

Thinking About Assessment

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As part of the 1998 Conference for Chairs a special panel on Academic Program Assessment was convened to address the objectives, guidelines and resources for conducting an assessment. Among the featured presentations was that of Vicki Golich, Director of the Faculty Center at California State University-San Marcos. As Golich's presentation featured a number of useful resources on the assessment process, the material is made available here to assist departments engaged in or planning for program assessment. Questions regarding the material may be addressed to Golich at vgolich@mailhost1.csusm.edu.

I. Assessment defined...

✓ Assessment Is

- an ongoing process of understanding and improving student learning.

✓ Assessment Involves

- making expectations explicit and public;
- setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning;
- systematically gathering & interpreting evidence;
- measuring outcomes by expectation; and
- using results to explain and improve performance.

✓ Assessment Can Help Us

- focus our collective attention;
- examine our assumptions;
- create a shared culture with goals of understanding; and
- assure quality higher education.

✓ The Purpose of Assessment is to

- inform;
- improve; and/or
- prove.

Adapted from T.A. Angelo (November 1995). "Reassessing (and Defining) Assessment." AAHE Bulletin, 48(2):7-9.

II. Effective Assessment

- assesses what we do - and what we expect the product to be;
- provides information for improving what we do;
- focuses on process as well as outcomes;
- actively involves relevant stakeholders;
- uses multiple and varied measures;
- is carried out at various points;
- provides feedback to those most affected; and
- is an intrinsically educational activity.

III. Assessment Sequence

An assessment program requires a statement of goals which requires analysis of needs when then facilitates an assessment protocol.

Adapted from Diamond, R.M. (1998) *Designing & Assessing Courses & Curricula: A Practical Guide*. Revised Edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p. 11.

IV. Goals and Objectives

- ✓ Goals and objectives are similar in that they describe the intended purposes and expected results of specific activities and establish the foundation for assessment
- ✓ Goals are statements about broad, long-range general aims; they are used primarily in policy making and general program planning.
- ✓ Objectives are brief, clear statements that describe specific desired outcomes of activities; attention is focused on performance and competencies.

Assessment Workbook. Ball State University, Offices of Academic Assessment & Institutional Research, p. 11.

V. A Checklist for Written Objectives

✓ An Objective

- uses action verbs that specify definite, observable behaviors; uses simple language;
- indicates a single outcome per objective;
- can be assessed by one or more methods;
- is clearly linked to a goal;
- is realistic and attainable;
- is not simple when complexity is needed; and
- is clearly understood by most people (e.g., not jargon).

Assessment Workbook. Ball State University, Offices of Academic Assessment & Institutional Research, p. 11.

VI. Validity Depends on...

✓ 3 Equally Vital Attributes

- relevance ⇨ the option measures your educational objective as *directly* as possible;
 - accuracy ⇨ the option measures your educational objective as *precisely* as possible; and
 - utility ⇨ the option provides formative and summative results with *clear implications* for educational program evaluation and improvement.
- ✓ If an assessment method doesn't suggest what the program's strengths and weaknesses are, then that assessment method cannot serve the institutional effectiveness goals of your program.

J. Prus and R. Johnson (1994) "A Critical Review of Student Assessment Options" (Rock Hill, SC: Offices of Assessment, Winthrop University)

VII. Keep in Mind That...

- ✓ there will always be more than one way to measure any objective;
- ✓ no single method is good for measuring a wide variety of desired outcomes;
- ✓ popularity, tradition, sales propaganda, or K-12 practices do not necessarily apply to higher education;
- ✓ there's usually an inverse correlation between the quality of measurement methods and their expediency (in other words the best methods usually take longer and cost more); and
- ✓ it's usually best to implement a beta test before completing an assessment project.
- ✓ If an assessment method doesn't suggest what the program's strengths and weaknesses are, then that assessment method cannot serve the institutional effectiveness goals of your program.

J. Prus and R. Johnson (1994) "A Critical Review of Student Assessment Options" (Rock Hill; SC: Office of Assessment, Winthrop University), p. 32.

VIII. Keep in Mind That...

- ✓ benchmarking against an appropriate standard of performance;
- ✓ simulation of a hypothetical situation;
- ✓ self- & third-party reports regarding performance;
- ✓ exit/focus group interviews;
- ✓ observations and reports;
- ✓ surveys;
- ✓ external;
- ✓ research-informed reports;
- ✓ archival data; and
- ✓ portfolio collections.

J. Prus and R. Johnson (1994) "A Critical Review of Student Assessment Options" (Rock Hill; SC: Office of Assessment, Winthrop University), p. 34-39.

