make some distinctions between "student outcomes" and "student learning outcomes." Student outcomes generally refer to aggregate statistics on groups of students, like graduation rates, retention rates, transfer rates, and employment rates for an entering class or a graduating class. These "student outcomes" are actually institutional outcomes; they attempt to measure comparative institutional performance, not changes in students themselves due to their college experience. They have generally been associated with accountability reporting.

Unfortunately, student-outcomes statistics are often "output-only" measures (Astin, 1993). That is, they are computed without regard to incoming student differences and without regard to how different students experienced the college environment. As a

result, they do not distinguish how much an observed measurement is the product of the institution and its programs on students, and how much is due to other factors, such as socioeconomic status, general intelligence, or which high school was attended, for example, and can therefore be misleading.

"Student learning outcomes," on the other hand, 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? How has it developed their many potentials? How has it enhanced their value to themselves, their families, and their communities?

There are essentially three threads which must be interwoven into a program dedicated to the improvement of student learning: shifting curricular focus to student learning; developing faculty as effective teachers; and the integration of assessment into curriculum at several levels."

Neither the institution nor its faculty nor staff can actually regard student learning outcomes as though they were attainable institutional goals. To be sure, student performance, persistence, graduation, GPA, and other like measures are entirely out of the control of the Institution; engaging behaviors that result in those outcomes are wholly under the control of individual students and the choices *they* make. However, those individual student decisions are often made based on things for which the school can assume responsibility, such as program offerings, support services, instructional quality, infrastructure and staffing.

To appropriately assess, an institutional understanding of what it can and cannot ultimately control must be clearly understood.

Instructions for Writing Student Learning Outcomes

Western Washington University has developed a step-by-step approach to writing student learning outcomes. Units can follow this method to establish outcomes which can be assessed and measured at ISU. Creating student learning outcomes for your degree or service program is a process and some programs have found that following the steps below have been helpful.

Step 1
Start by having a faculty/staff meeting (including students and community members, ideally) and brainstorm about what an ideal graduate would know, understand, and be able to do…and/or
Consult the web site for your professional/disciplinary organization – many of them are developing student learning outcomes for degree or service programs at various levels.

Step 2
Agree on a first draft of a list of outcomes, understanding that they will be revised several times before becoming firm (or definitive) and that they will change over time for currency in the discipline or service area and changing needs and characteristics of students.

Step 3
List the student learning outcomes on every syllabus for the required courses in your degree program (or programs within your student service area), indicating which of them will be covered in each particular course (or service program).

Step 4
Gather feedback from students in each course or service program about how well they perceive that student learning outcomes were addressed.

Step 5
Assess student learning by designing assignments specifically geared to measure achievement of each of the outcomes that are designated for each course, degree program, or service area.

Step 6
In light of this data, meet (with faculty, staff, and students) at the end of each semester or academic year and revise the list of outcomes, teaching methods, curriculum, and/or program.

Step 7
Repeat the cycle

As student learning outcomes are written, a plan can be developed which will define and measure specific learning outcomes through appropriate assessment design. The assessment design need not be complicated, complex or overwhelmingly time consuming. Rather, an assessment design should appropriately answer the questions:

Are we, as a unit, doing things "right?"

Are we, as a unit, doing the "right" things to facilitate the desired student learning outcomes

To measure ***knowledge*** (common terms, facts, principles, procedures), ask these kinds of questions: Define, Describe, Identify, Label, List, Match, Name, Outline, Reproduce, Select, State. Example: "List the steps involved in titration."

To measure ***comprehension*** (understanding of facts and principles, interpretation of material), ask these kinds of questions: Convert, Defend, Distinguish, Estimate, Explain, Extend, Generalize, Give examples, Infer, Predict, Summarize. Example: "Summarize the basic tenets of deconstructionism."

To measure ***application*** (solving problems, applying concepts and principles to new situations), ask these kinds of questions: Demonstrate, Modify, Operate, Prepare, Produce, Relate, Show, Solve, Use. Example: "Calculate the deflection of a beam under uniform loading."

