

Glossary of Assessment Terms

Part of our mission in IEPR is to assist faculty and staff to gain a working knowledge of assessment terms and methods. Following is a glossary of relevant terms and examples that would be used in talking about assessment.

Glossary of Assessment Terms

ASSESSMENT A systematic and ongoing effort to collect, analyze, and interpret evidence that describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or program effectiveness, with the goal of improving student learning and development.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT Refers to assessment that is carried out throughout the course, project, or time-frame to provide feedback regarding whether the objective is being met. Formative assessment may be conducted for the following reasons: program improvement; to provide feedback to improve teaching, learning, and curricula; to identify students' strengths/weaknesses and to assist in placing students based on their needs.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT Refers to assessment that is carried out at the end of a course, project, or time-frame to evaluate whether the objective was achieved (i.e., the overall performance). Thus, it is typically used to assign course grades. **Summative assessment** may be conducted for the following reasons: evaluation and accountability; decision-making regarding fund allocation; to aid in program level decision-making; to respond to demands of accrediting bodies, state, and federal agencies.

ASSESSMENT METHOD Refers to how the outcome or goal is assessed. The **assessment method** describes generally how the information/data will be collected, which may involve either **direct** or **indirect measurement**. Additionally the method specifies from whom the data will be collected and at what time points. Example **assessment methods** include but are not limited to evaluation of student academic work, observation, and self-report methods.

DIRECT MEASUREMENT Measures that require the student to demonstrate his/her knowledge and skills in response to the instrument. Examples of **direct measurement** include 1) achievement tests such as objective tests; 2) student academic work such as essays, presentations, portfolios, and course assignments; 3) observations or case studies; 4) performances.

INDIRECT MEASUREMENT Measures that ask students to reflect on their learning rather than to demonstrate it. Examples of **indirect measurement** include self-report methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT The assessment instrument is the specific tool or means of collecting the desired information. Example **assessment instruments** include but are not limited to interviews, portfolio evaluations, scoring rubrics, standardized tests, and surveys.

QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT Measures that assess objectives by collecting numeric data and analyzing the data using statistical techniques. Examples of quantitative data include GPA, grades, exam scores; forced-choice survey responses; demographic information; standardized teaching evaluations.

QUALITATIVE MEASUREMENT Measures that rely on and evaluate descriptions rather than numeric data. Examples of qualitative data include responses to open-ended survey or interview questions; evaluations of writing samples, portfolios, or formal recitals; participant observations; ethnographic studies.

ASSESSMENT PLAN A document that outlines the student **learning outcomes** (for academic programs) or **unit outcomes** (for support units), **assessment methods** used to collect evidence related to the attainment of each outcome, and the intervals at which the evidence is collected and reviewed.

BENCHMARK A point of reference for measurement; a standard of achievement against which to evaluate or judge one's own performance. A program can use its own past-performance data as a baseline benchmark against which to compare future data/performance. Additionally, data from another (comparable, exemplary) program can be used as a target benchmark.

CASE STUDY An in-depth examination of a single instance or event. A **case study** provides a systematic way of looking at an event(s), collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results.

COURSE-EMBEDDED ASSESSMENT Method of assessing student **learning outcomes** within the classroom environment, using course goals, objectives and content to gauge the extent of the learning. Such assessment uses existing information that instructors routinely collect (e.g., test performance, student portfolios) via both direct and indirect methods of measurement.

CURRICULUM MAPPING Process of evaluating curriculum in relation to intended outcomes to ensure that students are receiving appropriate instruction and to enable the program/department to identify gaps in the curriculum and provide an overview of program accomplishments.

GOAL Describes a broad learning outcome or concept (i.e., what you want students to learn or a unit to achieve) expressed in general terms. Example goals include, Problem-solving skills or Providing high quality, cost-effective healthcare for students.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS The extent to which an institution achieves its mission and goals. Institutional Effectiveness is monitored through ongoing, integrated, institution-wide, research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement of institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate how well the institution is accomplishing its mission.

LEARNING OUTCOME Specific, observable, and measurable knowledge or skill that the student gains/develops as a result of a specific course. These outcomes are clearly stated in the course syllabus. There are three categories of student learning outcomes.

COGNITIVE OUTCOME What students KNOW; knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, & evaluation.

AFFECTIVE OUTCOME What students CARE ABOUT; students' feelings, attitudes, interests, and preferences.

PERFORMANCE OUTCOME What students CAN DO; skilled performance, production of something new (e.g., a paper, project, piece of artwork, music or drama performance), critical thinking skills (e.g., analysis and evaluation).

MISSION STATEMENT Statement of a Unit's purpose (the end result the Unit seeks to accomplish) and how it supports the Institutional Mission.

OBJECTIVES Specific skills, values, and/or attitudes students should exhibit that reflect the broader goals. For example, a possible objective for an Anthropology course would be, Students will be able to identify trends and patterns in anthropological data.

OPERATIONALIZE) To define a term or object so that it can be measured (usually in terms that distinguish the term/object from others).

PORTFOLIO Collection of student work over time that is used to demonstrate student growth and achievement in identified areas. Portfolios may contain research papers, tests and exams, case studies, audio or video tapes, computational exercises and other original works, as well as personal essays, journals, and self-evaluations.

PROGRAM EVALUATION Determination of the adequacy of the program in fulfilling its mission, goals, and objectives.

PROGRAM GOALS Intended outcomes of instruction, stated in general terms, further defined by a set of specific (observable and measurable) student **learning outcomes**. Program goals reflect institution-wide goals and the program's mission.

RELIABILITY The extent to which an assessment method produces consistent and repeatable results. Reliability is a precondition for validity.

RUBRIC A scoring key. Typically a **rubric** is a grid that outlines identified criteria for successfully completing an assignment or task and establishes levels for meeting those criteria. **Rubrics** provide an efficient and reliable way to evaluate complex products or performances and to define precise outcomes and expectations. **Rubrics** can be used to score everything from essays to performances and portfolios.

STRATEGIC PLANNING Long-term (i.e., often 3-5 year) planning at the level of the whole institution or unit that focuses on adaptation to the organization's external environment and the future. Guided by a vision of the organization in the future, strategic planning attempts to position the organization favorably with respect to needed resources.

TRIANGULATION The use of a combination of at least two assessment methods, such as surveys, interviews, and observations, to measure a unit outcome.

UNIT OUTCOMES Intended outcomes that reflect the area or service that can be improved using current resources and personnel and are assessable within one assessment cycle. Unit outcomes should be under the direct control of the unit and in-line with a University Strategic Plan goal, objective, or strategy. FOR ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS, **unit outcomes** are primarily process-oriented, describing the support process/service the unit intends to address. FOR EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT UNITS, **unit outcomes** may include both process and student learning outcomes.

VALIDITY The extent to which an assessment method measures or assesses what it claims to measure or assess. A valid assessment instrument or technique produces results that can lead to valid inferences.

VALUE ADDED The enhancement that students acquire (to knowledge, skills abilities and other attributes) as a result of their higher education experience. It is a measure of what value, to the student, has been accumulated as a result of a period of time in higher education. Institutions may be evaluated or assessed on the basis of the cumulative value that they add to their students.

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