

Division of Student Affairs

Student Affairs Assessment Glossary

Accountability

The obligation placed on an educational institute by public officials, employers, and taxpayers for school officials to prove that money invested in education has led to measurable learning. Accountability is often viewed as an important factor in education reform. An assessment system connected to accountability can help identify needs so that resources can be equitably distributed. The responsibility of an agency to its sponsors and clientele for accomplishing its mission with prudent use of its resources. In education, accountability is currently thought to require measurable proof that faculty and institutions are teaching students efficiently and well, usually in the form of student success rates on various tests.

Accreditation

Official recognition that an institution meets required standards. UWSP is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

Action Step

An action step is a way to implement a strategy to achieve an outcome or goal.

Affective

Outcomes of education involving feelings more than understanding: likes, pleasures ideals, dislikes, annoyances, values.

Alternative Assessment

Alternatives to traditional, standardized, norm- or criterion-referenced traditional paper and pencil testing. An alternative assessment might require students to answer an open-ended question, work out a solution to a problem, demonstrate skill, or in some way produce work rather than select an answer from choices on a sheet of paper. Portfolios and observation of students are also alternative forms of assessment.

Analytic Scoring

A type of rubric scoring that separates the whole into categories of criteria that are examined one at a time. Student writing, for example, might be scored on the basis of grammar, organization, and clarity of ideas. Useful as a diagnostic tool. An analytic scale is useful when there are several dimensions on which the piece of work will be evaluated.

Aptitude Test

A test intended to measure the test-taker's innate ability to learn, given before receiving instruction.

Assessment

"Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well

performance matches those expectations and standards, and using the resulting information to document, explain and improve performance.’ (Angelo, 1995)

Upcraft and Schuh (1996): “assessment is any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness.”

Henning (2006): Assessment is helping folks determine if they are doing what they say they are doing and determine how well they are doing it so they can make improvements in what they are doing.”

“Assessment is the systematic collection, review and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development.” (Palomba & Banta, 1999)

Astin (1991): Assessment is “the gathering of information concerning the functioning of students, staff, and institutions of higher education.”

Assessment Literacy

The possession of knowledge about the basic principles of sound assessment practice, including terminology, the development and use of assessment methodologies and techniques, familiarity with standards of quality in assessment. Increasingly, familiarity with alternatives to traditional measurements of learning.

Assessment Task

An illustrative task or performance opportunity that closely targets defined instructional aims, allowing students to demonstrate their progress and capabilities.

Benchmark

Spendolini (1992): Benchmarking is a “continuous, systematic process for evaluating the products, services, and work processes of organizations that are recognized as representing best practices for the purposes of organizational improvement.”

An actual measurement of group performance against an established standard at defined points along the path toward the standard. Subsequent measurements of group performance use the benchmarks to measure progress toward achievement. Examples of student achievement that illustrate points on a performance scale, used as exemplars.

Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives

Benjamin Bloom originated this taxonomy for categorizing level of abstraction of questions that commonly occur in educational settings. The taxonomy provides a useful structure in which to categorize test questions, since staff will characteristically ask questions within particular levels, and if you can determine the levels of questions that will appear on your exams, you will be able to study using appropriate strategies. There are six levels arranged in order of increasing complexity (1=low, 6=high):

1. **Knowledge:** Recalling or remembering information without necessarily understanding it. Includes behaviors such as describing, listing, identifying, and labeling.

2. **Comprehension:** Understanding learned material and includes behaviors such as explaining, discussing, and interpreting.
3. **Application:** The ability to put ideas and concepts to work in solving problems. It includes behaviors such as demonstrating, showing, and making use of information.
4. **Analysis:** Breaking down information into its component parts to see interrelationships and ideas. Related behaviors include differentiating, comparing, and categorizing.
5. **Synthesis:** The ability to put parts together to form something original. It involves using creativity to compose or design something new.
6. **Evaluation:** Judging the value of evidence based on definite criteria. Behaviors related to evaluation include: concluding, criticizing, prioritizing, and recommending.

Capstone Assessment

Assessment of outcomes structured into learning experiences occurring at the end of a program. The experiences involve demonstration of a comprehensive range of program outcomes through some type of product or performance. The outcomes may be those of the major and of the general education program or of the major only. (Palomba & Banta, 1999)

Checklist

A type of quantitative data collection. Can be used by collector or collectee to identify actions or activities that have occurred or taken place. These are often incorporated into surveys. This only indicated the existence and not the judgement or level of learning.

Cohort

A group whose progress is followed by means of measurements at different points in time.

Competency

Processing the knowledge and skills to design and implement quality assessment.

Concept

An abstract, general notion -- a heading that characterizes a set of behaviors and beliefs.