To measure ***analysis*** (recognition of unstated assumptions or logical fallacies, ability to distinguish between facts and inferences), ask these kinds of questions: Diagram, Differentiate, Distinguish, Illustrate, Infer, Point out, Relate, Select, Separate, Subdivide. Example: "In the president's State of the Union Address, which statements are based on facts and which are based on assumptions?"

To measure ***synthesis*** (integrate learning from different areas or solve problems by creative thinking), ask these kinds of questions: Categorize, Combine, Compile, Devise, Design, Explain, Generate, Organize, Plan, Rearrange, Reconstruct, Revise, Tell. Example: "How would you restructure the school day to reflect children's developmental needs?"

To measure ***evaluation*** (judging and assessing), ask these kinds of questions: Appraise, Compare, Conclude, Contrast, Criticize, Describe, Discriminate, Explain, Justify, Interpret, Support. Example: "Why is Bach's Mass in B Minor acknowledged as a classic?"

Assessment is not easy by any means. To be sure, there are a number of objections to assessment in general that include;

- assessment requires far too great a commitment of human and financial resources,
- assessment requires out attention be diverted from actually "doing our job of providing student services and supports"
- assessment never results in any change,
- assessment is far too complex to understand

However, owing to the compelling case presented in favor of assessment by those to whom we are accountable, including students themselves, the question cannot be "can we really afford the time and resources necessary for assessment," but rather, "can we afford NOT to assess?"

Assessment does require substantial resources of time and money. But through determining our effectiveness and efficiency, the time and money spent in effective assessment will ultimately result in savings as our effectiveness and efficiency improve. In this case, "*a dollar spent today can result in five dollars being saved tomorrow."*

Assessment can be time consuming if our methodologies are ill-conceived and planned. However, through appropriate planning before the fact, assessment can be conducted at the same time we are engaging in our daily activities. In that case, we are working *"smarter"* and improving the overall value of the actual time we spend on projects.

The concern that assessment never results in any change can be easily overcome when a full cycle of assessment occurs, including planning, data-collection, analysis and interpretation, reporting, and using assessment results to improve strategic planning. Strategic planning occurs at the unit level, and when that planning folds into it the results of assessment, the assessment itself becomes a highly utilitarian endeavor. It is the unit itself that should employ assessment results in their daily operations.

Assessment need not be complex to be effective, nor should it be. Following a prescribed approach as outlined later in this Guide provides an extremely simple yet highly effective "template" that should make assessment understandable to all members of the Division.

Assessment at the Student Affair's unit level should endeavor to present empirical evidence of its effectiveness in terms of measurable student outcomes. A commitment to assessment within the Division reflects a continuous effort to design assessment

protocols, gather, analyze, and interpret collected data to assist in better understanding the overall "effectiveness" and efficiency of the Division's units and their various programs. Effectiveness includes the assessment of student learning outcomes while efficiency focuses on operations and such things as staffing formulae, cost-effectiveness, constituent satisfaction, and meeting demonstrated needs.

A comprehensive assessment program should list;

- specific educational objectives for each of the unit's major programs expressed in terms of student learning outcomes,
- measures of student achievement within each of the objectives,
- how specific data will be gathered,
- procedures for involving unit staff members in reviewing and using the results to influence ongoing strategic planning, and
- procedures for the annual collection, analysis, and reporting of the results of assessment.

It is important to note that no single assessment point is sufficient to fully understand the effectiveness and efficiency of the unit. Using a composite approach where multiple measures are used provides a more comprehensive understanding of effectiveness and efficiency. A variety of assessment methodologies is also appropriate, using qualitative, quantitative, direct and indirect approaches.

Direct measures assessment design includes such things as engagement and performance in student activities, evaluation of student performance in internships by employers standardized tests, juried review of student performances and projects, internally-developed instruments, written reflection exercises, or juried projects.

Indirect measures include surveys, student evaluations of programs they attend, exit interviews, placement and acceptance data, retention and transfer rates, and persistence and graduation rates. It should be noted that student GPA, accreditation reports, demographic data, and other administrative review data are not considered appropriate measures of student learning outcomes.

