



ASSESSMENT AND QUALITY
 ENHANCEMENT
 FOR
*INSTITUTIONAL
 EFFECTIVENESS*



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ACC utilizes WEAVEonline[®], an assessment management software, for all outcomes and program reviews. A link to WEAVEonline[®] can be accessed on the ACC intranet. For additional information contact the Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness at 336-506-4113.

Outcomes Assessment

So what exactly is outcomes assessment? Here is a working definition, followed by a set of questions that can be used as a checklist when thinking through the quality enhancement process:

Outcomes Assessment is a systematic process of gathering and interpreting information to discover if a program is meeting established objectives and then of using that information to enhance the program.

A good assessment process can answer three related questions:

- What are we trying to do?
- How well are we doing it?
- How are we using what we discover to improve what we will do in the future?

For each program, student learning outcomes assessment will determine whether that program is helping students achieve intended learning outcomes in the major, in general education, or in other areas -- and, more importantly, where they are not learning. Knowing the areas where students are not learning as much as desired is essential in order to inform the decision making process. Assessing outcomes allows ACC to focus on what those students know and can do after they complete a specific program.

Information that departments and units often collect can include:

- Actual student work products (papers, portfolios, etc.)
- Satisfaction surveys and other self-report information
- Rates of student achievements (acceptance to graduate school, passing rates of certification exams, etc.)
- Reports of others (supervisor evaluations, etc.)

Of these, the first one (actual student work products) is the information that will be most useful in determining if students have learned what is described in the outcomes. ***This is different from using grades, however. While course grades are based on actual student work products, what goes into the calculation of a grade might be more than what is necessary to see if a student has mastered material for a specific student learning outcomes. For example, a grade might include attendance or other course requirements that are not part of a specific learning outcome. For these reasons it is not considered appropriate or meaningful to use grades as a measure for student outcomes assessment.***

Assessment Learning Cycle: Are you doing what you think you are doing?

Step One: What are you trying to do?

Define intended program learning objectives: specifically, what do you want your graduates to know and actually to be able to do?

Step Two: How will you know if you are successful?

Define observable, measurable, actual outcomes that will tell you how well each objective has been met.

Step Three: How successful were you?

Compare observed outcomes to intended outcomes: how well did you meet your objectives in general, and your student learning objectives in particular?

Step Four: What should you do about it?

Accept or modify program objectives, outcomes, and assessment measures to better achieve target objectives in next cycle.

Creating “Assessment for Learning”

When used together with best practices in teaching and effective facilitation of student involvement, assessment is just another way to look at the ongoing cycle of setting goals and outcomes, measuring them to see how well they have been achieved, and making appropriate changes to courses, programs, and the assessment process. This is important because the information gained through the assessment process can provide information to guide curriculum revision, planning, and the support of programs toward the goal of enhanced student learning.

These three elements (teaching, student involvement, and assessment) can gradually build a “**culture of evidence**” where the feedback from assessment becomes a regular and essential component of program development.

Important Note: *Outcomes assessment is not an evaluation of individual students or of individual faculty or staff*; rather, it is a process that provides each academic program, department, division, or related administrative unit with valuable feedback about overall performance related to curriculum, learning success, and/or services and goals.

The assessment focus of each program/unit is on showing how the purpose or mission of ACC is being accomplished through that particular area. The emphasis is on the benefits or results of the learning or services provided — on the outcomes that are experienced by those involved. Is ACC’s mission being accomplished through the work done by your area?

Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

Given the importance of assessment in planning for academic quality enhancement, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) asked key higher education leaders to develop guidance for good practice in assessing student learning. Many of these principles are quite useful for assessment of administrative and support areas as well. The principles recognize that our work is complex and meaningful. As quality enhancement planning occurs, think about how your plan puts the following nine principles into action:

From the American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum:

1. 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 not 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 in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

2. 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 classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by 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, a firmer basis for improving our students' educational experience.

3. 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 — those derived 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.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally 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.

5. 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 linked series 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.

6. 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 play 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.

7. 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 principle 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.

8. 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 continually worked. 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.