Content Analysis

Used to pull out themes from existing qualitative data. This is not difficult but it can be time consuming to develop and hone codes and then perform the analysis. *(Examples: Review and code the content of an open-ended evaluation question, Review and code answers to an application to a living-learning program to understand the needs of those incoming students.)*

Criteria/Standards

Performance descriptors that indicate how well students will meet expectations of what they should be able to think, know or do. They are descriptive benchmarks against which performance is judged. These criteria or standards may be described in varying gradients of success as in rubrics or in grades. Often they are stated in terms of percentages, percentiles or other quantitative measures (Nichols, 2000)

Direct Assessment Methods

These methods involve students' display of knowledge and skills (e.g. text results, written assignments, presentations, classroom assignments) resulting from learning experience in the class/program. (Palomba & Banta, 1999)

Ethics

Winston and Saunder (1991): Ethics is concerned with determining what acts or behaviors are "right" or "ought to be done/not done" as well as determining the epistemological justifications for ethical statements or assertions."

Evaluation

Upcraft and Schuh (1996): "evaluation is any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institutional, departmental, divisional or agency effectiveness."

Both qualitative and quantitative descriptions of student behavior plus value judgments concerning the desirability of that behavior. Using collected information (assessments) to make informed decisions about continued instruction, programs, activities. Decisions made about assessment findings; deciding about the value of programs/program outcomes; may involve recommendations for changes.

Experiment

Seeks to control variables within assessment design and can give confident results when implemented but can be resource intensive. Usually not used often in education. Pre and Post-test is most popular design. *(Examples: Impact of two different forms of alcohol education, effectiveness of roommate matching, Impact of employee trainings for student employees in a student union.)*

Focus Groups

A type of qualitative data collection. Can be done in person or on-line with direct follow-up. Trust needs to be established between the moderator and participants for it to be effective. Data collected can be have depth but lack in breath. Can be time consuming to collect and analyze data. *(Examples: Meet with students of color to learn about their experiences on campus, Meet with students traveling abroad to discover what they are learning from their participation.)*

Formative Assessment

Observations which allow one to determine the degree to which students know or are able to do a given learning task, and which identifies the part of the task that the student does not know or is unable to do. Outcomes suggest future steps for teaching and learning. Assessment conducted during a performance/course/program with the purpose of providing feedback that can be used to modify, shape, and improve a performance/course/program. (Palomba & Banta, 1999)

Indirect Assessment Methods

Assessment methods that involve perceptions of learning rather than actual demonstrations of outcome achievement (e.g. alumni surveys, employer surveys, exit interviews).

Institutional Effectiveness

The measure of what an institution actually achieves.

Interviews

A Type of qualitative data collection. Used to obtain detailed information and allow for direct follow-up. This can be in person or on the phone. Data that is gathered is very rich however, this type can be expensive and time consuming since it takes a great deal of time to transcribe notes and analyze data. *(Examples: Talk with exceptional scholar athletes to learn keys to academic and athletic performance, Talk with students of color who leave the college to find out those reasons, Talk with female science students to learn about the challenges they face.)*

Journals

Students' personal records and reactions to various aspects of learning and developing ideas. A reflective process often found to consolidate and enhance learning.

Looping

Closing the loop of assessment means to take the assessment data that has been collected and analyzed and use it to improve the programs and services that will continue to enhance student learning and program effectiveness.

Mean

One of several ways of representing a group with a single, typical score. It is figured by adding up all the individual scores in a group and dividing them by the number of people in the group. Can be affected by extremely low or high scores.

Measurable/Observable

Outcomes are narrow, specific and easy to be measured and or observed if written correctly.

COMPONENTS OF A MEASURABLE OUTCOME USING THE ABCD METHOD

(Heinich, Russell. Molenda, & Smaldino, 2002)

- 1) **Audience** : "The student will..."
- 2) **Statement of Desired Behaviors** (indicator of knowledge, skills or attitudes): "An action verb and a description of that action." The more specific the verb, the better the outcome.
- 3) **Statements about Conditions**: "Under what circumstances, in what environment will the student perform?"
- 4) **Statements about Degree** : "At what level does the behavior need to be performed or to what criteria must the student perform?"

Example: "First Year Students who participate in Welcome Week activities will demonstrate knowledge of social resources to help navigate their transition to UWSP."

Measurement

Quantitative description of student learning and qualitative description of student attitude.

Median

The point on a scale that divides a group into two equal subgroups. Another way to represent a group's scores with a single, typical score. The median is not affected by low or high scores as is the mean.

Metacognition

The knowledge of one's own thinking processes and strategies, and the ability to consciously reflect and act on the knowledge of cognition to modify those processes and strategies.