IX. Designing an Assessment: Some Initial Questions to Consider

✓ **Motivation**

What's the important question to answer or problem to solve?

✓ **Type of inquiry**

Is your inquiry exploratory or confirmatory?

✓ **Stakeholders**

Who'll benefit from/be interested in the answer and/or solution?

✓ **Desired response to the assessment**

What do you hope will happen in responses?

✓ **Type of information/evidence required**

What kind(s) of data will stakeholders find persuasive?

✓ **Amount of information/evidence required**

How much data will it take to persuade stakeholders?

✓ **Type of reporting format required**

What type of reporting format will persuade stakeholders?

✓ **Expected results of the assessment**

What do you predict the data will show?

✓ **Expected response**

How do you want stakeholders to respond?

Adapted from T.A. Angelo (1997). "Classroom Assessment & Classroom Research" Presentation @ the AAHE Assessment Forum.

Articles and Chapters

The following compilation would constitute a useful Packet of Articles & Book Chapters:

Section 1 - The Basics

American Association of Higher Education (AAHE). (1992). "Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning." Washington, DC American Association of Higher Education.

Angelo, T.A. (May 1997). "The Campus as a Learning Community: Seven promising Shifts and Seven Powerful Levers." AAHE Bulletin. 49(9):3-6.

Ewell, P.T. (December 1997). "Organizing for Learning." AAHE Bulletin. 50(4): 3-6.
Mihram, D. (compiled by) (1997). "Classroom Assessment Techniques." University of Southern California, Center for Excellence in Teaching Bulletin No. 1., pp. 1-16.

Schilling, K.L. and K.M. Schilling (1997). "Looking Back/Moving Ahead: Assessment in the Senior Year." pp. 258-259 in J. Gardner & G. Van der Veer (eds.) The Senior year Experience: Facilitating Integration, Reflection, Closure, and Transition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Section 2 - Assessment Models

"Assessment Models at Other Institutions." (November 14, 1995). Chapter 5 of Contributing to the Pursuit of Educational Excellence: Assessment Guidelines for Willamette University - Report of the Task Force on Assessment. Salem, OR: Willamette University Office of Institutional Research, www.willamette.edu/ir/assess/assess.html (see [Web Site listings](#) as well).

Ball State Assessment Workbook. (1992). -Designing a Department Assessment Plan" & "Shaping Department Goals and Objectives for Assessment." Indiana: Ball State University, Offices of Academic Assessment & Institutional Research.

Hutchings, P. (1-988). "Behind Outcomes: Contexts and Questions for Assessment." The AAHE Assessment Forum. "Methods of Assessment." (November 14, 1995). Chapter 6 of Contributing to the Pursuit of Educational Excellence: Assessment Guidelines for Willamette University - Report of the Task Force on Assessment. Salem, OR: Willamette University Office of Institutional Research, www.willamette.edu/ir/assess/assess.html (see [Web Site listings](#) as well).

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- Angelo, T.A. (1993-1994). "Teaching Goals, Assessment, Academic Freedom and Higher Learning." *Teaching Excellence*. 5(7):1-2.
- Boehrer, J. (1990-1991). "Spectators and Gladiators: Reconnecting the Students with the Problem." *Teaching Excellence*. (2)7:1-2.
- Harris, S. (1998). "Using Scoring Rubrics." Presentation to the CETL Conference on Assessment.
- Huba, M.E. (1998). "Formulating Intended Learning Outcomes for Your Program." Presentation at the 1998 AAHE Assessment Conference (June :13-:17), Cincinnati, OH.
- Jones, E. (undated mimeo). "Overview of Results from National Studies - Defining Essential Skills in Communications, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: Perspectives of Faculty, Employers, and Policymakers". Faculty Center Packet.
- Kinsella, K. (Spring 1997). "Promoting Content Literacy Across the Disciplines." *Exchanges*. 8(1): 1, 3-6.
- Nichols, J.O. and K.W. Nichols. (1998). "Assessment Implementation at the Departmental Level: a Practical Guide for Action." Presentation at the 1998 AAHE Assessment Conference (June 13-17), Cincinnati, OH.
- Secor, R. (). "Recapturing Departmental Community." *AAHE Bulletin*.
- Svinicki, M. (1993-1994). "What They Don't Know Can Hurt Them: The Role of Prior Knowledge in Learning." *Teaching Excellence*. 5(4):J--2.
- Tyree, T. (October 1997). "Assessing with the Net." *AAHE Bulletin*. :10-12.
- Wiggins, G. (March 1992). "Creating Tests Worth Taking." *Educational Leadership*. 49(8): 26-33.
- Wiggins, G. (1989). "The Futility of Trying to Teach Everything of Importance." *Educational Leadership*.