9. 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

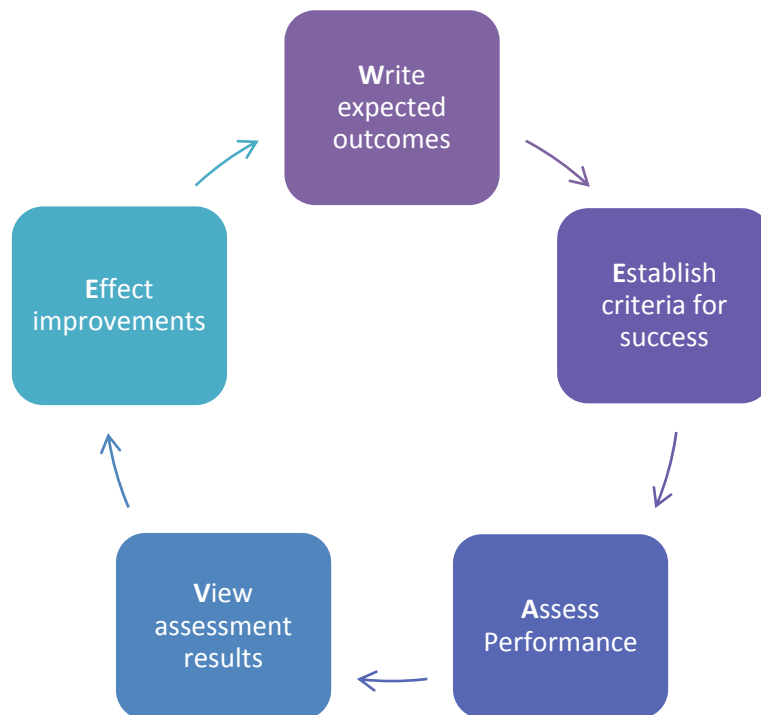
provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation — to ourselves, our students and society — is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

Authors: Alexander W. Astin; Trudy W. Banta; K. Patricia Cross; Elaine El-Khawas; Peter T. Ewell; Pat Hutchings; Theodore J. Marchese; Kay M. McClenney; Marcia Mentkowski; Margaret A. Miller; E. Thomas Moran; Barbara D. Wright

The WEAVE Cycle

The WEAVE cycle begins when goals and objectives are articulated. Once these are established, each unit must determine how to those goals and objectives and decide how well they are being met. Next, conduct the assessment activities and determine the results and findings. Then the department or administrative and educational support unit reviews the results and determine any actions to be taken, including any changes that need to be made to improve learning or services.

- **Write** expected outcomes
- **Establish** criteria for success
- **Assess** Performance
- **View** assessment results
- **Effect** improvements



Academic Programs

When developing and implementing outcomes assessment strategies for an academic program, it is important to keep in mind three purposes:

- To improve
- To inform
- To prove.

Each program or unit needs to design an assessment process that provides information that can be used to determine whether intended outcomes are being achieved and how programs can be improved.

Write Expected Outcomes

Step 1: Articulate the mission or purpose of your academic program.

Your program's mission statement or statement of purpose links the program or department to your division and ultimately to the overall mission of ACC. In formulating or revising a purpose or mission statement that is integrated into the College's mission, review the College's mission and identify how your academic program supports ACC's mission.

Step 2: Define educational and programmatic goals and objectives, including desired learning outcomes.

If any single step is the key for assessment planning, this is it. You will assess student learning relative to the educational goals and objectives you agree upon and establish for your program.

A goal is a general statement about the aims or purposes of education in your program. Goals are long-range outcomes that are written in broad, sometimes vague language.

An objective is a specific statement that describes a desired learning outcome for your program. This concept of a learning outcome seems to be the most difficult type of objective for people to understand, but it is really quite straightforward. Peter Ewell, a well-known national assessment researcher, puts it this way: "A student learning outcome ... is ... defined in terms of the particular levels of knowledge, skills and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of collegiate experiences."

Establish Criteria for Success

Step 3: Identify and describe appropriate assessment instruments or methods.

After you have identified goals and objectives, decide on appropriate assessment approaches. What sources of evidence could you gather that would convince you (and others!) that your students are reaching the desired learning objectives?

Remember the nine principles: comprehensive assessment strategies frequently require

the use of more than one assessment to determine program effectiveness.

Step 4: Establish criteria for learning success.

It is important to know what level of achievement will tell you that your program helps students achieve learning success. Here are only a few examples; think of what is important to you:

- 70 % of students can solve a complex, real-world problem using skills developed in your program.
- A panel of experts rates highly the performance of students on their oral presentations in a capstone course.
- The program advisory group reports that graduates have appropriate entry-level skills.
- 80 % of students can pass your professional licensure exam on the first attempt.
- Panels of reviewers confirm that student portfolios reflect progressive development of critical thinking skills over time in your program.
- 95 % of students and employers of graduates indicate satisfaction with your program.
- Interviews with graduating seniors indicate that students are overwhelmingly pleased with your program, but desire more internship possibilities.

