

Student Learning Outcomes

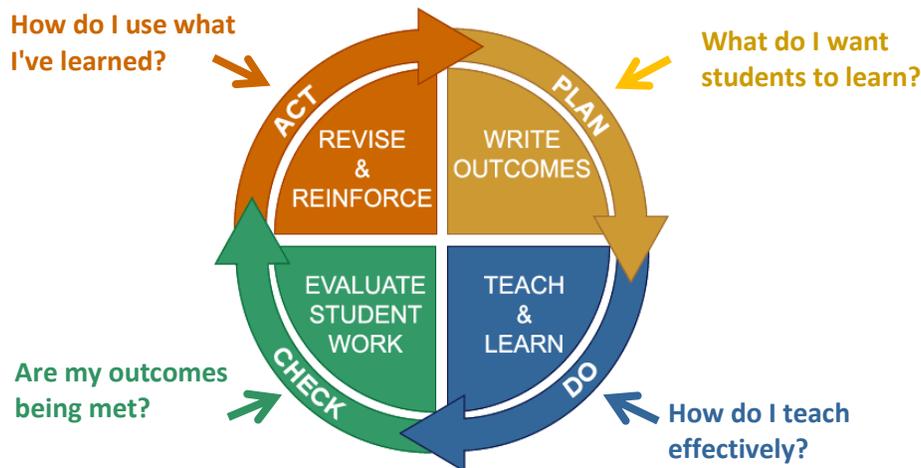
Assessment of Student Learning Academic Program Level

Assessment

- Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information 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. (Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: shifting the focus from teaching to learning by Huba and Freed 2000).
- Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. (Assessment Essentials: planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education by Palomba and Banta 1999).

Assessment Cycle

- Assessment is an ongoing and continuous cycle composed of:
 - Establishing student learning outcomes (Plan)
 - Providing learning opportunities (Do)
 - Assessing student learning (Check)
 - Using the results for program improvement (Act)



Assessment image taken from Westminster College at <http://www.westminster.edu/acad/oaac/cycle.cfm>

Assessment Components

- The components of assessment include:
 - Program mission statement
 - Program goals

- Student learning outcomes
- Measures, targets, and findings
- Action plan

Program Mission Statement

- Each academic program should have its own mission statement that aligns to and reflects its unique contribution to the university's mission statement. The mission statement outlines the purpose of the academic program within the context of who it serves and in what ways.

Program Goals

- A statement, clearly aligned to the program mission, which addresses the distinct body of knowledge students will possess upon completing a program of study.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

- A statement, clearly aligned to a particular program goal, which describes specific knowledge, skills, or perceptions to be gained or improved upon completing the program of study.
- SLO must indicate a specific measureable assessment of student learning
- Use concrete action verbs that will result in observable behavior that can be measured (see the Bloom's Taxonomy Document for more information).
- Focus on the end result! For instance:
As a result of students participating in [academic program], they will be able to [Bloom's action verb] [cognitive skill gained].

Direct Measures

- A direct measure, clearly aligned to a particular SLO, describes a specific assessment measuring how students' work will be evaluated to determine their level of competency.
- A direct measure provides students with the opportunity to *show* what they have learned.
- A direct measure acts as evidence of students learning a specific competency (ies).
- **Examples of direct measures** include presentations, theses/dissertations, exams, portfolios, research papers, supervisor's evaluations of internships/co-ops.
- Course grades, GPA, course completion are **not** direct measures
- Rubrics can be used as an additional form of assessment providing even greater detail to criteria used to evaluate student learning and performance
- Because direct measures capture what students can actually do, they are considered best for measuring levels of achievement of student learning on specific outcomes.

Indirect Measures

- An indirect measure, clearly aligned to a particular SLO, can be used **in addition** to a direct measure.
- An indirect measure should **not be used instead of** a direct measure.
- An indirect measure provides students with an opportunity to *tell* what they have learned.
- An indirect measure is not as strong evidence as direct measures to assess student learning. Indirect measures usually do not provide enough specification to indicate students' actual level of performance or achievement in learning a certain competency.

- **Examples of indirect measures**
 - Student satisfaction surveys, exit surveys, focus-groups, and individual interviews
 - Course grades provide information about student learning indirectly because they can:
 - include participation variables (like discussion, cooperation, attendance, verbal ability) which do not directly reflect course content and mastery of specific competency (ies).
 - be comprised of assignments throughout the course that helps students learn new skills, yet using a final grade can underestimate the student learning that has occurred by the end of the course. (see *How is Assessment Different from Grading?*)

Target

- A target clearly aligns to a particular measure and SLO
- A target indicates a specific and appropriate threshold for students' collective performance related to that specific assessment of the SLO

Finding

- A finding clearly aligns to a specific target.
- A finding explicitly indicates whether the target was met.
- If you find that your targets are being continually met or exceeded, consider increasing the threshold to ensure continual program growth and facilitate student learning.

Action Plan

- An action plan provides evidence of "closing the loop" by utilizing the assessment results in order to indicate strategies for continuous program improvement and enhance student learning.
- An action plan is the final step in the assessment cycle. The ongoing process begins again by determining ways to better facilitate student learning through continuous program improvement.