Metrics/Methods

Metrics/Methods are parameters or measures of quantitative assessment used for measurement, comparison or to track performance or production. There is a wealth of assessment metrics/methods used in higher education to assess students' achievements. The primary goal is to choose a metric/method which most effectively assesses the objectives of the program and/or developmental skills and competencies learned by the student.

Mission

A holistic vision of the values and philosophy of a department, program, unit or institution. General education learning goals are often found in the institution's mission statement. (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Allen, 2004)

Modifications

Recommended actions or changes for improving student learning, service delivery, etc. that respond to the respective measurement evaluation.

Multidimensional Assessment

Assessment that gathers information about a broad spectrum of abilities and skills.

Multiple Choice Tests

A test in which students are presented with a question or an incomplete sentence or idea. The students are expected to choose the correct or best answer/completion from a menu of alternatives.

Narrative/Journaling

Allows students to reflect on an experience. Can be analyzed using a rubric or content analysis looking for demonstration of writing skills, critical thinking, and can also provide insight into other types of learning. *(Examples: After students complete a judicial sanction have them write a reflection paper on what they learned from the experience, For new student leaders, having them write one page entries in their journal after every meeting to discuss what is working or not for them in their roles.)*

Norm

A distribution of scores obtained from a norm group. The norm is the midpoint (or median) of scores or performance of the students in that group. Fifty percent will score above and fifty percent below the norm.

Objectives

An objective is the intended effect of a services or intervention, but is much more specific than a goal. It is facilitator centered. Statements that describe measurable expectations of what students should be able to think, know or do when they've completed a given educational program. Each statement should describe one expectation; should not bundle several into one statement. The statements must be clear and easily understood by all.

Objective Test

A test for which the scoring procedure is completely specified enabling agreement among different scorers. A correct-answer test.

Observation

Used to gather qualitative data in an unobtrusive way. Need access to the group you want to collect data from and may take a great deal of time to transcribe notes and analyze data. May not be a very useful form of data collection for the types of things we usually measure in Student Affairs.

(Examples: Watch students in the dining hall to determine which types of foods are the most popular, Watch students on a weekend night to determine how many people are making unsafe choices walking along or what routes they take to determine if they are lighted appropriately.)

Outcomes

An outcome is the desired effect of a service or intervention, but is much more specific than a goal. It is participant focused. These are often what students should be able to demonstrate after their participation, which are also defined as learning or developmental outcomes. Outcomes can also be programmatic. A programmatic outcome could be something like an increase in usage of a particular resource or service.

Percentile

A ranking scale ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 99 with 50 as the median score. A percentile rank indicates the percentage of a reference or norm group obtaining scores equal to or less than the test-taker's score. A percentile score does not refer to the percentage of questions answered correctly, it indicates the test-taker's standing relative to the norm group standard.

Performance-Based Assessment

Direct, systematic observation and rating of student performance of an educational objective, often an ongoing observation over a period of time, and typically involving the creation of products. The assessment may be a continuing interaction between faculty and student and should ideally be part of the learning process. The assessment should be a real-world performance with relevance to the student and learning community. Assessment of the performance is done using a rubric, or an analytic scoring guide to aid in objectivity. Performance-based assessment is a test of the ability to apply knowledge in a real-life setting. Performance of exemplary tasks in the demonstration of intellectual ability. Evaluation of the product of a learning experience can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching methods.

Performance Criteria

The standards by which student performance is evaluated. Performance criteria help assessors maintain objectivity and provide students with important information about expectations, giving them a target or goal to strive for.

Portfolio

A systematic and organized collection of a student's work that exhibits to others the direct evidence of a student's efforts, achievements, and progress over a period of time. The collection should involve the student in selection of its contents, and should include information about the performance

criteria, the rubric or criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection or evaluation. It should include representative work, providing a documentation of the learner's performance and a basis for evaluation of the student's progress. Portfolios may include a variety of demonstrations of learning and have been gathered in the form of a physical collection of materials, videos, CD-ROMs, reflective journals, etc. *(Examples: Have students in a leadership series compile and reflect on examples of leadership to demonstrate what they learned in the series, Have students develop an extracurricular portfolio to demonstrate to employers the skills they gained through participation in these activities.)*

Portfolio Assessment

A type of direct measure, a performance measure, in which students' assignments are carefully reviewed for evidence of desired learning outcomes. The portfolios contain work selected over a period of time, with materials added as the student progresses through the course/program. In addition, the portfolios usually include students' reflective learning/outcome analysis.

Process

A generalizable method of doing something, generally involving steps or operations which are usually ordered and/or interdependent. Process can be evaluated as part of an assessment, as in the example of evaluating a student's performance during prewriting exercises leading up to the final production of an essay or paper.

Product

The tangible and stable result of a performance or task. An assessment is made of student performance based on evaluation of the product of a demonstration of learning.