Assess Performance of Students

Step 5: Conduct assessment activities.

Put your plan into action. Conducting assessment activities could include having a panel read a set of papers, taking a sample of oral presentations and reviewing the videotapes, or conducting a focus group with seniors. This time is marvelous to see what students can do, find out what they think and look more closely at your curriculum. Think through developing the tools you will need.

If you plan assessments so that they are comparable over time and the sample sizes are adequate, you can gather valuable feedback on your program's effectiveness.

View Assessment Results

Step 6: Analyze the findings from your assessments.

What are the implications of the findings? How did students do compared to your expectations? What program changes could you make to improve student knowledge and skills that did not reach criterion success levels? What can you infer from the data? What future actions should your program take?

As you discuss the assessment results and their implications with others in your program, remember to celebrate what the program has accomplished in relation to what it hoped to accomplish. Are students achieving expected outcomes? This time also is for you to revisit and improve your assessment measures.

Remember to document assessment findings. Summarize the results for reporting purposes, but be sure to retain details of documentation in your own files so that you can review performance, and progress, over time.

Step 7: Implement changes to enhance quality.

The results of this process should not sit on your shelf. To avoid having done a hollow exercise, you must “**close the loop.**” If you have moved through the steps of this model, you will have evidence in hand that is important to you; use it to make improvements in your academic program in order to improve student learning. How can you help students develop the outcomes you wish to see? Perhaps you need to add or modify learning opportunities, give more chances for students to develop their skills in certain areas, or improve advising so that students take courses in a sequence that helps them develop key skills.

Also, review the assessment plan. Is it time to make changes in goals and objectives? Are the assessment methods giving you the quantity and quality of information you need?

The best time to update objectives is in August of each annual reporting cycle. The assessment cycle will start the year with goals and objectives in place, assess how well we are doing through the year, and then report results of assessment activities and implications for future actions in July, modifying objectives for the following year. This will enable the academic year (beginning in August) to be the start of measuring the already-established outcomes. . (Appendix A-Timeline)



YES! Benefits of Using Assessment

Of course, even without formal assessment procedures, faculty have constantly explored in their own ways what worked well and what didn't, and then used those observations and impressions to make changes in their courses and curriculum. Formal assessment (like the type discussed here) simply makes those informal activities more systematic, more focused, more effective, and more public. Assessment can facilitate improvement through a variety of venues. When faculty members are directly involved in the development, implementation, and analysis of assessment activities, a number of specific benefits result.

<p>Because assessment can provide information about the knowledge and skills students have as they enter a course...</p>	<p>Faculty can design instruction to target the knowledge and skill levels students should have upon finishing a course and better determine the levels of thinking or reasoning appropriate for the course.</p>
<p>Because assessment can provide reliable data on student learning...</p>	<p>Faculty can rely less on the comments that appear on student evaluations as indicators of their success in teaching.</p>
<p>Because assessment can make available richer data about the effects of the curriculum or teaching methods...</p>	<p>Faculty can engage in more productive conversations about the status of student achievement and make better decisions about how it might be improved.</p>
<p>Because assessment can yield more reliable data about instruction...</p>	<p>Faculty can make reliable decisions about innovations or experimental projects in instruction and share successes more easily.</p>
<p>Because assessment can provide evidence that faculty make a difference in student learning...</p>	<p>Faculty can enjoy greater satisfaction in their work as educators.</p>
<p>Because assessment can offer a larger view of student needs and accomplishments...</p>	<p>Faculty can identify directions for future instructional development</p>

*Adapted from *Program-based Review and Assessment*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst (Fall, 2001).

Administrative and Support Programs

SACS uses the term “Administrative and Educational Support Units” for a wide range of programs and activities that do not award degrees. It is possible to work through the WEAVE process to develop appropriate assessment approaches for any unit. While you are “WEAVEing”, consider how you can integrate any relevant professional standards, criteria, etc., into your thinking.

Write Expected Outcomes

Step 1: Articulate the mission or purpose of your unit.

Your unit’s mission statement or statement of purpose links the functions of your unit to the overall mission of ACC. In formulating or revising a purpose or mission statement that is integrated into the College’s mission, you should review the College’s mission and identify how your unit supports ACC’s mission.