Once data has been collected, appropriate analysis is necessary to identify general trends and in understanding differences and similarities among various data points. Interpretation then provides a means by which data can be tied to the actual objectives they are supposed to measure, hypothesizes various relationships between multiple phenomena, and further qualifies, amplifies, draws inferences, and evaluates how well the unit is fulfilling its mission.

A Step-by-Step Process for Assessment Planning

ISU's Division of Student Affairs has distinguished itself as forward thinking and responsive to high quality assessment. A tremendous amount of preliminary work has already been completed and it is now time to engage in a second phase of assessment.

Work that began in the fall of 2004 resulted in units producing two reports, the CAS-like review and the Administrative Unit Review. Those two reviews were helpful in contrasting unit operations against a standard to establish a benchmark report in the case of the CAS review, and a review of efficiency and effectiveness in the case of the AUR review. In both the CAS and AUR reviews, discovery was made not only of those areas in which appropriate (and in many cases, outstanding) performance was being executed, but in some areas where improvement could be made to compliment more effective and efficient operations.

Over the past number of years, most if not all units within the Division have employed assessment of operations in one way or another. Customer service surveys, utilization studies, assessment of needs, benchmarking and assessment of the campus climate and culture have all been used to gather, analyze and report data. Continuing these efforts along with the additional step of measuring overall student growth, learning and development (GLD) will produce a comprehensive and holistic approach to assessment Division-wide.

This document has been prepared to provide a useful template for the long-term planning and development of a Master Assessment Plan. Included is a link to an easy-to-use record-keeping database that will produce reports that are standardized and track everyday assessment projects. There are also templates that can be used to assist in the planning and execution of individual assessment projects. The database and templates are provided as a convenience to each unit and can be easily modified to meet the specific needs and wants of the unit, yet provide comprehensive and standardized reports to allow for tracking at the Division level. While a Master Assessment Plan is being devised, that plan must be dynamic and flexible if it is to be fully responsive to the Division's immediate and future needs. Suggestions, comments and feedback to the Master Plan are encouraged and welcomed.

This plan calls for two-track approach to Division assessment. The first track calls for the development of a response plan to findings of the CAS and AUR reviews, and the second-track deals with the development of a plan to bolster and support the more traditional assessment work that has been ongoing at the unit level.

A useful database has been developed that can be used at the unit level to track assessment projects and is available through the Student Affairs Office of Assessment. The database provides simple-to-use electronic forms to enter information, and a number of reports that can be generated. The database is also highly flexible in that additional forms and reports can be designed to meet specific needs of the unit.

A number of paper-based planning forms are also available through the Office of Assessment, or can be downloaded from the assessment website.

Definitions

A number of terms are used in higher education assessment, many of which are used to describe the methods of data collection. To assist you in better understanding the principle terms, the following list is provided.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is highly descriptive and uses "natural" settings within which to collect data and the perspective of the researcher is a primary instrument in the data's analysis. Data is collected and reported in narrative as opposed to numbers and there is a great deal of emphasis placed on "process" rather than "outcome." Methodologies do not include attempts to prove or disprove assumptions, but rather, themes are discovered and defined as they pertain to how the "subjects" of the research make meaning out of their lived experiences. Focus groups, structured interviews and general observations of behavior are typically used as formats in qualitative research.

Quantitative research

Quantitative research attempts to collect data which can be interpreted and categorized in terms of specific measurements of phenomena, whether cause and effect, correlation or other types of "relationships." Measurement is used to interpret data because it allows for the identification of connections between empirical observation and a "numbers-based" expression of relationships.

Surveys

Surveys are often used to discover what people think, want, or believe. Needs meeting is fundamental to long-term satisfaction, and the use of carefully designed surveys can provide essential information to the researcher.