Helpful Books and Notebooks

AAHE Assessment Forum. (1998). *Architecture for Change: Information as Foundation-Program*, Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

AAHE Assessment Forum. (1997). *Learning Through Assessment: A Resource Guide for Higher Education*. Edited by L.F. Gardiner, C. Anderson, and B.L. Cambridge. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

AAHE Assessment Forum. (1996). *What Works? Learning From Success (and Avoiding Pitfalls)-Program* Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

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Association of American Colleges. (1994). *Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges.

Banta, T.W., et al. (1995). *Assessment In Practice: Putting Principles to Work on College Campuses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Banta, T.W. & Associates. (1993). *Making A Difference: Outcomes of a Decade of Assessment in Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Boyer, E.L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered., Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Boyer, E.L. and A. Levine. (1981). *A Quest for Common Learning. The Aims of General Education*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Brown, S. and Knight, P. (1994). *Assessing Learners in Higher Education*. London, UK: Kogan Page.

Brown, S., P. Race, and B. Smith. (1996). *500 Tips on Assessment*. London, UK: Kogan Page.

California State University (1998). *CSU Resource Book on Student Learning Outcomes 1997-98*. Long Beach, CA: California State University, Institute for Teaching & Learning (includes copy of CSU, San Bernardino. (October 1996). *Guide to Assessment of Student learning outcomes and Status Report on Assessment Efforts*. San Bernardino, CA: Office of Academic Programs.

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Campus Life: In Search of Community. (1990). Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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Gamson, Z. and A. Chickering, (1991). *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gardner, J.N. and Van der Veer, G. (1998). *The Senior Year Experience: Facilitating integration, Reflection, Closure, and Transition*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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Greenwood, A. (May 1993). *National Assessment of College Student Learning: Getting Started-A Summary of the Beginning Activities*. NCES 93-116. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Guarasci, R., G.H. Cornwell, & Associates. (1997). *Democratic Education in an Age of Difference: Redefining Citizenship in Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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Jones, E.A., et. al. (December 1994). *A Plan for Validating Criteria and Measures to Monitor Progress Toward national Education Goal 5.5: Identifying College Graduates' Essential Skills in Writing, Speech and Listening, and Critical Thinking-Final Report*. University park, PA: National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning & Assessment (NCTLA).

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Moss, A. and C. Holder. (1988). *Improving Student Writing. A Guidebook for Faculty in All Disciplines*. Long Beach, CA: The Trustees of The California State University.

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Nichols, J.O. (1995). *The Departmental Guide and Record Book for Student Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness*. New York, NY: Agathon Press.

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Weinstein, M. and W. Oxman-Michelli. (1988). *Critical Thinking, Language and inquiry Across the Disciplines Conference 1988 Proceedings*. Upper Montclair, NJ: Montclair State College.

White, E. M. (1994). *Teaching and Assessing Writing: Recent Advances in Understanding, Evaluating, and Improving Student Performance*. 2nd Edition, Revised and Expanded. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wholey, J.S., H.P. Hatry, K.E. Newcomer, eds. (1994). *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*. San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass.

Wingspread Group on Higher Education -An American Imperative. (1993). The Johnson Foundation, Inc.

Helpful Web-sites:*

Internet Resources for Institutional Research

www.apollo.gmu.edu/~jmilam/air95/assess.html

ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment & Evaluation

www.ericae2.educ.cua.edu/

Learning Through Assessment: A Resource Guide for Higher Education

www.aahe.org/

WASC

www.wascweb.org

University of Colorado, Boulder

www.colorado.edu/outcomes/resource.htm

Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education

www.carfax.co.uk/aeh-ad.htm

Assessment Glossary

www.csulb.edu/~ddowell/glossary.htm

Assessment Methods & Models

www.willamette.edu/ir/assess/assess.html

Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

www.byu.edu/tmc/bucs/fc/

Southern Illinois University @ Edwardsville (comprehensive institutional web site w/
links to several other good resources)

www.siu.edu/~deder/assess/

*Compiled from T. Tyree, "Assessing With the Net," AAHE Bulletin October 1997, p. 13;
F. Wada, "Student Learning Outcomes Environmental Scan," July 25, 1997, pp. 1-10; and
K.M. Schilling, "Assessment Package," Presentation at the 1998 AAHE Assessment
Conference (June 13-17), Cincinnati, OH.