

Some Assessment Definitions and Principles

Process and Principles for Assessment

Principles

- **Aim for improving the quality of instruction and the educational experience of students.**
- **Assess program learning outcomes**, not those of individual students or those of individual instructors' students.
- **Obtain specific information that is fine-grained**, which will tell you specifically what students know/don't know and can/can't do. (Grades cannot do this.)
- **Make it public.** Your SLOs, methods, and results must be transparent for all stakeholders.
- **Set high expectations for "success"** to allow you uncover areas that can be improved. If students are "doing just fine," then set the bar higher or get a different bar altogether.
- **Target "greatest opportunities for improvement."** When you have your assessment information, choose the improvements that will lead to the most important changes.

Steps in the Process (for direct measures)

1. **Faculty develop goals or outcomes** (at least two and probably fewer than ten).
Recommendations: two or more faculty collaborate; learn from extramural colleagues.
2. **Select the instrument—what will be measured.** Some kind of student "performance" should be measured (papers, projects, art shows, dissertations, essay-exam responses, portfolios, objective exams (if broken down into learning outcomes). Course- or program-embedded instruments near the end of students' careers are best.
3. **Establish a rating scale.** Make it as simple as possible (1–4); you can complicate it later.
4. **Set a level for success.** For example: "80% of our students should score 3 or above."
5. **Randomly select samples.** Sample from 5% to 100% of the total.
6. **Involve key faculty members in all aspects** (scoring, analyzing, and interpreting).
7. **Measure outcomes once a year, and measure *only* two to four outcomes each year.**
8. **Analyze "data."** Analyze using methods that make sense to your faculty.
9. **Analyze findings.** Faculty discuss what the data tell them about teaching and learning. Ideally, they look at specific examples of student work as they discuss data in aggregate. This should be one of the "rewards" of assessment: rich faculty conversation about students' strengths and weaknesses, and about improvement.
10. **"Close the loop"** by taking measures to address program weaknesses or in some cases changing your assessment process or outcomes and by **publishing the results.** Writing Learning Goals and SLOs