Structured Interview

Structured interviews are used to collect specific data through the use of standard questions put to all research participants. The collection of data through the use of standard questions allows the researcher to compare or evaluate perceptions of the participants.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are useful when like data is sought from large numbers of research participants. This approach can be used to gather general feelings, beliefs, demographic information, or a host of other data points from large groups of people in an inexpensive and simple way. It is important to construct questionnaires in a specific way to assure the data collected can be used to answer specific questions the researcher seeks to have addressed.

There are typically six steps that need to be addressed in the use of questionnaires, which include:

- Defining the objectives of the survey.
- Determining the population from which the survey group will be drawn.
- Crafting specific questions to be included.
- Administering the questionnaire itself.
- Assembling and reviewing the data.
- Appropriate analysis of the results.

Focus Group

Focus groups are collections of small groups of research participants (typically 8-12 people) to which questions are put to generate open conversation. A high degree of trust is required on the part of the participants that they will not be judged or their comments reported to anyone outside the group members themselves. Skill is required to keep the conversation "on-track" without impeding the natural direction the conversation will take.

Pre and Post Testing

Pre and post testing is used to determine if and to what degree learning has occurred after an "intervention." While this type of data collection is appropriate in some circumstances, results might not be indicative of long-term results.

Direct Assessment

This type of assessment involves evaluating actual samples of student work produced in our programs. Such assessment includes activities such as multiple-rater, jury and committee reviews of student work.

Indirect Assessment

This type of assessment focuses on gathering data in ways other than reviewing actual student work products and is typically the method used in student affairs. This approach to assessment includes things such as surveys, exit interviews, and structured interviews.

Track-One Assessment Protocol
(see worksheet provided on page 19)

Extract information regarding possible improvement in areas such as programming, support, and office function, etc., discovered through the CAS and AUR reviews.
Prioritize the items for possible improvement
Determine what items will be addressed in the upcoming year
Establish goals or desirable outcomes resulting from improvement projects
Assign a responsible person or persons to the project
Assign a targeted completion date for the project

Track-two Assessment Protocol
(see worksheet on page 20 and 21)

Using any sort of source document the unit finds appropriate, such as published CAS standards or the UniLOA, choose two to four "items" that the unit finds are complimentary to its functioning, is grounded in student learning outcomes and is consistent with the University's mission statement, and design an assessment protocol that manageable and will produce data of high utility.

A convenient assessment protocol includes;

- Determine the thing(s) to be assessed
- identify how the thing(s) to be assessed is(are) tied to student learning and the University mission,
- define exactly what it is you are hoping to discover (satisfaction, participation, learning outcomes, etc.,
- determine where to collect relevant data,
- determine from what population you will your sample group,
- determine how data will be collected (focus groups, surveys, observation, etc.),
- determine how the collected data will be analyzed,
- subject collected data to the chosen test and through appropriate analysis, compute the results,
- determine the best means of reporting the results,
- assess the results and determine how they will actually be used to influence change, reinforce the status quo, or to support new programming and supports.

Track-One Assessment Protocol Worksheet

The following items have been noted in our CAS-like and AUR reviews as needing attention:

We have prioritized the items needing to be addressed above as:

We will focus on the following items to correct/improve/develop over the next year:

We intend to reach the following outcomes as a result of attending to the items we have chosen to focus our attention upon:

The person(s) in charge of the project(s) will be:

We intend to complete the project(s) by the following date(s)

Track-two Assessment Protocol Worksheet

We will assess the following item:

The item chosen to be assessed is tied to the University's mission in the following way(s):

As a result of this assessment project, we are hoping to discover:

The place chosen to collect appropriate data is:

We will collect data from the following group(s) of people:

We will collect data in the following way(s)

The collected data will be analyzed in the following way(s):

Results of the analyzed and interpreted data will be reported in the following way(s):

The person(s) responsible for conducting the assessment activities is/are:

This assessment project will be coordinated/supervised by:

This assessment project should be completed by the following date:

The Assessment Cycle

Determine what to assess

Determine Learning Objectives

Design Study

Collect Data

Analyze and Interpret Data

Report your Findings

Determine Appropriate Changes and Intervention

Include Intervention into Strategic Plan

Examine Effectiveness of Intervention