Here are a few questions to consider in formulating the purpose or mission of your unit:

- What is primary function of your unit?
- What core activities are involved?
- What should those you serve experience after interacting with your unit?

Step 2: Define your unit’s objectives.

Here are three categories of objectives:

- **Outcome statements** concern gains you want those you serve to make — for example, what can someone do after interacting with your program?
- **Process statements** concern the accomplishments of your unit’s functions, such as:
 - Level or volume of activity
 - Efficiency with which you conduct the processes
 - Compliance with external standards or regulations
- **Satisfaction statements** describe how those you serve rate their satisfaction with your unit’s processes or services.

In drafting objectives, it may help to create a flowchart of your unit’s work processes to determine what your unit will accomplish and what students, faculty, staff, and others will think, know or do following the provision of the service.

Consider such questions as:

- What are the most important results or impacts that should occur as a result of your unit’s activities?
- What are your critical work processes and how should they function?
- What does the end user experience through interaction with your unit?

SMART is an acronym that is often used to determine how well an objective is formulated. A good objective is a **SMART** objective when it is:

- **Specific** – Be clear about what your unit plans to accomplish, as well as when,

where or how. For example, “we will expand our services” does not specify how or by how much or for how many customers the services will be expanded. Words such as *develop*, *encourage* and *enhance* lack specificity. Action words such as *locate* or *reduce* make objectives more specific.

- **Measurable** – Quantify your objective as to targets and benefits, so that your unit can determine if it has reached the objective.
- **Achievable** – Know the objective is something that your unit can accomplish. It is fine to accomplish your objective in incremental steps over several years.
- **Realistic** – Make sure the objective is something that can be done practically in a specific time frame or for a specific amount of money.
- **Time-bound** – When will the objective be completed? Tie the objective to a specific time frame.

Establish Criteria for Success

Step 3: Determine appropriate assessment measures and criteria.

Once you establish your unit’s objectives, define and identify the sources of evidence you will use to determine whether you are achieving expected impacts. You must detail what will be measured and how it will be measured. For each outcome, create measures that help your unit in making critical decisions about its processes and services. Build an inventory of existing evaluation and assessment activities. Ask colleagues in similar units at other institutions how they assess their efficiency and effectiveness. When designing your assessment, you should use multiple measures. A composite of results can yield a more realistic picture of your unit’s performance.

Common types of assessment

- Attitudinal – measures of satisfaction from those you serve
- Direct – counts of unit services
- External – validation (neutral party, auditor, professional standards)

Criteria or targets for success

Always aim for a criterion level that stretches your unit’s performance. For example:

- How well should we serve our clients?
- 95 % of our users will be “very satisfied or satisfied” with our services.
- At least 80 % of eligible employees will participate in training.
- 90 % of the transcripts will be sent within three days.
- 90 % of the forms will be processed without errors.

Assess Performance of Unit

Step 4: Conduct assessment activities.

Put your assessment plan into action. You must set a schedule for conducting assessment activities. Some assessments may take place monthly, others annually and others even on a biennial basis. Conduct a focus group of those you serve, survey people who have participated in your unit’s activities, have an expert come through and review your processes. This time is to find out what others say about your operation.

View Assessment Results

Step 5: Analyze the findings from your assessments.

Once the results from your assessments have been collected, see what they can tell you about your program. Consider asking questions such as:

- What can you infer from the data?
- What future actions will you take?
- What changes have you made (or will you make) based on assessment results?
- What are the budgetary implications?

As each unit discusses the assessment results and their implications, celebrate when the unit has accomplished what it planned to accomplish! Come to a clear understanding and agreement on areas that still present opportunities for growth and improvement. Document the findings of assessment. Summarize the results for reporting purposes; and, be sure to put these into the WEAVE Online Assessment Management system. As you discuss results, revisit and improve your assessment measures.

Effect Improvements to Increase Unit Performance

Step 6: Use your results.

The quality enhancement process is not completed until the “loop is closed” and the results are used to make improvements to services. Typical changes in services might include:

- revising organizational structure
- reallocating resources
- revamping administrative procedures
- modifying or expanding relations with public or external agencies

The decisions made regarding the course of action for the following year also may lead to a restructuring or revision of your unit’s objectives for the following year.

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Additional Resources:

<http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm>

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<http://www.assessment.tcu.edu/documents/assessmentmanual-TCU.pdf>

APPENDIX A
Academic, Administrative & Educational Support
Outcomes and Academic Program Review Timeline