Profile

A graphic compilation of the performance of an individual on a series of assessments.

Project

A complex assignment involving more than one type of activity and production. Projects can take a variety of forms, some examples are a mural construction, a shared service project, or other collaborative or individual effort.

Quantitative Methods of Assessment

Methods that rely on numerical scores or ratings. *(Examples: Tracking, Experiments, Surveys, Testing Instruments, Checklists and Rubrics.)*

Qualitative Methods of Assessment

Methods that rely on descriptions rather than numbers. *(Examples: Ethnographic field studies, logs, journals, participant observation, and open ended questions on interviews and surveys.)*

Quartile

The breakdown of an aggregate of percentile rankings into four categories: the 0-25th percentile, 26-50th percentile, etc.

Rating Scale

A scale based on descriptive words or phrases that indicate performance levels. Qualities of a performance are described (e.g., advanced, intermediate, novice) in order to designate a level of achievement. The scale may be used with rubrics or descriptions of each level of performance.

Reliability

The measure of consistency for an assessment instrument. The instrument should yield similar results over time with similar populations in similar circumstances.

Research

The collection and analysis of data to build or confirm theory and conceptual foundations.

Results

The process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment **results** are used to improve subsequent learning. (Erwin, 1991)

Rubric

Set of criteria used to judge student demonstration of learning. Completed by a rater, not a student. Can be holistic or component driven. Can be an effective assessment tool, but underutilized in student affairs.

Sampling

A way to obtain information about a large group by examining a smaller, randomly chosen selection (the sample) of group members. If the sampling is conducted correctly, the results will be representative of the group as a whole. Sampling may also refer to the choice of smaller tasks or processes that will be valid for making inferences about the student's performance in a larger domain. "Matrix sampling" asks different groups to take small segments of a test; the results will reflect the ability of the larger group on a complete range of tasks.

Scale

A classification tool or counting system designed to indicate and measure the degree to which an event or behavior has occurred.

Score

A rating of performance based on a scale or classification.

Scoring Criteria

Rules for assigning a score or the dimensions of proficiency in performance used to describe a student's response to a task. May include rating scales, checklists, answer keys, and other scoring tools. In a subjective assessment situation, a rubric.

Scoring

A package of guidelines intended for people scoring performance assessments. May include instructions for raters, notes on training raters, rating scales, samples of student work exemplifying various levels of performance.

Self-Assessment

A process in which a student engages in a systematic review of a performance, usually for the purpose of improving future performance. May involve comparison with a standard, established criteria. May involve critiquing one's own work or may be a simple description of the performance. Reflection, self-evaluation, metacognition, are related terms.

Standards

Agreed upon values used to measure the quality of student performance, instructional methods, curriculum, etc.

Strategy

A strategy is means to achieving outcomes or goals. *Example: In order to increase students' GPA we will develop and implement weekly study groups with trained facilitators in the traditionally difficult courses.*

Subjective Test

A test in which the impression or opinion of the assessor determines the score or evaluation of performance. A test in which the answers cannot be known or prescribed in advance.

Stakeholders

A person, group or organization that has interest or concern in an organization. Stakeholders can affect or be affected by the organization's actions, objectives and policies.

Summative Assessment

Assessment conducted after a program has been implemented and completed to make judgments about its quality or worth compared to previously defined standards. (Palomba & Banta, 1999)
Evaluation at the conclusion of a unit or units of instruction or an activity or plan to determine or judge student skills and knowledge or effectiveness of a plan or activity. Outcomes are the culmination of an educational learning process for a unit, subject, program or year's work.

Surveys

Can be paper or electronic (SNAP, SurveyMonkey) and used to collect data from many people quickly and easily. Limited resources are needed to complete this quantitative collection type. *(Examples: To understand satisfaction with membership in a strength center, To gather data to determine effectiveness of residence hall staff members, To understand the characteristics of incoming students.)*

Testing Instruments

A type of quantitative data collection. Use of pre-created instruments to measure particular traits or domains. Participants are given a score and compared to normative data. This can be useful if measuring a specific area *(Example: To measure the moral development of students going through the judicial system, To measure students' critical thinking before entering UWSP and when they leave, To measure the personality types of student leaders so they can understand how their personality affects their leadership style.)*

Tracking

A type of qualitative data collection. Simply tracking what individuals were served or impacted by a service or program. It is important to gather data in detailed ways for future analysis and helpful to have a student ID number to connect to other institutional databases.

Triangulation

Multiple lines of evidence pointing to the same conclusion.

Validity

The test measures the desired performance and appropriate inferences can be drawn from the results. The assessment accurately reflects the learning it was designed to measure.

Vision

Bryson (2004): A vision clarifies what the organization should look like and how it should behave as it fulfills its mission.

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